



WIND IN
HER SAILS
The start of the
race in Sydney
Harbour; skipper
Mark Richards

How to: WIN THE SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

Having taken line honours in the iconic race seven times,
Wild Oats XI skipper Mark Richards gives us his tips

AS SKIPPER, YOU HAVE TO LEAD

I'm involved in all aspects of the race, from the boat preparations and any modifications we do, through to the racing itself. You have tacticians and other people there to help, but when you get into certain situations, at the end of the day the skipper needs to make a decision, whether it's which sail to put up or which way to go, whether to continue or pull out of the race. It's a big responsibility.

CONSIDER STRATEGY

You have to ensure you're getting the best out of the crew as well as making sure you get to Hobart in the fastest time possible.



GET OFF TO A GOOD START

It's something you can't predict. We do a lot of training, and I've been racing my whole life so starting is one of our strong points, but you just never know. Every start is different – you only need one little boat to be in the wrong position and mess up your start or you have a collision

and it could be a disaster. This year even more so – there will be five 100-foot yachts on the line, all trying to beat *Wild Oats* at the start. It's demanding, but it's exciting.

HOPE FOR GOOD WEATHER

The challenges depend a lot on the forecast. If you get a big southerly wind into Hobart, out there in Bass Strait is somewhere no one wants to be. In those situations, keeping the crew safe and morale high is vital – people get seasick and other stuff happens when it starts to go wrong, which affects your result and the way people perform.



FIERCE COMPETITION
Perpetual Loyal and *Wild Oats XI* battle it out (left); *Wild Oats XI*



PLAN FOR BAD CONDITIONS

When you have a strong southerly, Bass Strait can get really bad. The swells are much bigger because the water is shallower; you get big seas rolling in from the Southern Ocean and they hit the shallow shelf of the strait, and the seas get twice as big. That's when a lot of boats start having gear failures and issues, in that 150 miles across the Strait, and where boats generally do pull out.

IGNORE THE COMPETITION

If you meet them out there, just keep pushing harder. All these boats are quite different to each other... We all sort of know each other's strengths and weaknesses, so the key is you sail as hard as you can, to minimise any damage to your lead. Last year *Loyal* had a good, big lead and we caught them up and overtook them. That's part of the fun – having competitors you have to fight hard against in order to get there first.

“We all know each other's strengths and weaknesses, so the key is you sail as hard as you can”

WORK WITH YOUR TEAM

It's like a grand-final football game. If the whole team does a good job, you're going to get a good result. If people do a bad job it affects the team and, especially in the big boats, you can fail because of a crew member's

mistake. It can put you out of the race. Starting the Sydney to Hobart is one thing; finishing is another. There have been plenty of races where we've had to slow down and other boats have got ahead of us, but they've taken high risk going offshore with more current, so they have bigger seas and have ended up dropping their masts over the sides, whereas we've elected to go into shore where there's no current and smaller seas. It's the conservative slow-and-steady approach and it's paid off in the end. You've got to know the limitations of your boat and stick within those limitations and you'll end up getting there. *

The Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race commences at 1pm EDST on 26 December. rolexsydneyhobart.com

See it yourself

Watch the race start from Sydney

by heading to any headland between Rushcutters Bay, Watsons Bay and South Head. On the north side, try Cremorne Point, Bradleys Head, Clifton Gardens or North Head. See the finish in Hobart from the Derwent River, the finish line at Battery Point, or the city's foreshore.