

Sail Port Stevens Regatta – ANZAC Weekend 23-25 April - Many Firsts – the First of Many!

We turned into Lemon Tree Passage boat ramp and we saw Crosswind rigging, and parked Aye-Sea Red beside Only Time who we thought would have launched. Tania and I were excited, our 1st time overnighing on Aye-Sea Red after buying her 2 weeks prior! A subdued Kevin told us that due to a launching mishap ending with a broken outboard mount they were going to take Only Time home and return, having booked a motel near the Marina. Kevin was a great help to us rigging Aye-Sea Red, having owned a Noalex 25 (About Time) previously.

At the going down of the sun, we motored behind Crosswind up the Lemon Tree Passage and Port Stephens Harbour to d'Albora Marina at Nelson Bay, arriving just on dark – the first time we had sailed at night, watching a fantastic sunset reflected behind us on the inner harbour. We were amazed at just how much beach room there was for us to reverse up to the beach. Coconut Duck appeared out of the dark and moored beside us while Tania was off getting yummy fush n chups.

Saturday dawned, sun shining and cloudless, oh and apparently windless! Brian and Val motored up to the beach in Waterbago, and the skippers then headed up to register and to receive a briefing from the race coordinator, where we all received a little "Skippers Pack" and course details. "We're heading towards New Zealand!" I told Tania, "But only as far as Shoal Bay, then back to Salamander Bay mark, then the finish line!"



As we all motored after Brian & Val on Farr Too Sirius out of the breakwater, the rest of the regatta fleet in all its glory was at



the start line. A fantastic sight to behold! From Maxi's down to the sports trailer sailers. With the first division off, we motored up beside the breakwater to get behind the starting line – realizing later that we all (except Val) had actually motored up through the starting course – oops!! Commodore Kev had hitched a ride on Crosswind with Charmaine and

Graeme, who had to do a penalty turn after being pushed across the start line early by Skipper Tania – how'd she manage to do that? Another first! We were off into the Roaring 40's of about a 6-knot wind! Yes, the wind died down as soon as the main fleet sailed off, leaving NHYTA fleet bobbing along towards the harbour entrance under a cloudless sky. I changed the jib for the genoa on the water – another 1st, and we were picking up what little breeze there was. Oh, how quickly race positions can change, picture Aye-Sea Red leading the charge, er meander, towards the Shoal Beach mark, next minute, a couple of wrong tacks too close to shore so we lost the wind, and Crosswind sauntered past and rounded the buoy 1st.

Are we headed up towards the Salamander Bay mark, we passed Garry & Cathy on Coconut Duck and then Brian & Val on Waterbago still heading towards Shoal Bay mark, both caught in the doldrums! As the wind changed and picked up, the first boats of the main fleet came streaming back through the heads, spinnakers out catching what little breeze there was. Hmmm, maybe I need to learn how to set a



spinnaker!
and then still managed to overtake us!

I saw my mate Steve on Mako cross the finish line behind us

The race organiser shortened our course to finish at the Salamander Bay mark with Skipper Tania taking us over the finish line for her 1st race! As we turned back toward d'Albora Marina we watched Coconut Duck and Waterbago catch a stiff breeze for the run home.

No sooner was our last boat secured to the beach than club Happy Hour started on the council provided picnic table under the trees and under the stars. Garry and I wandered up to the main function area, and while we had missed the race results and debriefing, the atmosphere was great, mixing with the other crews of the Regatta and watching the day's highlights on a big screen – we all definitely need to go to Race Results next year before our Happy Hour!

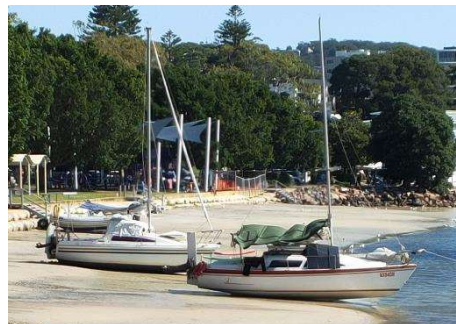
As Tania and I finished dinner on Aye-Sea Red, she uttered those immortal words, "oh, Happy Hour is still going on, come on, let's go join them"!! Probably the best Happy Hour we had been to - great laughs, and funny stories until the wee hours! Mind the step to the beach Garry and Graeme!



ANZAC morning saw Crosswind drag her anchor and tie up at the Tea Garden ferry jetty – until the ferry came in! Coconut Duck ended up sitting on the sand with an outgoing tide and everyone else pulling out, then we all attended the 10.45am Anzac Day Ceremony, with the Air Force jet flying overhead bang on time at precisely 11am.

As we got back to the boats, I learnt that the tide goes out faster than I thought, and Aye-Sea Red was also sitting on the sand! So, what to do when it all turns to custard – go shopping at the local markets up the hill, which gave us a fantastic view of Sunday's Regatta race going up the harbour, with all the boats looking magical!!

We had the NHTYA banners on show and had chats with people about the joy of owning a trailer sailer, with of course "I used to own a" And from us "Yes, we deliberately beached on the sand to show that it can be done!" I used the time waiting to refloat productively, by picking off the previous name from the hull.



I hope they can put a Sunday event on for us as well next year. It would be amazing to be part of that! A great way to end a fantastic weekend, which I hope goes into the calendar for next year when the dates are finalised! It really did end up a memorable race cruise! We sailed out of Nelson Bay to Lemon Tree Passage as the sun was going down. We must remember to anchor the boat 30 paces from the high-water mark next time – lest we forget.