

Podcast 66 – The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

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Hi,

Boxing Day, the 26th of December, is the day after Christmas day. In Australia, we have 2 major sporting events which start on this day. The first is the Boxing Day Cricket Test which is played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and the second is the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about the second event, an event which highlights Australians' love for the sea and their desire to challenge themselves against it.

The annual Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race is 1170km long. It starts from Sydney's beautiful harbour on the coast of New South Wales and finishes in Hobart, in the waters of the Derwent River on the east coast of Tasmania. It is considered one of the greatest ocean yacht races in the world and really is one of the most challenging ocean races there is. What makes it so challenging is the section across Bass Strait, the area of ocean between the mainland of Australia and our island state of Tasmania. This section of the race is around 400 km long. This strait has a reputation for being unpredictable and sometimes dangerous. It has an average depth of only about 60m. This means it can occasionally produce very big waves and dangerous sea conditions. Of course it can also be very calm. I have travelled across it several times on the Spirit of Tasmania ferry and each time it has been quite

calm. Even so, it can get rough, very quickly. The ferry is around 190m long, so it can handle all types of weather. But imagine being on a small yacht, say 15 metres long. This is why the Sydney to Hobart race is such a great race.

The inaugural race was held in 1945 when only 9 yachts entered. The winning yacht back then took 6 days, 14 hours and 22 minutes to complete the race. In 2014, the race had 117 entries and the winning yacht took 2 days, 2 hours and 30 minutes. That's pretty fast for a yacht. The fastest time ever was set in 2012 by the 100 foot long Wild Oats XI. It took only 1 day, 18 hours and 23 minutes. That's an average speed of around 28 kilometres an hour – not bad for a yacht using only the power of the wind.

One of the many reasons why this yacht race is so well known in Australia and around the world is because of the spectacular start. This start takes place in the very beautiful Sydney Harbour. To see over 100 yachts sailing so close together around the start line is indeed a spectacular sight. They jostle for position and they turn left and right, with often just a few feet between the boats. It's breath taking. There are hundreds of spectator boats crowding the edge of the course, and around three hundred thousand people watching from the shores and high points around Sydney Harbour. What a sight! The biggest yachts are 100 feet long and the smallest 34 feet long, with the average size being around 58 feet. At the start of the yacht race, every skipper is trying to get his yacht just in the right position for the starter's gun. When the starter's gun goes off, the boats all head across the line and race for the entrance to Sydney Harbour, called the Sydney Heads.



First Through the Heads, 2012 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

By Albinfo (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Once through the Sydney Heads, the yachts turn south and start their long and challenging trip down the coast of New South Wales and into Bass Strait. The start of the race is always shown live on television, with an audience of many hundreds of thousands, and it's something I have been watching on television for as long as I can remember on Boxing Day. 1pm is the start of the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.



The winner Investec Loyal arriving in Hobart in the 2011 race.

By JJ Harrison (jjharrison89@facebook.com) (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Once the yachts have crossed the unpredictable Bass Strait, they must race down the east coast of Tasmania until they reach Tasman Island which is close to Hobart. They turn right and then race the last 70 kilometres across Storm Bay and into the Derwent River at Hobart. Just like at the start of the race, the winning yachts are joined by many spectator boats as they sail up the Derwent River to finally cross the finish line near Hobart. Waiting for them on the dock at Hobart are many cold drinks and many congratulations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdwuXG0G5Sc>

What a sense of achievement it must be to complete the race. These yachts may seem big when they are all crowding each other at the start line in Sydney Harbour, but when out on the

open ocean in a strong wind and rough sea, they must feel very small indeed. The race requires excellent fitness, great sailing skills, endurance and courage. Bass Strait can be very tough on both sailors and boats. The weather can change and bring with it howling winds and dangerous waves. In 1998, the race suffered its worst conditions ever. A vicious storm hit the fleet in Bass Strait, with winds up to 80 knots and waves up to 20 metres high. Of the 115 yachts that started, only 44 finished. 71 yachts retired from the race. Seven yachts were abandoned by their crews and five yachts sank. 56 crew members were rescued by helicopters and, tragically, six crew members lost their lives in Bass Strait that day.

In the years following that tragedy, changes were made to how the race was managed and how competitors must prepare themselves. The yachtsmen and women are now better prepared and the race is safer, but even so, competing in and finishing a Sydney to Hobart yacht race is a magnificent feat and a wonderful achievement. That's why it fascinates Australians and has become one of our iconic sporting events.



Wild Oats XI, about to finish the 2011 race.
By JJ Harrison (jjharrison89@facebook.com) (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)] , via Wikimedia Commons

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to

hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 66 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

abandoned = when you leave a boat, so that there are no people left on it

achievement = when something difficult is completed successfully

annual = happens every year

audience = the people who watch a performance or competition, usually on TV or in a theatre

average = the middle number in a range of numbers. To calculate an average, add all the numbers and then divide the total by how many numbers you have

calm = when the ocean is smooth with no waves

challenge = when something is hard to do, but you still want to do it

coast = where the land meets the sea

competitors = people who enter a competition or race

conditions = how things are, what state they are in

congratulations = when you win something, people give you

congratulations (e.g. Well done)

considered = thought to be

courage = when you are brave, even though it is dangerous

course = the direction where competitors in a race must go during the race

crowding = when many people or things are very close together

depth = how deep something is

desire = when you want something a lot

edge = a line showing where an area finishes

endurance = when you can play a sport for a long time without stopping

entrance = where you go into or out of an area

entries = those people who have entered a competition

events = things that happen

fascinates = when people are really, really interested in something

feat = an achievement, when you do something that is very difficult

fitness = how easily you can play sport without stopping for a rest

highlights = shows

howling = to make a loud and scary sound like a wolf

iconic = when something is much loved and respected

imagine = to think of something in your mind

inaugural = the first

jostle = when you must push others to move

knots = a way of measuring wind speed at sea. 1 knot = 1.85 kilometres per hour

magnificent = when something is really, really good

major = large and popular

occasionally = sometimes

power = how strong something is

reputation = what other people think of you

retired = when you have stopped doing something

section = part

skipper = the captain of a boat, the one who is the leader on a boat

spectacular = when something is very exciting to look at

spectator = someone who watches a sporting event

strait = an area of ocean between two areas of land or two islands

suffered = when something bad happens to you and you are in pain

tragically = when something really bad has happened, for example when someone dies

unpredictable = when it is hard to say what will happen

vicious = very, very bad and dangerous