Podcast 66 - The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race

by Rob McCormack - Friday, October 09, 2015

http://slowenglish.info/?p=1789

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

Podcast Number 66 – The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race

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=UdwuXGOG5Sc

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

[Vocabulary 52]

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