

A Sailing Adventure

By Dennis Shepherd

In my last article describing my adventures in Fiordland, I mentioned my planned sailing adventure, helping to deliver my Hobart friend's Elan 434 yacht up to Airlie Beach. Sorry, this is not about Jaguars but 3 out of the 4 on board own Jaguars.

We finally left Hobart on the 7th May after waiting a week for a suitable weather window. Heavy rain, 30 knots and 12 degrees wasn't the start we wanted for a 3000Km journey, but after waiting a week, we were keen to get underway. The weather got worse that evening with 44 knot winds and very rough seas as we headed north up the east



coast of Tasmania. The eastern coast of Maria Island provided a much-needed shelter and anchorage for a few hours' sleep before heading north to brave the journey across Bass Strait. The direct line towards Sydney (Sydney to Hobart Race fame) is well east of Bass Strait but this is an infamous piece of water. It's still one of the toughest ocean yacht races in the world.

Uncharacteristically we had almost no wind and motored for 2 nights and 2 days. The boat has a 55 hp Volvo diesel which at 2,000 revs, gives us 7 knots consuming an average of 3 litres an hour. After refuelling at Eden on the south east coast of Australia, we sailed on with freshening winds against the very strong 3 knot East Australian Current. After 4 days and nights at sea, the Shell Harbour Marina south of Wollongong provided a welcome break while we waited 3 days for a strong northerly storm to pass.

Cruising sailors try to avoid sailing upwind and generally wait for reaching (wind at 90 degrees to the course) or downwind conditions. This provides much more comfortable sailing.

Rested, refuelled, water tanks topped up and some fresh food supplies, we headed north again, dropping in to Sydney Harbour for a "Tiki Tour" down the Harbour, under the bridge and back out to sea. This was Sunday afternoon so it was a very busy Harbour.

Briefly refuelling at Coffs Harbour amongst some grumpy fishermen was the only landfall for 6 days and nights, sailing through some big seas, strong winds and keeping alert to avoid the constant procession of large commercial shipping traveling up and down the coast. Our yacht is equipped with GPS, AIS (Automatic Identification System which shows a vessels position and details on the GPS screen), and Radar which proved invaluable. Numerous fishing vessels working at night did not have their AIS turned on at night, not wanting to give away their position.

At night we worked shifts of 1 hour on watch sailing the boat and 3 hours off. Sleeping during the time off watch was not always easy as the boat charged along in 4 to 5 metre seas, rain and more than 30 knot winds at times. Other nights were beautiful moonlight nights and plenty of breeze. Navigating inside Fraser Island saved many miles but proved a significant navigational challenge.



By day 6 at sea in this leg of the journey, we entered the Gladstone Harbour, weaving through the commercial shipping. The shelter of the Gladstone Marina was very welcome for 2 days.

The final leg was 2 days and 2 nights to one of the southernmost islands in the Whitsundays group. A quiet night anchored in a lovely bay gave us a taste of things to come.



From there we were only a half days sailing to Airlie Beach. The weather for most of our journey had been wet, very windy and rough seas. Avoiding shipping, tricky navigational issues and sleep deprivation made for a challenging but wonderful adventure. Great comradery on the boat and sharing the load was a critical part of making this such a fantastic experience. I thoroughly enjoyed the adventure and even in the toughest conditions, I had a smile from ear to ear. A magnificent 18-day adventure. Now for some serious cruising around the Whitsundays and some serious social racing. In the meantime, enjoy driving your Jaguars and the BOP Jaguar Driver's Club activities. Kind regards,



Dennis