

Hook Island timed race 2020

A report from David Taylor (dtayls)

My first timed race and my first SOL win! I'm a very happy chappie!

Across Australia and throughout much of the world we are all stuck at home. So, what do we do? We go racing, of course!

My yacht club – Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (RMYS) here in Melbourne/AU – cancelled all regular racing about one week before the Australian government introduced restrictions effectively closing down all yacht racing in keelboats through to dinghys. So, I took the initiative to invite RMYS members to join the upcoming Hook Island to St Bees timed race. I hadn't done a 'timed' race before but it seemed like the perfect opportunity for people who had never tried SOL before to get their crew involved as a group and do a race (or two or three) together on this course any time over the next few weeks. What's more, most of us have either raced or cruised around the Whitsunday Group many times in the past so this is a place we all know well or would like to get to know better.

The preferred route for my first run was to start to the south and keep to the west of the main Whitsunday group but I always like to take the path less trodden – and I was feeling lazy! – so I headed out to the north of Hook Is, then outside Border and Haselwood islands. I have never sailed this far east in real life (IRL) but would really like to do so some time. My race time on that run was nothing special but following that I was keen to look for some winds with a bit more east it which should make for a much faster timed run. In reality I am used to sailing there in August or September where the winds come in from the NE in the afternoon so these constant south-easterlies were a bit of a surprise and a frustration.

To be honest, I was really happy with the idea of simply doing a few runs in the company of others from my club, but soon after my first run I realized that a nice window was opening up the next day, so I ran a few test routings that afternoon and a few more the next day with the latest weather forecasts (WXs). Another RMYS member 'hoppy65' was thinking 17:00 local time (0700Z) might work. My analysis suggested the window would be open from around 0900Z through to around 1400Z. I didn't want to aim for the end of the window for fear of what a later WX change might do to my chances. On that basis I decided on about 20-30% in to the window as the optimum for me.

1000Z was my chosen start time.

The usual suspects – the regular winners and undisputed best SOL sailors – had already started so I knew I was in the ball-park, but I stuck to my plan and waited a bit.

After rounding the top of Hook Is I turned right immediately to head for Solway Passage (ie. the gap between Whitsunday and Haselwood islands) while those who left before me were taking the outside path.



After passing the beautiful Whitehaven beach to the right and passing through Solway Passage it was finally time to go to sleep. There would be one more WX update before I arrived at St Bees so I set my alarm for around 30 mins before my predicted approach. I carefully fine-tuned my rounding of the eastern point of St Bees and my approach to the finish to cut off every possible second from my elapsed time because I know these results can come down to a matter of seconds. I watched my boat over the line around 5:08am local time.

But there were still others on course who might be able to put in a better time so I waited up for the next hour or so to be sure.

The next morning my analysis suggested that the conditions available over the next couple of weeks would not see a better elapsed time but who can be sure what the wind gods will actually deliver. I was quietly confident but with more than two weeks to go before the end of the event I didn't want to count all of my Easter eggs before the bunny had done his final run.

The Easter bunny has hopped away for another year and the race is finally over so I can now eat all of my choky eggs knowing that no one can take them away from me.

Thanks to SOL for making the platform available and thanks to everyone who competes and makes a race of it.

And finally, consider what you can do to get your friends and fellow sailors involved during this very difficult time for us all.

Cheers,
David (dtayls)