

AAA 2020

It is well I remember having to learn Irish in secondary school. To like Irish was not 'on'. Nobody did. So trying wasn't on, but obviously to fail wasn't on either – one has one's competitive pride. In consequence, I developed a series of stock phrases 'as Gaeilge', one of which I applied at the start of every written essay: "Is maith is cuimhin liom" – it is well I remember. And thus continuing in this repetitive tradition...

Before the first wave of 'The Pandemic' took hold at the start of the year, I had already resolved I would race every leg of the 2020 SAILonline Ocean Championships and of the AAA AGage Around Australia Series. These were both going to be firsts for bonknhoot – in the past I had always skipped a few races in each, and given up or not tried very hard in a few more.

With one ocean race remaining, victory in that Series is outside my reach. Truth will out – I am simply not good enough. The nuanced judgment as to where to sail when forecasts become unstable and really anything could be awaiting you a week or more ahead is not (yet, grr!) my forte. However, shorter races – where the weather is generally much more reliable – these are a different matter. But I have my rivals – several, many even – and so to win this AAA series gave a big buzz. I tried hard, unlike in Irish class.

So, how did it go? Let me check my reports (and other's) and test my memory.

Race 1 – Adelaide to Melbourne

A modest enough fleet of slightly more than 100 SOLers aboard First47.7s set off for Melbourne from Adelaide as Bimmer's cannon fired for the first race of the AAA series. After some cape-to-bluff-to-point coast hugging, the general strategy was to keep south and out to sea of the rhumb line for more wind, but how much or how little was varying from one WX to the next. With knockando66, limesinferior, rafa, WRmirekd, Beliberda and batatabh, all highly respected rivals, all in contention, I was glad to finish P2, slightly behind knockando66, who had ventured closer inshore to hit paydirt.

RMYS Marina, Melbourne



Race 2 – Melbourne to Hobart

Kipper1258 joined the rest of my usual suspects for the start of Leg 2. After another rock-hopping harbour exit, it was a breezy beat all the way to Tasmania. Breeze means steady WXs, and thus the race proved to be a relatively simple matter of judging how free to sail into each header for the tack point, when to go onto optimum angle and when to tack, which only changed a little from WX to WX. Of all my rivals, WRmirekd is perhaps strongest at this sort of precision SOLing, but alas for him, he had scraped a rock exiting Melbourne Harbour, so that it was bonk 1, WR 2 as we began the tricky (familiar to all Sydney Hobart sailors) approach to Hobart through Storm Bay, which is how it stayed. rafa came 3rd, knockando66 slipped a little recording a 5, and Kipper1258 came in 8th.

Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania



Race 3 – Hobart to Sydney

Given that we had already raced this track earlier in the year, you might have been surprised to see the numbers of starters doubling for this one, but then you wouldn't have been aware that a pandemic had taken hold of the World and was keeping us all at home, an ideal place to online race from. Kipper1258 was out again, but so was fellow Aussie Dingo, and Ricotina and Aner59, the cream of the Italian fleet joined in, as well as very quick US newbie Starship (who has since gone missing again). Once more we were racing 47.7s and TWA 39 was mostly the magic number, the challenge this time being how far west to tack to get further into a lift and then tack back onto a northerly course to gradually ease sheets and finally gybe onto a curving course for Sydney Heads in a dying breeze. I slavishly followed my router and found myself too far west when later WXs freed us off. Some hadn't tack at all! I had my worst result of the series, appropriately enough a 13th, and Ricotina showed us all how it should be done, winning by half a minute from Starship.

Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron



Race 4 – Sydney to Gold Coast

Déjà vu – more than 200 boats away at the gun again and, once around a headland, onto a long beat into the wind in 47.7s. So... it was close, very close again, and this time it was my turn to make a small error early on – keying a TWA change into my CC box. Three days of slow upwind work soon started to wear people out and a movement for a change of craft took hold. This was going to be the last race in our First47.7 which inspired me to write the following eulogy for the beastly Beneteau:

Farewell then, trusty Forty-seven, full-stop, 7
Cruise-racer most capacious, like a Seven 47
With opt'mum angles, simple, logical and fair
Back to the boathouse you shall go, don't ask, so there:
Some folk dislike your charms – they say "not Heaven".

Hoh, hoh, hoh, but it didn't help me catch WRmirekd, who, enjoying a finish, unusually for the series, out at sea, pipped me by a minute, with rafa coming in 3rd, Dingo 4th, Spain's elbetico 5th, Ricotina only 6th, always steady batatabh 7th and SOL returnee Exmeromotu from Puerto Rico 8th. Guess after the finish, we must have motored the 10-odd miles though the lagoon to Melbourne, where the next leg was to start. On the other hand, as we had got so disaffected with our 47.7s perhaps we just abandoned them washed up on the beach.

Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron



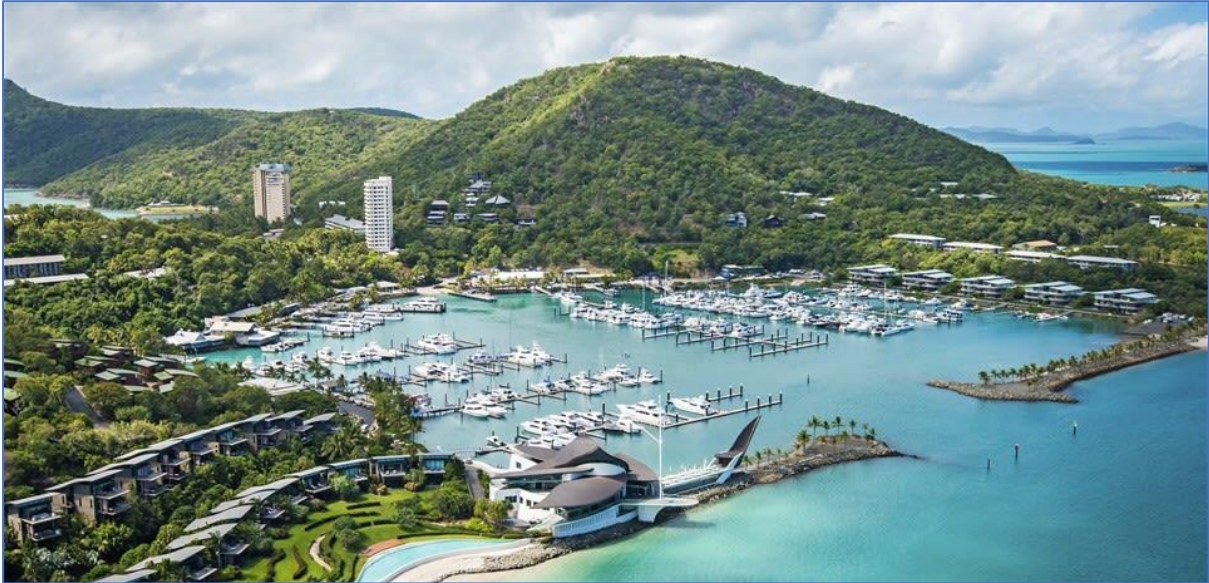
Race 5 – Brisbane to Hamilton Island

With four races completed and a generous two discards allowed for the nine race series, it was reasonable to assume the leading boats were going to be discarding their worst race to date. For me that was my 13th in Hobart Sydney, and for WRmirekd it was a 22nd in that same race. He too had been caught out by the shifting WXs. Thus, after discard, we were lying first and second with 5 points and 7 points respectively. I had a lead, but it was slim, with knockando66 discarding a 28th and rafa a 19th, a further few points adrift on 12 each.

I have no notes saved and very few recollections on how this race progressed, excepting that I seem to remember that WRmirekd, knockando66 and I had a dingdong battle the whole way north, which was only decided in my favour at the last tack in from sea to the line under Hamilton Island.

SOL's goo'ol' Class40 proved to be an inspired choice, or rather reversion to the series' designer's original choice, as the conditions were light enough and our 40 ghosts well. Starting numbers were down vs those of the previous two legs, but at c 150 were still very respectable. However, how there was enough depth and room for our deep-keeled fleet on the island's marina is anybody's guess!

Hamilton Island Yacht Club



Race 6 – Airlie Beach to Cairns

Given the lack of berthing space, quite possibly we never went ashore on Hamilton at all and either sailed straight on to Airlie Beach, or abandoned our Open 40s to a similar fate as befell our First47.7s and took the ferry across to find more than 200 equally SOL-familiar Seacart30s in wait for us. The Seacart is a quick little multihull, and the 300 odd miles to Cairns, that might have taken two days in our by now ship-wrecked 47.7s, didn't take much more than 24 hours. I crossed the line first, nicely consolidating my series lead overall, and was followed home by two Brazilians less than 30 secs behind; Alexandria, another returnee from gone-away, and NagaJolokia, a fast-improving newbie. WRmirekd and knockando66 finished 13th and 6th respectively, which, I'm sorry, was also helpful.

Cairns' Half Moon Bay Yacht Club



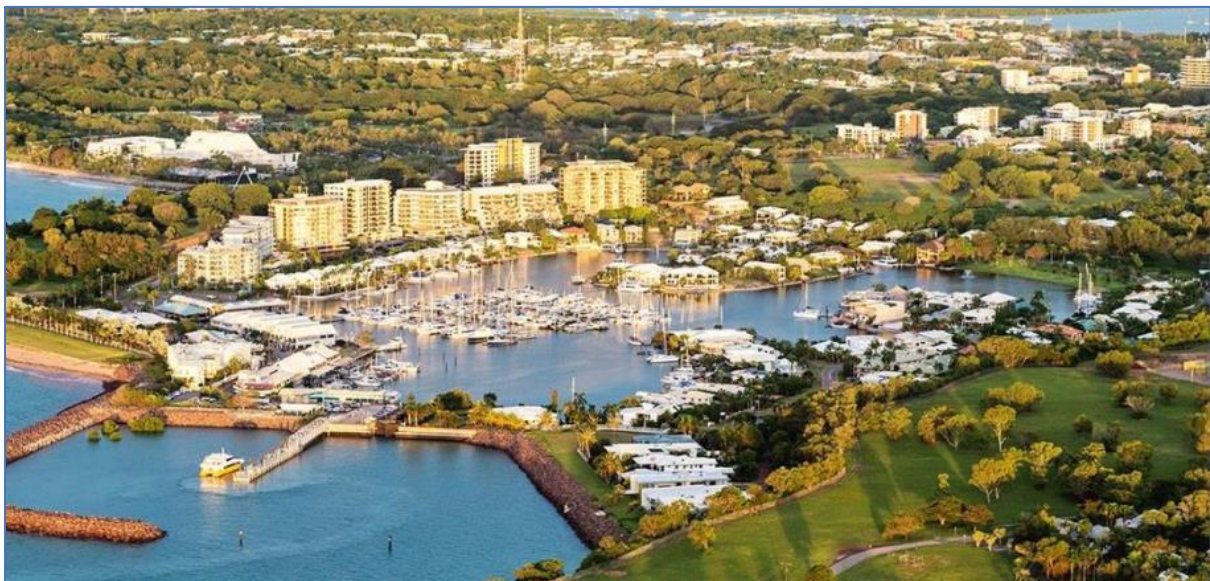
Race 7 – Cairns to Darwin

In Cairns we got rid of our boats again, or perhaps just their 30 foot port and starboard hulls swapping them for 60 footers, which, one has to admit was sensible as there were going to be at least 1400nm to cover to get to Darwin. Moreover, we would be sailing in tropical latitudes, so a certain fraction of 'blue goo' seemed inevitable. The fleet size was down a bit to about 150 starters, as we set off in said inevitable blue goo, but my main rivals for the overall were all out – WRmirekd, knockando66 and batatabh. Determined to do well, I almost immediately did one of my patent CC/TWA mux-ips! As it was a long race, fortunately there were several opportunities to catch-up which I did, save for the wily Dingo, who in his usual calm and collected way was SOLing a blinder. Now very well placed overall, I decided it was OK to tempt fate and I wrote a report.

It's a good story, read it at:

http://sailonline.org/static/var/sphene/sphwiki/attachment/2020/07/26/Darwin_20_REP_bonknhoot.pdf

Darwin Harbour Marina



Race 8 – Darwin to Perth

I do not know whether our many Australian friends consider their land's west coast less worth the while to explore, but for whatever reason, Tyger's design for our Aaron Gage Memorial series now offered us a longest leg by far – 2500 non-stop miles to Perth, and sensibly we doubled up our hull lengths a second time, now to 125ft in a catamaran configuration. But straight to Perth, no, that wouldn't do Tyger at all, so first our devilish designer had us heading just north of west to a turning mark on an invisible island cum reef in the middle of the sea, and, as it happened, in the middle of a sizable patch of 'blue goo'. So, the fleet left it well to port and skirted Indonesia's Timor Island instead, after which it was a downwind sleighride all the way to Perth.

If that turn on Ashmore Reef hadn't been there, and we'd been racing anything less speedy than the Orange125, this truly would have been a 'proper' ocean race, with one WX after another to route generating ever-different solutions, requiring SOLers to 'take a view'. My view was not too good and I struggled in, in 5th, well adrift of the first four, led by NagaJolokia, who had now scored 1, 3, 3 in the three races he had competed in. Top class! WRmirek got a solid 3rd, but that was not enough to threaten me for the overall.

I had won the series with a race to spare!



Race 9 – Perth to Adelaide

The last leg then – I remember in my dinghy days, there'd be these guys every now and then who wouldn't race the last race, if they could just discard it and still win. They'd go and de-rig and pack-up and maybe even leave before the prizegiving. Very unsporting. The very few times my helmsman/helmsmen and I had the choice, we always raced, and there was/is no way I would/will ever do otherwise on SOL. So, one more time, away we all went – reduced to 160 strong – down the coast of Augusta-Margaret River Shire (really!) through the middle of the European night to Cape Leeuwin and then out into the Southern Ocean for another speedy downwind sleighride now of only 1200nm and in vintage swing-keeled Volvo 70s. Similar as to what befell me in Race 8, halfway down the leg, I found myself offset somewhat from the consensus course.

But this time my deviation favoured me as I was able to hold more wind for longer further south than main rivals rums kib (yet another comeback kid) and NagaJolokia (again!), and thus, approaching the turning mark at Alpthorpe Light into St Vincent Gulf, early European morning, I found I had gone into the lead. I rerouted, set my DCSs and went back to bed, but when I woke up next time I found that NagaJolokia (again!!) had pipped me. Had Naga raced from the start he would have definitely featured on the table below.

	<u>bonk</u>	<u>WR</u>	<u>knock</u>	<u>rafa</u>	<u>bata</u>
AAA1	2	4	1	6	31
AAA2	1	2	5	3	10
AAA3	13	22	6	19	10
AAA4	2	1	28	3	7
AAA5	1	2	3	23	8
AAA6	1	13	6	158	12
AAA7	2	9	4	6	7
AAA8	5	3	23	4	8
AAA9	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>188</u>
	29	64	81	235	281
DISC1	-13	-22	-28	-158	-188
DISC2	<u>-5</u>	<u>-13</u>	<u>-23</u>	<u>-23</u>	<u>-31</u>
	11	29	30	54	62



Epilogue

Aaron's home club (pictured above) is a beachfront dinghy club, so undoubtedly, we swung our keels out to one side, slung our hooks over the other side and waded ashore, to raise a glass and drink one more to his memory, after a great series which had a bit of everything!