



Sydney-Hobart Report: 64-year-old Rookie Heads Down Under

As part of a documentary he is producing about the infamous 1998 Rolex Sydney-Hobart Race, Dennis Perkins is preparing to compete in the 2006 Sydney-Hobart. The 628-nautical mile race, which starts December 26, will be Perkins' first distance race.

Dec 11, 2006

By Dennis Perkins

2006 Sydney-Hobart Blog: December 11

"OLD SALT FACING AUSTRALIA
CHALLENGE"

It isn't every day you open the morning paper to find a picture of yourself with a headline like that. But there I was, staring back at myself in black and white print, undeniably tagged by a story in the New Haven Register as an "old salt." I guess I can hardly argue, having recently celebrated my 64th birthday and attended my 40th Naval Academy reunion. Plebe year and marlinspike seamanship seems like a long time ago, and now here I am, packing my bags for the Sydney-Hobart Race.

Perhaps even more remarkable, just last Sunday I was decked out in a tuxedo (with Musto foul weather gear for effect) headed to the Guilford Yacht Club for my wedding. Now, a week later, I'm leaving my lovely bride, Susan O'Malley, for "the race of my life," as this morning's paper says. How in the world did I get here?

By way of some explanation I am the CEO of a firm dedicated to helping organizations faced with demanding environments characterized by adversity, uncertainty, and rapid change. My colleagues and I have worked for over 25 years as advisors to senior leaders in organizations located throughout the world. A unique feature of our approach is a concept we call "The Edge," by which we draw on dramatic stories of adventure and survival to illustrate the skills needed to succeed in challenging situations.



-Carlo Borlenghi/Rolux

Competitors and spectators zoom out of Sydney Harbor at the start of the 2005 Rolex Sydney-Hobart Race. First-time distance racer Dennis Perkins will be blogging from the 2006 race.

In 2000, we published "Leading at the Edge," a book that highlights the extraordinary saga of Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition. As part of our effort to understand the accomplishments of the expedition, we traveled to Antarctica and retraced much of Shackleton's voyage. We now use video footage of our trip, along with photographs taken by the expedition photographer, to tell the story of the expedition.

A few years ago, we asked ourselves, "What's the next Shackleton story?" And we believe that we have found our answer in the 1998 Sydney-Hobart Race. While much of what has been written about the race focuses on tragedy and loss, we were impressed by the saga of Ed Psaltis and the crew of *AFR Midnight Rambler*--the overall winners of the race who were awarded the Tattersalls Trophy.

We have spent the past two years researching the race and preparing to tell this story. We have filmed interviews of all the *AFR Midnight Rambler* crew, and some others, including Kristy McAlister, one of the helicopter rescuers who was cited for her bravery. The more we learned about the race, the more fascinated we became. Fascinated enough, in fact, that we wanted to experience the Sydney-Hobart Race just as we had Antarctica.

A connection with one of the *AFR Midnight Rambler's* crew, Chris Rockell, led us to Peter Goldsworthy of Getaway Sailing. Chris and Peter had sailed together in a small skiff in New Zealand some 30 years ago. One thing led to another and so in an hour I will be leaving for my "honeymoon cruise" on a Volvo 60. Ed Smith, my friend, sailing partner, and an expert videographer, will be joining me for the adventure—the "race of my life."

I'd like to say more, but I have a sense that my new bride would like to say goodbye to this old salt. On to Australia!

Dennis N. T. Perkins
New Haven, Conn.

Sydney-Hobart Report: A Look Inside the Volvo Ocean Race 60

On location report by Dennis Perkins

Dec 15, 2006
By Dennis Perkins
December 15, 2006
1300 Hours
Sydney, Australia

We arrived in Sydney on Wednesday morning (losing a



Dennis Perkins

At the dock in Sydney, Australia, the Volvo Ocean Race 60 that Dennis Perkins will sail to Hobart sits ready for action

day), dropped our bags at the hotel, and headed straight for the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia. Visiting the CYCA and having a drink is now a ritual for me, but this time it seemed even more important. Somehow, I felt that just being around the home of so many sailing greats would help me absorb "the stuff" I'll need for the Sydney to Hobart Race.

Our formal training regimen starts on Saturday, but we were both eager to see a Volvo 60 up close and personal. So on Thursday afternoon I was standing on the boat with my partner, Ed Smith, and Getaway Sailing skipper, Peter Goldsworthy. What a feeling!

Stepping from Ed's J29 to this vessel was like stepping into another world.

The Volvo Ocean Race 60 raced round the world in 2001 as Djuce Dragon and was purchased by Getaway Sailing just 2 months ago. In its first outing with the new owners, with "Goldy" at the helm, it won the Gosford to Lord Howe Race on line honours, PHS handicap and set a new course record.

The boat is certainly a racing machine. Below is a series of pumps that move water to tanks on either side as ballast in heavy air conditions. We tested it on the dock and loaded 5 tons of water into the port tank in about 30 seconds!

There is little else below. The first third of the boat is a watertight collision compartment then a 2 burner gimbaled stove as a galley, and then 3 rows of pipe berths nestled between pipes for the water ballast and structural ribs and stringers. I was trying to think of how to describe the Spartan interior of the boat to my new wife, Susan, but gave up. I'll just tell her there is slow room service.

Our day was spent measuring and surveying the condition of sails (There are at least 30 sails, some over 20 meters to a side) and troubleshooting a leak in the pump system. Fascinating to watch the banter...lots of humor, lots of "hand me this or that, mate," and good humor all around.

The day ended with beer and sailing stories recounted by Goldy and Johno from Getaway. Everyone in Australia seems to have a nickname, and now I wish I had my father's and could be "Perk" instead of Dennis!

Tomorrow we will meet the rest of the crew and get to know our teammates for the race. I can't wait.

Sydney-Hobart Report: Ocean Racers In Training

Dennis Perkins and other members of his Sydney-Hobart crew begin on-the-water training

Dec 20, 2006
By Dennis Perkins
1300 Hours
December 18
Sydney, Australia

Today is a "lay day," and my first chance to catch my breath. On Saturday we met most of the rest of our mates for the race. They were a diverse lot in almost every way: backgrounds, sizes, professions, and the like. However, as expected they did have a couple things in common. First, they've all had extensive sailing and offshore racing experience. This highlighted, of course, my "rookie status". Second, it seemed like almost everyone had a nickname: "Fairweather," "Jungle," "Goldy," "Frenchy," to name a few. I felt like I was enrolled in the Navy's Top Gun school. By the end of the day I was often identified as "Perk," at least to "Jungle" (so named for his ability to climb a halyard like a tropical vine.)



Sunday, yesterday, was our first day sailing. I should preface this part by saying that my recounting of what happened yesterday owes much to Ed (Eddo) Smith. Truth told, so much was going on that my mental state was pretty much the same as at my wedding the week before: I was happy to be there, but sufficiently awed by the experience that what actually happened was pretty much a blur! (For the record, I clearly remember saying, "I do" at the wedding, but I don't recall a similar commitment for the Sydney to Hobart Race.)

Before heading out we had a second tutorial on the operation of the water ballasting system. On each side are three tanks (basically double walled sections of the hull) that can be filled with seawater to level the boat. They are operated with a series of 12 valves, all operated from the companionway steps by pulling on ropes in the proper sequence.

All this was explained over the roar of the engine, and I can't say I got it down pat. Maybe by the end of the week I'll feel more confident I could do it smoothing in a tacking duel with our direct competitor...the DHL Volvo 60.

After lots of dragging around huge (read gigantic) sails in cramped spaced (including the dreaded "Anaconda") we set out onto Sydney harbor.

Our practice sail took us under the iconic "Harbour Bridge," already rigged with New Years fireworks, and breathtakingly close to the downtown skyline and the beautiful Sydney Opera house. All the while being dodged by fleets of Lasers, windsurfers, Ynglings, 505s and speeding 49ers, impossibly rigged with jutting bowsprits and hiking platforms and iridescent Mylar mainsails that make them look like a swarm of dragonflies.

It soon became clear that --though there was plenty of individual sailing experience on the boat -- that didn't automatically add up to a high performance team. On the way out we tore the tack (bottom corner) completely off our giant "Code 0" headsail. It is an upwind sail, but unlike our normal jibs which run up a slot in the forestay to a point two-thirds of the way up the mast, the Code 0 is hoisted unsupported to the top of the mast and trimmed to a spinnaker block on the transom.

The accident post mortem concluded that we had over-tightened the backstay while the sail was up, pulling the mast tip back and over tensioning the leading edge of the sail.

We ran into similar problems on the way back. A small tear in the spinnaker quickly spread from bottom to top and edge to edge as we tried to pull the sail down.

Ironically, part of the problem seemed to be that people were confident in their ability and eager...maybe too eager...to lend a hand. Absent coordination, this led to problems. And on a boat like this little problems quickly become big ones.

I alternated between the coffee grinder for the main (all that practice with the arm cycle machine actually paid off!) and the running backstays.

The runners are a critical job, since the oversized mainsail means there is no permanent backstay. If one of the two backstays is not fully tightened at all times, there is a very real risk of breaking the mast at the deck level, and toppling it forward.

Tonight Ed and I are meeting John Walker for a drink. At 84, John is the oldest skipper to do the race, and will be doing it in one of the smallest boats. I spent a lovely afternoon at his home on my last visit and John was, in part, my inspiration for doing the race myself. I'm really looking forward to seeing him at the Cruising Yacht Club.

Tomorrow, back for another go with "Dragon," as Goldy calls the Volvo. Let's see if we can make a smooth running team out of this collection of experienced sailors!

Sydney-Hobart Report: Seeking Advice from Aussie Legend

On the eve of his biggest sailing adventure, Dennis Perkins gets some insight and inspiration from an Aussie sailing legend.

Dec 26, 2006

By Dennis Perkins

Wow, it's now Saturday...Christmas Eve! Hard to believe that almost a week has gone by since my last entry. I guess I've been pretty remiss in my blogging, but I haven't been idle.

Monday night, Eddo and I had dinner with the remarkable John Walker. John, who turned 84 this year, will skipper his yacht *Impeccable* for his 23rd race to Hobart, which will equal the record for "oldest skipper" set by Alby Burgin in 2000 on *Alstar*.

On the advice of his cardiologist, John skipped the S2H Race the year he had a triple bypass. That year, he decided to do a somewhat less challenging race.



Our conversation ranged from sailing stories to my greatest interests: leadership, teamwork, and overcoming adversity. John shared insights from his remarkable life, which included surviving over 3 years in Auschwitz, the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, and a journey to Australia where he is now CEO of a timber company.

We could have talked all night, but John had to leave to attend a retirement party. The event was being held for someone John had hired 12 years ago, thinking this individual would be his replacement!

John Walker is truly one of the most charming, thoughtful, and kind individuals I have ever met. An inspiration—and a fitting role model for me as I prepare to embark on my first S2H tomorrow. I'm not sure what this race has in store for me, but already the experience has enabled me to meet some amazing people.

Sydney-Hobart Report: Back in the USA!

Summarizing the race by Dennis Perkins

Jan 12, 2007

By Dennis Perkins

Well, my high tech solution to blogging -- using a BlackBerry with an external keyboard -- was a complete failure. As much as I wanted to provide timely updates, typing with waterlogged thumbs just didn't work. So, after much delay, I'm back behind a computer, the feeling is back in my finger tips, and I can recount the rest of my Sydney to Hobart Race adventure.



My last entry detailed a delightful dinner with John Walker, the oldest skipper in the race. It was thoroughly enjoyable, and fortifying to think that John is still racing at 84...and doing it well!

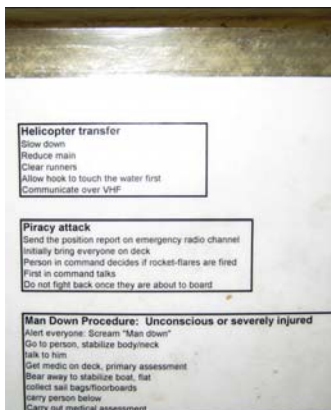
The next morning, I was back at Birkenhead doing my part to get *Dragon* ready for the race. I inventoried EPIRBs, strobe lights, and PFDs, found bolts for the emergency steering equipment, and continued to try to understand this racing behemoth.



To demystify the water ballasting system, I developed an "SOP," so that I would be clear on which of the 12 values to pull, and when. I also began to familiarize myself with the "guts" of the boat, and how to explain all this to my new bride, Susan.

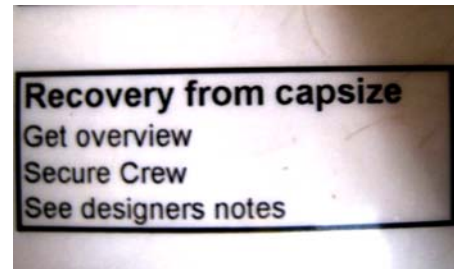


One image came to mind instantly. As an ER physician, she had shown me photos of her "office," the Trauma Bay. As I looked around the boat's innards, the resemblance between the *Dragon's* interior and Susan's Trauma Bay was remarkable. Substitute IV tubes for wiring, and I was pretty much working in my wife's "office."



I was also fascinated by the instructions developed by the Norwegian crew in 2001, and still posted on the bulkhead. There were SOPs for every possible calamity, including, God forbid, "Piracy Attack." I was hoping there were no pirates in the Bass Strait, but I guess you never know.

Most procedures were detailed, but it struck me that some could have been a bit more complete. In case of capsizes, for example, it certainly made sense to "Get overview" and "Secure crew." But I wasn't sure just how helpful the instruction "See designers notes" would be if we capsized in the race. I'm sure they would be floating around somewhere.



On Wednesday, the *Dragon* was – finally -- sufficiently prepared that she could be moved to the Cruising Yacht Club for a Cat 1 safety inspection. It was great to be back at the CYC, and Ed went

up the mast in an attempt to retrieve a lost halyard and change out a broken wind instrument. Go Eddo!



Ed took a camera, so I got to see what things looked like from some 85 feet above the deck. It was a magnificent scene, and we got a different perspective on the competitors: ABN AMRO and Skandia berthed right next to us. Wow, what a view!



On Thursday, I was invited to dine with the crew of *AFR Midnight Rambler* – the team that had started all this to begin with. The amazing story of their triumph in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Race was the thing that had initially captured my attention and much of my motivation for being here was driven by a desire to tell their story with a deep personal understanding of the race.

It was great to see them all again and, remarkably, over dinner I got an email from Kristy McAlister. I had also read about Kristy's courage in 1998 when, as a rescue paramedic, she jumped into the maelstrom to save two sailors from the sinking boat, *Stand Aside*. I had interviewed Kristy in 2003, and later found out that her story was part of the "in development" film by Paramount on the Sydney to Hobart Race. She was astonished to find that I was doing the race, sent her greeting to the crew, and wished me luck. I told her to stand by in case I needed to be fished out of the Bass Strait.





Friday we had a "long sail," far out past the Sydney Heads and into the evening. We encountered bigger seas and more wind than before. The wind was gusting over 30 knots, and the seas were around 12 feet. The crew had come a long way, but our spare mainsail, a leftover from the Around the World Race, wasn't up to the challenge. It came apart with loud crack.

Looking on the bright side, this gave us a chance to practice lashing the main and set a storm trysail in something like the real conditions. A couple of people got seasick, and I got a little queasy. I've never been seasick, and have sailed in some rough waters like the Drake Passage. But I realized it could actually happen to me and, if it did, I didn't want it to be on the Sydney to Hobart Race. So, I reluctantly decided to take some Dramamine during the race. I ended the day wishing that we had more time on the water to practice...but time was running out.

On Saturday we went through survival drills, and the morning began with a nice plunge into Sydney harbor. Climbing into a life raft with full foul weather gear was difficult, even in protected waters. But climb into the raft I did, and then swam back to the boat to be hoisted back aboard by Brett and Jungle. Here's a tip: put the sling on feet first, to make sure the helicopter doesn't whip it away before it's around your chest.

Sunday was a lay day, but Ed and I volunteered to attend the Race Briefing at the CYC. The briefing included the latest weather forecast – the first one that I thought I could share with Susan. Previous headlines had been saying things like **"Dangerous Weather Forecast for Sydney to Hobart Race,"** with accompanying stories talking about the 1998 race and boats sinking. Now they were saying that the "southerly buster" -- an intense depression typical of a boat-breaking Rolex Sydney Hobart -- forecast earlier in the week would be further offshore for the Boxing Day start of the race.



Even though the wind might drop, however, still of concern would be a residual swell from the south driven by the 40 knot winds blowing across the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand on Christmas Day. The prediction was that these would clash with the warm current flowing south down the coast of eastern Australia, creating a "lumpy" seaway, more than capable of damaging the finely-tuned race boats in the south-bound fleet.

My thoughts were pretty much in line with those of Ray Roberts, skipper of *Quantum Racing*, who quipped, "Everybody's saying the winds are lightening off but I still think 30 knots is not light. To win this race you've got to finish the race." He

went on to explain that, often, the hardest part of the race is the New South Wales Coast. "You've got a relatively shallow continental shelf and a hard southerly breeze pushing against a strong current so you've got very steep waves."

The second part of the briefing dealt with search and rescue capability. John Rice, Senior Search and Rescue Coordination, showed photos of all the aircraft that theoretically would be available to help, but then warned that at least some of them would be down for repairs and that fixed wing aircraft couldn't do much more than drop things on us. We were also briefed on the limitations of helicopters: some of the winches might not work; their time on station would be extremely limited if we needed to be pulled from, say, the Bass Strait; and that, if we were over 100 miles from the coast, choppers couldn't be used at all. Finally, we were informed that, if anything happened at night, we would have to survive until daylight, since there would be no winching at night.

Sobering, to say the least. It dredged up thoughts about medevacs and Vietnam. I shook off those feelings, and focused on the fact that I



had spent the money to buy the equipment I thought would give me the best shot at survival. After talking with Zack Leonard, coach of the Yale sailing team, I had decided on the Mustang Hydrostatic PFD. If I went over the side unconscious, it would inflate after being submerged in 4 inches of water. Art Vasenius, at the Sailing Pro Shop in Long Beach, encouraged me to keep a submersible VHF radio in my pocket. If a chopper were looking for me, he reasoned, it would be nice to be able to say something to the pilot, like, "I'm at your 4 o'clock. Made sense.



And then there was my ACR P-EPIRB. Before the trip I had joked with Susan that it would absolutely ensure my survival since it transmitted on both 406 and 121.5 MHz. The 406 signal would be picked up by the



COSPAS-SARSAT satellite system run by NOAA. My Naval Academy room mate, Connie Lautenbacher, is now head of the NOAA, and Susan is quite fond of him. So, I assured her that Connie had a red phone by his bed and, once my signal was picked up, he would be notified immediately. And further, once that happened, Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, USN (Ret.) would spring into action and personally coordinate my rescue. Implausible? Maybe, but the very thought of it seemed to be reassuring.



Monday was Christmas, and that could have been a pretty lonely day away from home had not Brett invited us to celebrate with his lovely family. We put on party hats, played games, and ate delicious home-cooked food. Ed and I both appreciated both the hospitality and the cuisine and – had we known the way we would be eating

for the next four days – would probably stuffed our pockets with ham and cookies.



Tuesday, Boxing Day, was the day we had been waiting for. I was amazed to think that I was now pulling away from the dock just like *AFR Midnight Rambler* in 1998. Of course, I was in a Volvo 60 and they had sailed a Hick 35. But it was the same feeling, and they would be racing again this year in a Farr 40.

The start of the race was the intense, adrenaline filled experience everyone talks about. The day was sunny and the wind was great. The starting line is divided in two, to keep the smaller boats from being crushed by giants like Skandia and Maximus, both 98 feet. At 60 feet we were among the smaller boats in the big boat starting area, but we were right there with all fancy maxis favored to take line honors. I was so focused on not screwing up the runners that I didn't take it all in, but I saw *AFR Midnight Rambler* speed by us. What were they doing at this part of the line, I wondered? Trying to win another trophy seemed to be the obvious answer.



We got off to a great start, but our pre-race equipment problems and lack of training time quickly caught up with us. As we came out of Sydney heads, the course turned to windward and we needed to drop our spinnaker. The VO 60 has a halyard locking mechanism at the top of the mast to take strain of the lines while under sail, but it took several attempts and precious time to release the lock and drop the sail. But the time we got it, we were rounding the mark and it was too late to control the sail. Ultimately, after much yelling we had to let the halyard run through the mast and drop the sail into the water. We pulled it aboard like a huge dripping fish net.

Our strategy was to immediately head offshore to take advantage of exceptionally strong currents heading toward Hobart. This was clearly the right strategy, and for a time the tracking reports had us near the front of the fleet. However, there were pros and cons to our strategy. Although we never got sustained gale force winds, the combination of the three knots current in one direction and the previous several days of strong winds from the other, caused particularly difficult sea conditions offshore.



These "lumpy" waves caused problems for us and many other boats. Essentially, the





waves were compressed by the current, making them so steep that boats were lifted up by one wave and dropped with a crashing jolt on to the face of the next. The strain caused the rigging to fail on the *VO 70 ABN AMRO*, and on *Maximus*, toppling their masts and injuring six crewmembers. Another boat, the *Koomooloo*, broke a structural rib and quickly sank.

The *Koomooloo* crew was recovered from life rafts, and there were no fatalities on the boats that were dismasted. But people were hurt and this was no cake walk. I could understand how a boat like *Maximus* – built for speed and relatively fragile – could come apart. But *ABN AMRO* had just won the Volvo 2005-06 Ocean Race, and had faced some of the toughest waters on the planet.

Our problems weren't life threatening, but they were still serious. Our electrical system had been problematic before the start, and the constant shaking caused it to fail the second evening as we were hit by what Goldy described as a "rogue wave." They all seemed like rogue waves to me, but I remember this crash well. We were left with no communications or navigation instruments and for a while no lights. This led to a difficult night of sailing with just flashlights, compass and a hand-held GPS.



I was pleased that the GPS I had taken to Antarctica (and decided to bring along at the last minute) came in handy. But fixing the navigation system was distracting and, by the time we got our navigation equipment back on line, our course strayed back over the continental shelf and out of the favorable current. We had fallen considerably in the standings.

Back at home, Susan was glued to the Rolex Sydney to Hobart Race website. She saw boats sinking and "retiring," and *Dragon* (according to the yacht tracker), dead in the water. My new bride was worried

Except for the navigation problems, I was completely unaware that all this was going on. It was probably a good thing. I was completely focused on the task of offshore racing, which was both a new yet vaguely familiar experience. Since I had never done an offshore race, much less the Sydney to Hobart Race, the routine of trying to maintain maximum speed 24 hours a day was demanding.



Our watches were 4 hours on, 4 hours off in the day time, and 3 on and 3 off at night. But I soon realized that 3 hours off didn't really mean 3 hours of sleep. First of all, it took time to get your PFD off and find a place to sleep in a cave filled with exhausted people and sails. Second, it



seemed like, the minute I fell asleep, there would be some crisis, like a ripped sail. The call of "all hands on deck" would mean that I would soon be sliding out of the rack and engaged in a life and death struggle with some out of control object. If that didn't happen, we would change course, and the call of "tacking" meant that everyone would roll out of wherever they were trying to sleep and move to the opposite side of the boat so that their weight would be on the upwind side. This meant finding a new spot in the cave, and there was no reserved seating.

At the same time, I realized that I was never really sleeping much at all. Part of it was that the steep waves that were causing damage to other boats were constantly pounding us as well. We were driving forward into the wind, "on the nose," and it felt to me like we hitting brick walls. There would be two or three, sometimes four or five consecutive and jarring crashes. Even though exhausted, I was hard pressed to really fall asleep.

In the back of my mind, I was always preparing for the next crisis, or to get ready for my next watch so I wouldn't delay someone else from going below. This constant state of vigilance took me back, once more, to my experience in the Marines. In Vietnam, I never really slept because I never really knew what would happen next. The big difference here of, course, was that the crashing waves weren't high explosives, no one was actually trying to kill me, and this wasn't going to last for a year. Also, and this was a huge relief, I wasn't really in command of anything. I just had to find a way to do my job, to show up on watch, to find some way to contribute.

My mantra for this mission had been, "Cultivate poised incompetence, and find a way to contribute." So far I had learned to live with my rookie status, but making a useful contribution was harder. Sometimes the experienced hands didn't seem sure of what they were doing, and overrides (tangles) on winches weren't that uncommon. Sometimes I would see experienced people doing things that didn't look right to me, but – with everyone trying to demonstrate their worth -- I was clearly not invited to make suggestions. In another life I might be a CEO and an author. Here, I was just a novice.



In the middle of all this, I found a surprising coach. Jungle was a man of few words, and many muscles. When I first met him 10 days ago, he seemed like the most task oriented person I had ever met...with the possible exception of a couple Marine Corps gunnery sergeants.

During our first day of trying to get Dragon ready for race, Jungle had been trying to screw something down in the dark innards of the boat, and I had held a light to help him. (One of my plans to contribute had been to make sure I would have equipment that might be needed.) Jungle completed that task and went on to the next without a word of acknowledgment.



But now, with me stumbling around in the dark and *Dragon* crashing into brick walls, I found Jungle to be great at giving specific advice, like, "Don't hold the sail that way, you'll lose a finger." Good to know. And Jungle was also great at providing quick confirmation that I had actually been helpful: "Good job, mate," or simply, "Cheers."

Not only that, but Jungle even tried to spare me "The Coffin." The Coffin was a rack with so little clearance that, once in, it was impossible to turn over. Jungle actually tried to get into The Coffin and give me a real berth. Because of the size of his chest (large) he found it impossible. I finally wedged myself in, but was relieved to hear the call "tacking" and immediately squeezed out of the claustrophobic Coffin, never to return. I'd rather sleep on wet sails.



What was important about all this was knowing that there was someone (besides my great partner, Ed) who could give me clear instruction, affirm small accomplishments, and who even cared enough about me to inconvenience himself. (Note to self: remember that for next book).

I did try to make myself useful by helping with other activities, like getting hot food to people on the next watch. While Steve created a lukewarm gruel out of God-knows-what, I held the stove and tried to get half-filled cups of the stuff to the people top side. Carrying cups from the stove to where it could be handed to someone on deck reminded me of that old game show "Beat the Clock" where contestants would be given some impossible stunt while the clock ticked away. I tried to time my movements between collisions with the brick walls, always looking for some way to wedge my body against something without spilling too much of the...er, food. I don't think I would have won much on the game show, but I was trying.



I also tried to do my bit on deck. Besides wrestling with thrashing sails, I remembered Ed Psaltis' (skipper of the AFR Midnight Rambler) habit of taking the front rail position whenever possible. Hanging over the side as "rail meat" is not the most pleasant job, since the forward people absorb the most spray and wind. However, thanks to Martha Parker and Team One Newport, I had the best foul weather gear I could lay my hands on. Though I was mindful of a previous bout with hypothermia, I figured I could take the forward position whenever possible. I got cold, but it was a tangible way I could help.



Other people made more dramatic contributions. At one point, Sammy had to climb the mast to make repairs, while Beeks tried to steady him from below. Climbing an 85 foot mast



not an easy undertaking in any circumstances, but doing in the middle of the Bass Strait during a race was clearly above and beyond. Sammy did it with a chuckle – he seldom actually spoke, mostly chuckled – but this was clearly his “Oh, S--t” chuckle, not his “I’m amused” chuckle. As always, however, Sammy came through.

By the third day I had more or less figured out my routine, but things continued to be challenging. Unexpectedly, I reenacted an *AFR Midnight Rambler* incident from the 1998 race.

During the first few hours of the '98 storm, Chris Rockell, mainsail trimmer, bon vivant, and front line rugby player, was getting ready to come on watch when the boat was hit by a big wave. Chris floated through the air and his head hit a protruding bolt. Blood was everywhere and he touched his head, worried that he might have a concussion, and wondering if he would touch “hard or squishy.” Turns out he was injured but OK, and they sailed on.



In an inadvertent recreation of Chris' experience, I found myself trying to hang my wet weather gear on a small plastic hook dangling from a small clothesline in a forward compartment. This was the prescribed procedure for keeping water away from the navigation table, but getting to the hook required jumping over the “head” and other obstacles, then balancing with nothing to hang on to while trying to catch the hook. Also, people often got seasick in the confined space. Another Beat the Clock game.

In my attempt to win the prize, we crashed into another big wave (was it a rogue?), and I went flying across the compartment and smashed my head against the hull. I saw stars, slid down to the ropes on the deck, and sat there stunned for a while. I had a hell of a headache, but it all seemed to be hard, not squishy. Ed found two Advils, and all was more or less well. I did notice, however, that few people used the clothesline by the end of the race. Most just collapsed, still wearing most of their wet weather gear.

Sometime early Friday morning I saw a light in the distance, and it gave me encouragement. I was actually holding up better than I thought I would be, but a persistent voice was now repeating, “Are we there yet?”



Much to my surprise, sailing in the Bass Strait had been easier than crashing down the coast. By 8:00 PM, we were really close to Tazi coast and I knew we were in the home stretch. For the first time, I started to relax. I was actually going to make it to Hobart!



The time between that feeling and our crossing the finish line seemed interminable. As we sailed up the Derwent, I could see the lights of Hobart in the distance, but they never seemed to get closer. Sailing under spinnaker, we all peered intently into the darkness, and few words were spoken. It was strange, almost eerie, that the race would end in such silence.

We drifted across the finish line in a dying breeze at 1:05 AM. On shore I saw three children holding sparklers to celebrate our arrival. Beeks' family had flown to Hobart, and served as our arrival party. We were 13th over the line, and I had expected a brass band, but three sparklers would do just fine. (I later learned that John Walker was 5th on handicap!!)

We tied up, cleaned up the boat, and organized the sails on deck, in the dark. I was exhausted. Ed and I took our racing gear from the boat (it was all we had, since the bags we had shipped down we missing), and trudged toward The Old Wool Store where we had made reservations six months before.

Standing there in my foul weather gear, my mind somewhat slowed by 4 days of physical exhaustion and lack of sleep, I took me a while to comprehend what the night clerk was saying. Our reservations, he explained patiently, were for the next night. They were completely full this evening, but tomorrow he could fit us into a studio with a roll away bed.

I had heard Debby, my supremely efficient office manager, make the reservations. I knew it was their mistake. But nevertheless, as hard as it was to believe, I was now Steve Martin in a nightmare from *Planes, Trains, Automobiles...and Sailboats*. I was too tired to be livid. Ed was, as always, patient.



After wandering around Hobart, I finally found a room for us at the only other hotel in town, the Grand Chancellery. At 5:40 AM, I collapsed into a chair and called Susan. I was safe. I would be home soon.

After my first real sleep in a long, long time, I awoke some time that afternoon. Hobart was one a big party. The *Dragon* had made it, *AFR Midnight Rambler* had made it, and I had made it. What a great feeling!



Ed and I wandered around Hobart, and found that most of the crew had been partying since we tied up. We found Goldy, Andy, and Beeks having their quiet little drink (QLD) at the Customs House.

Then we headed for the Shipwright Arms, where the crew of the *AFRMR* was given a standing ovation after their win in the 1998 race. Sure enough, there were the Ramblers, partying hard. It was great to see them, and I was honored when they asked me to sign a photograph of their little Hick 35, taken during the '98 race, and now hanging in the Shipwright Arms Hotel.



The next day, at 10:30 am, December 31, Ed and I stepped on to a Qantas plane in Hobart, Tasmania. At 9:50 PM, December 31, I stepped out of a Qantas plane at JFK Airport in New York. And at 12:50 PM I was drinking champagne with Susan, toasting the New Year, in Branford, Connecticut.

All in all, it was quite an adventure. I came away with a feeling of accomplishment, and the knowledge that a lofty goal can be personally revitalizing. All the training, preparation, and focus had paid off. I had come away with a deeper understanding of the story of the *Midnight Rambler*, and what it must have taken for them to win the Tattersalls Trophy in those incredible seas. And I had also come to understand leadership and teamwork in a different way, looking up from the bottom of the pyramid in a new and, often, foreign organization.

But most of all, I come away with a feeling of appreciation for all those who supported me in this adventure: my wife Susan, my children, grandchildren, my colleagues and friends. It made such a difference!

I looked at the poster my granddaughter, Elysia, made for me in Sunday school, and which I took with me in my pack. It made me smile.



For now, I think I've had enough of Category 1 offshore racing. I've now followed Shackleton's footsteps to Antarctica, and the *Midnight Rambler's* journey in the Sydney to Hobart Race. It's time to look back on my adventures at *The Edge*, and to do some reflecting. I think my next great adventure will involve a glass of wine and a roaring fire.