



CATS IN THE SUN

Seawind's BRENT VAUGHAN reports on their fourth annual Whitsunday Rally that saw faithful cat crews kiss the southern winter goodbye

The winter chill quickly reminds me that I am no longer in the warm Whitsundays as I walk across the tarmac at Sydney Airport dressed in shorts, thongs and my wet-weather jacket. Only a few hours earlier I had been sailing a Seawind 1160 *Yaminda* back across to Airlie Beach from Hamilton Island in blue skies and a beautiful 15-knot southeasterly trade wind, typical for the winter months, following the final night of

the Seawind Whitsunday Rally. Nineteen Seawind catamarans had come together from up and down the east coast of Australia, including Sydney, Lake Macquarie, Brisbane, Mooloolaba, Yeppoon and, of course, Airlie Beach, home to many Seawind charter boats. Some were chartered from Airlie for the rally with crew flying in from Melbourne, Perth and as far as Singapore, making up a total of 80 crew who had been planning for months on being involved in this

legendary event, which is one of eight events that Seawind host as part of the Seawind Cruising Club series for owners in locations such as Sydney, Brisbane and Mandurah in Australia, and stretching as far as California, Mexico and even the Bahamas.

SEAWIND HOLIDAYS
A week prior to my icy Sydney reception, I was walking my bags down the dock of Abel Point Marina on day one of the rally, where I was delegated as crew onboard

Nineteen Seawind sail cats spread out from Airlie Beach, racing towards the Whitsunday Islands.





Ester, Scott and Denise, left, crew of *One More* enjoy a relaxed sail into port out in front of the fleet. This photo, the Seawind-Whitsunday Rally crew whoop it up at the Charter Yachts Australia Beach Barbecue Party.

It's no wonder I have no idea what's been going on in the world. Until last night, the fleet had been in the northern islands of the Whitsundays...

HAPPY SAILORS HAVE THEIR SAY

"Just thought I would send you a short note to let you two know what a great job you did organising the Seawind Rally. I can honestly say that myself and the rest of the *Gypsy Rose* crew haven't had so much fun in a long time. We have the photos to prove it (blackmail material I think). I have done quite a few Hamo Race Weeks, but nothing could compare to the week I have just spent sailing with the Seawind Gang." — Gary of *Seawind 1160 Gypsy Rose*.

"Dear Renee and Brent on behalf of the crew of *Leaper*, I thank you for a most enjoyable week of total fun. I know how much effort you both have put into this regatta prior to the event and during the week to make things go smoothly. A job well done. I will cherish the memory of the 1000-mile trip to the Whitsundays and a week of hilarious fun forever." — Rodney of *Seawind 1000 Leaper*.

"A big thank you to Seawind, all the event sponsors, all participants and a special thanks to Brent and Renee. It must have been challenging for Brent and Renee with all the changes to planned routes but they took it in their stride. This event had something for everyone and was a wonderful sailing holiday for us and our crew" — Alan of *Seawind 1160 Talisker*.

Yaminda. She had been chartered through Seawind Sailing Holidays, Seawind's very own travel agency specialising in charter holidays on these comfortable cats all around the globe.

My fellow crew included Steve and Leigh Cunningham from Singapore and Jim Bodel from Sydney. Steve and Leigh used to own a quarter share of a syndicated Seawind 1000 on Sydney Harbour, of which Jim still owns a share.

The friendship that had developed through sailing on Sydney Harbour had now brought them all back together for a week of social racing and onshore shenanigans around the Whitsundays. They had all gone to some trouble to squeeze in a week from their busy schedules and, at the Seawind Meet the Fleet party at Abel Point Marina Bar & Grill, they were looking forward to a leisurely sailing holiday around the islands.

I grinned as I explained just how the Whitsunday Rally worked. With 12 Seawind 1160s and seven Seawind 1000s all going in the same direction at the same time, even in the most social setting there is inevitably some competitiveness. However, you have to do better than just sail fast to win this rally.

Each day, at the end of racing, the 80 crew from 19 boats meet up for a social event that also

entails another type of competition, which all counts towards the final point score. These events included Karaoke, a Blind Man's Dinghy Race (where a female crew navigate a blindfolded male rower around a racecourse), Trivia, a Sand Sculpture competition and finally, the best costumes at the presentation night, each with equal weighting to the races.

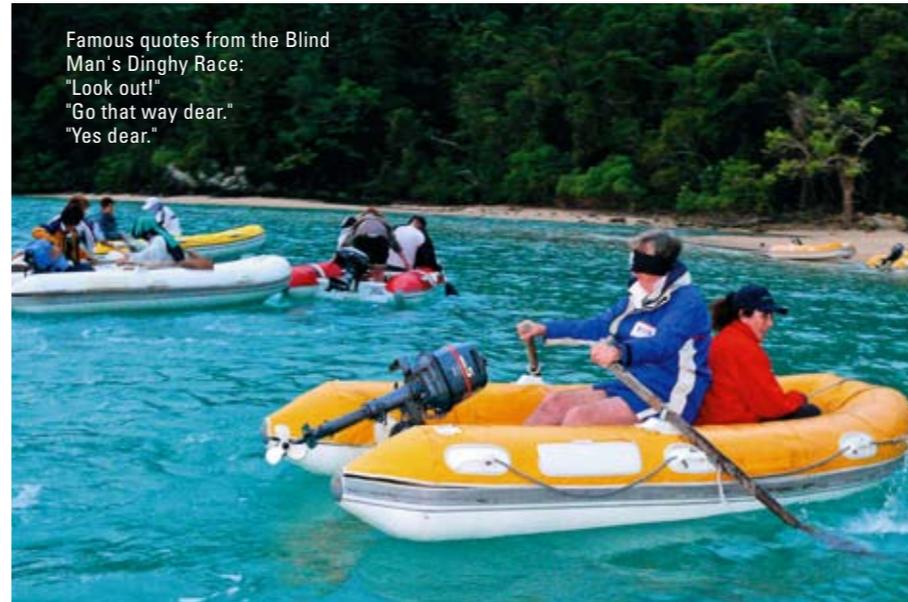
VIKING HELMET

The leader of line honours gets to wear the Viking Helmet, Seawind's equivalent to the Yellow Jersey, while the leader of the overall rally gets the Captain's Hat. It's amazing what a bit of competition will make you do!

After racing from Airlie Beach to Long Island on day two, in a beautiful 20-knot southeasterly, the Hawaiian party got underway at the iconic sand bar, located on the beach overlooking the bay with the sun setting behind the Seawind fleet.

Photos from the day's racing were projected onto a screen behind and tales from the days racing raged, but everyone knew that karaoke was soon to come and so when the food stopped, the drinks kept pouring. After all, the teams had taken the stage in some form or another, mostly proving why we all had day jobs, a final attempt at immortality was about to be made.

The crew from *Gypsy Rose* took to the stage and *Love Shack* blasted out. Dressed in Hawaiian hula skirts



Famous quotes from the Blind Man's Dinghy Race:
"Look out!"
"Go that way dear."
"Yes dear."

and flower leis, six bodies hogged the mic with their ringleader reading out the verses in a poetic spoken-word dialogue that would have made Leonard Cohen proud. The crowd encouraged him on and he was met with a rapturous applause.

THIS IS LIVING

Once everyone had felt equally embarrassed, the dinghies pushed off the beach, outboards pattered and we motored back to our mooring with the moonlight reflecting off the water with near to no wind. "This is living", I heard someone say as we tucked into a night cap and watched

the water glisten.

Later, on day three, we raced from Hamilton Island down to Cid Harbour in a 30-knot blow downwind. The full fleet stretched from side-to-side of Dent Passage as Plumb Pudding and Henning Islands zoomed past and the fleet consistently hitting boat speeds above double figures.

The previous night, we had gathered at an exclusive events room inside the new spectacular Hamilton Island Yacht Club. The architects definitely made a very big statement with this design that is as bold as the Sydney Opera House, with not a single straight line to be seen. The



Now you're cooking!
Tropical fish barbecued to perfection.



Margaret and Jim Holt, above, of *Gatina* celebrate at the presentation with their souvenir boat-photo frame.



Jim, Steve and Brent onboard Yaminda.



the northern islands of the Whitsundays with Nara Inlet being the final night on water together before the presentation party at Hamilton Island. Before that, we enjoyed Pot Luck cruiser parties around the narrow bay that evening, with the *piece de resistance* being freshly shucked local Oysters Kilpatrick onboard Seawind 1160 *Antidote*.

After the fleet raced around the islands for a week, a mystery location was only revealed and the 80 crew were ferried from Hamilton Island Marina to Dent Island Golf Club. With an Academy Awards theme prompting celebrity costumes, the passengers stepped out of golf buggies that had escorted them up the hill from the ferry wharf and onto the red carpet with the paparazzi waiting for a photo and interview.

AND THE WINNER IS...

Once inside the Golf Club, the panoramic view stretched our eyes over the southern horizon

with the moon shimmering over Pentecoste and Lindeman Islands in the distance. After a banquet fit for a king, the Oscars and prizes were given out, including Don't Give Up Your Day Job (aka Best Onshore Result) given to *Meltimi*, Best Fudged Result (aka Best Corrected Result) given to *XTSea*, Consistently Luckiest (aka Best Overall Line Honours Result) given to *Talisker* and Whitsunday Wally Winner (aka Overall Rally Champion) given to Seawind 1160 *XTSea*.

Anxious to dance the night away with the nostalgic songs being strum out by Patch, our guest performer for the night, I don't think there was a soul left sitting as this rowdy bunch of motley crew let their hair down for one last party.

It was a week to remember and a perfect foil to the daily grind that now confronts me in Sydney.

For further information on other Seawind Cruising Club events and Rallies, Seawind Sailing Holidays, or the range of Seawind Catamarans, click onto www.seawindcats.com



Rally winners. Dave, Anthony, Linda, and owners Colleen and David Downs, above, from *XTsea*. Early rally leaders and karaoke stars, crew of *Peer Pressure* Len, Isla and Lee Peers.



Seawind trivia bash filled the rooms with noise that night and controversy still rages over some of the formal answers.

SAND SCULPTURES

The fleet arrived quickly after a little more than an hour of flying downhill to Cid Harbour, a beautiful natural harbour suitable for most conditions and surrounded by Norfolk pine trees that give it a very Canadian feel.

Despite the wild conditions, our generous sponsors Charter Yachts Australia had come out to feed us with a beach barbecue, big enough to feed an army. Co-owner Annie Judd's homemade potato salad was a real crowd pleaser.

John and Annie run a very personalised charter business from Airlie Beach and ensure their boats are impeccably maintained. *Yaminda*

will be their latest edition to the fleet, with a new Seawind 1000XL and Seawind 1250 due to arrive soon. The sand sculpturing competition really brought out the artistic talents in the group with massive tortoises, mermaids, dinghies and pods of dolphins shaped from just sand, water and the occasional piece of drift wood.

Fast forward. Realising I have been out of communication for a while, I turn to the cabbie in Sydney and ask: "I've been away for the past week, has anything newsworthy happened?" He raises his eyebrows and exclaims, "Now have first lady Prime Minister, and Socceros nearly good, but no good. Not much else happen."

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The fleet sail past South Molle Island, top, in one of the best races of the week. Above, Happy Hour on the beach.