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TIM PRIEST

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Four boats in fascinating 90-minute duel up the Derwent

D.D.MCNICOLL The Australian December 31, 2012 12:00AM

AFTER 620 nautical miles through seas that ranged from relatively calm to horrendous, four Sydney-Hobart yachts yesterday staged their own private race for the final eight nautical miles up the Derwent River.

Sailors with disAbilities, Rikki, Chutzpah and Peugeot Surfrider found themselves side by side after they rounded the Iron Pot at the mouth of the Derwent and began a very slow tacking duel up the river to the finish at Battery Point.

Watchers at Kings Pier in the heart of Hobart could first see the four yachts at about 7.30am when they were about four miles from the finish -- and over the next 90 minutes they were fascinated as the yachts wafted up the river, constantly swapping the lead.

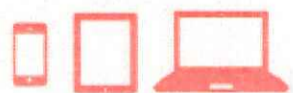
As they got within a few hundred metres of the line, the wind died to less than a whisper and it appeared the yachts might start going backwards with the tide.

But finally, Victorian dentist Bruce Taylor's Caprice 40, Chutzpah, slipped over the line first. David Pescud's Nelson Marek 52, Sailors with disAbilities, was second, Kiwi Ray Haslar's Reichel Pugh 42, Rikki, third and Frenchman Sebastien Guyol's Beneteau 45, Peugeot Surfrider, was fourth.

Pescud said he and his crew had been watching the finish line just as hard as the Hobart spectators.

"We were just side by side and it was whoever got the shift at the right time," Pescud said. "From the Iron Pot it was just who was going to get in first and Chutzpah pipped us on the line. It was good fun."

He said it had been "a really challenging race" from go to whoa. "It wasn't a hard race like 1998 or '93 but it was a tough, tough race," he said.



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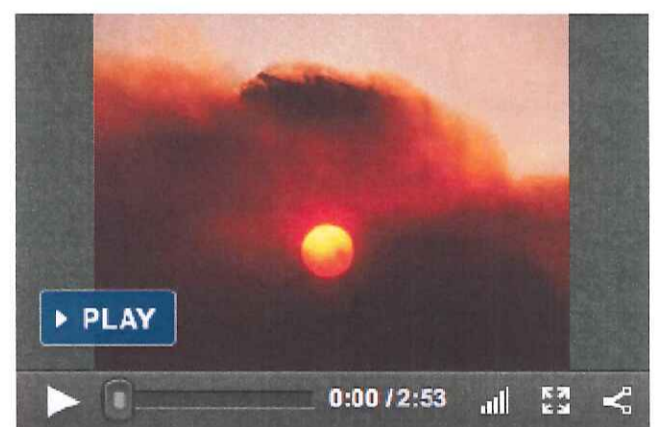
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"We lost all our big headsails on the first night, so we were down to our number four for the rest of the race. It was also really hard yesterday when that sou'easter hit at over 40 knots."

Crew member, London Paralympic sailing gold medallist Lisel Tesch, had a brighter view.

"The race had it all," Tesch said, "Spectacular sunsets with the dolphins, prolonged breeze in our faces with huge waves crashing against us and the Tasmanian coast. Freezing cold. Hot as.

"No one gave us a box of prawns but we did have some cherries aboard. It was a real challenge."

Taylor, who was making his 32nd race to Hobart, agreed that it was a "race with the lot".

"We had a bit of everything, it was quite surprising," Taylor said. "There were holes in the wind everywhere and we found too many of them.

"Yesterday there was a lot of talk about a southwesterly coming through so we headed for the coast early and we got pinned on the coast by a southeasterly change.

"We ended right on the beach for most of yesterday and even had to sail inside Maria Island for the first time ever."

New Zealand London Olympic sailing silver medallist Blair Tuke, who was having his first ocean race aboard Rikki, said it was "good fun" but added it was not quite the result the crew had been hoping for after a recent victory in the Round North Island race in New Zealand.

"I learnt a lot and enjoyed it," Tuke said.

"It was pretty tough out there yesterday.

"Doing a sail change in 30 knots off Tasman Island was an experience but we still enjoyed it."

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