



Tom Murphy (right) with skipper David Pescud.

Wot Eva it takes

As someone who sails regularly with a very broad range of folk, all of whom have some form of physical or intellectual disability, I have swiftly learnt that the term 'handicap' is most useful when applied to a rating system for boats and is conversely a singularly useless description of a human disability.

This is not political correctness, for the reality is that most people with a disability refuse to let it define them.

Tom Murphy will testify to that.

Tom, 29, may have impaired hearing, but evidently this creates no obstacles to him maintaining a very active sailing calendar.



As a solo sailor in a Laser dinghy at the Hunters Hill Sailing Club, the disadvantages of hearing impairment are not, perhaps, so serious for Tom, but his ambitions in the sailing scene led him in 2004 to start sailing yachts on Saturdays from the Sydney Amateurs Yacht Club, where verbal communication undoubtedly became more of a challenge.

It was a challenge that Tom obviously overcame, because when he first got wind of the Sailors with Disabilities team in 2009, he applied to sail with David Pescud and crew aboard its 54ft yacht. He was offered a berth and went on to sail in the 2010 Sydney to Gold Coast Race.

"You just keep your eyes open and use hand signals, which, as a mastman, is really quite normal," said Tom of the challenges he faces as a yacht crewman.

Last year, fate played another part in extending his growing sailing CV.

"I was wandering around at the Woolwich Marina a few months back and saw this boat that was up for sale," said Tom, referring to Graeme Wood's fast and successful Nelson Marek 52 *Wot Yot*. "I thought, 'What a fantastic yacht, I'd love to sail on that,'" he added, as we talked just hours before he set off on his first Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

"And here I am," he said with a broad grin, sitting in the cockpit of that very boat – now renamed *Wot Eva* – which had been gifted to Sailors with Disabilities by Graeme Wood shortly before this year's race south; a remarkably generous gesture supported by Club Marine's decision to sponsor the boat.

When I asked if he was nervous about his Sydney Hobart debut, Tom seemed unfazed.

"No, I'm just excited to be sailing," he said.

Sadly, Tom and his colleagues did not make it to Hobart this year, with *Wot Eva* returning to Sydney on the second day with a split fuel tank and 40-50lt of diesel sloshing around in the bilges.

Tom's skipper, David Pescud, a no-nonsense yachtsman who has led Sailors with Disabilities crews 16 times to Hobart, is fulsome in his appraisal of Tom's abilities and attitude.

"It's a privilege to sail with people like Tom. He makes a huge contribution to the boat and he has a complete 'let's go' attitude."