

When *Smackwater Jack* sank during the 1980 Trans Tasman race, her sistership was close by and suffering in the same conditions. The wind was blowing so hard that boats were surfing the waves with just bare poles. When *Smackwater Jack* turned into the wind and found her storm sails were too big, her crew did something most of us would not consider; they roller reefed the storm jib onto the boom and hoisted it as a small mainsail that gave steerage into the wind, slowed the boat and was small enough to be manageable. It was a clever bit of improvisation, and shows how in a storm the right knowledge and preparation can save your boat – and your life.

ROUGHING IT

DON YOUR LIFEJACKET AND CLIP ON YOUR HARNESS,
AS PACIFIC SAILING SCHOOL SHOWS US HOW TO HANDLE IT
WHEN THE WEATHER TURNS UGLY.

There's no one-size-fits-all method for dealing with heavy weather, other than not being out there in the first place. The peculiarities of your boat's particular design will play a lead role in how it handles in rough weather. For example, a Sydney 38 goes to windward in 60 knots with a storm jib only, but it runs like a pig under bare poles. A Farr 40 on the other hand is easy under bare poles, until you are doing 15 knots.

What Pacific Sailing School recommends is to form a "storm management plan" for *your* boat, something which you test and perfect. But before you take on rough weather in any boat, there are some important things to consider.

STORM MANAGEMENT PLAN

A storm management plan should include, at the very least:

- A quick inspection of halyards to make sure they are all in the right position.
- A deck check to see that all fittings and deck pins are OK, and that nothing is loose.
- A check to see that stowage below is locked and adequate.
- Ensuring jack stays are installed,

and a spare lanyard in the cockpit for people coming out of the hatch.

- Securing stoves, loose gear and bags.
- Putting some spare lines on the companionway ladder for lashing if required.
- Ensuring all crew are briefed and suitably equipped.
- Getting the crew well dressed, warm and prepared with harnesses and personal EPIRBs.
- Putting a dolphin torch in the cockpit as a first response to MOB.
- Bringing the deck log up to date with positions and resetting the barometer, taking hourly readings thereafter.

Once you have made up your own personalised list, the next thing is to brief your crew about managing your yacht in a storm, and then start practising. When it next blows, go out there with your storm sails, set them, trim them and see what they look like. Drill your crew into battening down, and have a written procedure for it. And of course make sure the majority, if not all of your crew have undertaken a Safety & Sea Survival Course.

When heavy weather does arrive, crew management is of paramount importance. There's no point keeping most of the crew on deck, cold and

wet in over 40 knots, when many could be below, safe and relatively dry. You have probably seen TV footage of maxi yachts going to windward in 50 to 60 knots with only three of their 18 or so crew on deck. A fatigued crew is not much good in heavy weather. Consider this strategy as well, although in heavy weather, committing crew to the bowels of your boat may prove unpopular for those prone to seasickness.

THE TRISAIL

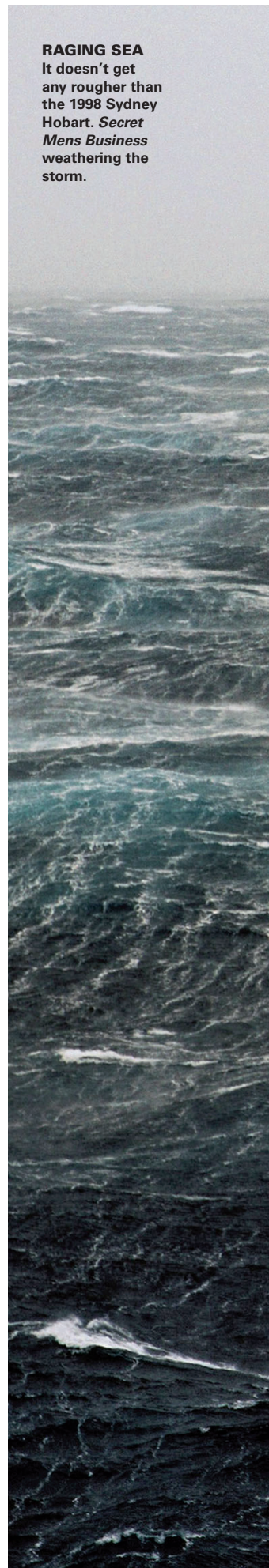
Take a moment to consider how your boat will face 70 knots. It's a scary thought, and of course, we all look towards our brightly coloured storm gear for salvation. But few of us know how to use it properly, and fewer yet go out in heavy weather to refine their knowledge.

Most racers view their trisail as quite useless, but properly sheeted it is a very good alternative to the fully-reefed modern mainsail. The vast majority of the entrants in a Rolex Sydney Hobart sheet their trisail to their spinnaker sheet blocks, hoping they never have to use it. The old campaigners sheet their trisail to the boom using a reef line because they know how much greater control they will have of the boat. In most boats a trisail becomes a very viable alternative to the main in over 40 knots (this is of course if you can put the thing on the mast without having two crew members exposed for hours – a good reason to consider putting the trisail on earlier).

GOING HEAD TO WIND

So, we have our storm gear, which is good up to 50-55 knots in most boats.

RAGING SEA
It doesn't get any rougher than the 1998 Sydney Hobart. *Secret Mens Business* weathering the storm.



Rough Guide

1. Decide what is heavy weather for you
2. Preplan your navigation
3. Get ready below decks – stow gear and prepare food
4. Shorten sail early and secure loose deck gear
5. Rig jackstays
6. Prepare the crew with good briefing and foul weather kit

Then what? There are many strategies for putting your head to the wind, and again they all depend upon a boat's particular displacement and also, dare we say it, the strength of your bow. A sea brake provides good head up control, as does almost anything you can drag overboard: anchor, warp, chain anchor, you name it. Motoring with a storm jib up and pointing very close to the wind may not do the motor much good, but it is safe and easy to steer. In cruising boats, more conventional methods like "heaving to" with a storm brake or drogue is an option, while many boats also choose to run with a headsail aback with a crossed rudder (it's not something we would recommend with a carbon fibre spade rudder though).

A WORD ON WIND

"Most rough weather is predicted," says the conventional wisdom. But consider a recent example in which some Pacific Sailing School students were bringing a boat down from Pittwater. Students were instructed to get the latest weather forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology and also to utilise Seabreeze.com.au. They were

to rig at Barrenjoey based on those forecasts. We left Pittwater with a reef in the main and a Number 3 up front, in light airs but ready for predicted heavy weather. But we ended up motoring home from Long Reef – so much for the weather predictions!

And what are the weather predictions talking about anyway. What is a storm? How much wind is there in a gale warning? It helps to have a clear understanding of the forecast as some of the definitions have changed (see the chart on the this page).

When you obtain your weather forecast, remember wind speed is the average speed of the wind over a 10-minute period at a height of 10 metres above the surface.

Gusts are increases in wind speed lasting for just a few seconds. The speeds are typically 30 to 40 per cent higher than the average wind speed, but stronger gusts are likely in the vicinity of showers, thunderstorms and frontal systems.

A squall is an abrupt and large increase in wind speed that usually only lasts for minutes then diminishes rather suddenly.

Wind direction is given in eight compass points for forecasts and 16 for observations, and is the direction the wind is coming from.

USE YOUR BAROMETER

If you don't run a decklog with barometric pressure, think about trying it on your next ocean race or cruise. Who could forget the dire forecast we received for the Audi Sydney Gold Coast race a few years ago? It was a positively scary prediction and many boats retired that night as a result of the warnings. However, the Pacific Sailing School entry did not as we were running an hourly barometric pressure record on a deck log and the air pressure did not move – not even half a millibar. Based solely on that, the students rightly concluded that the front was not approaching as forecast, and they continued. You can also use the barometer to advance your position on the weather map if you are outside internet range. Even with all this modern equipment and GRIB files, don't forget the barometer – it's arguably your best friend. ⚓

PRESSURE DROP

Barometer movement down means:

1 mb/hr
10 knot increase in wind

2 mb/hr
20 knot increase in wind

3 mb/hr
Hold onto your hats, big trouble!

Wind warnings:

Strong
26 to 33 knots

Gale
34 to 47 knots

Storm force
48 to 63 knots

Hurricane force:
64 knots or more



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