

The Smallest Sails Come Out.

By John Snowden

When Kathy Perkins and Jeff Stander invited me to hop on their Kelly-Peterson 44 named *Beatrix* for a trip from Hobart to Sydney it seemed like a straightforward passage. I was familiar with *Beatrix* from previous trips and I knew her as a comfortable and well set up boat that sailed extremely well. I also knew that Jeff and Kathy paid close attention to weather patterns, having extensive experience with both blue water and coastal sailing.

The fourth crew person was Lynton, from the Hawkesbury river region. He wanted some coastal sailing experience, which he described as his bucks party, prior to his imminent wedding. I think he got the trip that he wanted.

We slipped out of Hobart before dawn on 21st April so that we could catch the tide to take us through the Denison canal and the Marion Bay channel. Then choppy waves and low water levels at the narrows heralded the first inkling that winds were likely to be stronger than predicted. The plan was to make our way up the east coast of Tasmania bit by bit in north westerlies of around 20 knots, before an expected south westerly change. Once that had passed, we could head for Eden in its wake. With this in mind, we punched into it by day, mainly under motor, and sheltered at Riedel Bay on Maria Island, Wineglass Bay on the Freycinet Peninsula, and then at Skeleton Bay at the southern end of Binalong Bay while the main change went through.

That all went to plan, and the overnight anchorages allowed time to see to boat repairs, notably the malfunctioning autohelm, which sent Jeff to the nether regions of his extensive store of spare parts for a replacement hydraulic pump. Lynton was keen to assist, Kathy spent time in the galley, and I busied myself with cleaning and regular maintenance jobs.

We had checked the weather thoroughly before leaving Skeleton Bay at dusk on 25th April, but as we passed the Eddystone Point lighthouse on the north eastern corner of Tasmania it was clear that we were headed into stronger than the predicted 20 to 25 knot winds. We had two reefs in the mainsail but with winds already gusting to over 30 knots from the southwest we were overpowered, so we reduced to the #3 staysail and furled the genoa, receiving a generous drenching from waves across over the foredeck for our troubles.

That seemed fine and I went off watch. But the forward berth was far from comfortable. The term airborne came to mind. Either that or, around the bunk in 80-ways! Still, that didn't last long when a powerful slapping sound resonated throughout the boat. I pulled on my waterproofs, my boots, gloves, lifejacket, harness and went back on deck.

Jeff had the boat hove to, and Lynton and he were grappling with a very tangled sheet that had become loose from the staysail. Winds were over 35-knots gusting to 40 and *Beatrix* was doing her best to keep steady. I worked at keeping her that way until the guys returned to the cockpit. Back on course, reaching towards the shelter of Sellars Point on Flinders Island with double-reefed main and staysail, we were still overpowered. It was time for the trysail.

Interestingly, highly respected sailmaker Carol Hasse, from Port Townsend USA, had recently been onboard. Carol had made the sail wardrobe for *Beatrix* and had taken the opportunity to catch up with Jeff and Kathy when she was in Hobart to present at the Australian Wooden Boat Festival. Discussion on board had included the use of the trysail, as a versatile but underused sail, and Hasse had advocated hoisting it before dropping the main. On this occasion Jeff and I went forward to undertake that process.

Jeff had a purpose-built bag for his trysail. Sadly, I have to refer to this in past tense because it became a victim of the blow. It was certainly more difficult to get the sail out, run the sheets and get the halyard in its track with the boat heeled to starboard, the mainsail flogging and water over the gunwales. Still, we managed but couldn't raise the sail. Something was preventing it from going up and, at that moment, the cause of this obstruction was unclear. We decided to drop it again, lash it to the deck and then to drop the main.

That's when I fell. My harness was clipped on in 2 places, but I was caught off-guard when I had released one hand in order to grab a different rail. A sudden lurch of the boat led to a series of experiences, each so clear that, as a whole, they appeared as a slow motion series of events: boat heeling at a wild angle; wave over the gunwale; not a strong grip; losing my footing; falling; deck fitting banging my side; lying on my back near the scuppers; bang – my head. It felt like a few seconds, but Lynton was watching from the cockpit and he reported that I was up immediately.

'John! John!'

'I'm okay. I'm all right.' A few more seconds getting to my feet and then we set about dropping the main. That part went to plan; dropping the sail, lashing it and securing the boom. I put my hand to my head and felt blood, so I crawled back to the cockpit, sore and bleeding.

Kathy got me some dressings Lynton and Jeff helped to apply them to my wound before going below for a break. Kathy and I took the watch with me in whatever position felt comfortable and holding my head to stem the flow of blood. We were still reaching with just the staysail up. Strongest gusts that I noticed were at 45 knots and the SOG was at around 7 knots.

In the morning I went below, propped myself up in a sea berth and slept for 6 hours, doing my best not to bleed on things. Lynton and Jeff had raised the trysail, which helped to steady the boat. They discovered the cause of its nocturnal entanglement concerned the halyard and one of the lazy-jack lines. When I awoke, we were still about 10 miles east of Babel Island, on the east coast of Flinders. The currents had driven us further offshore than we would have liked, but there was one boat already anchored not far away at Sellars Point. We called them on VHF and were delighted to hear that all was calm close to the beach.

The next few days were spent recuperating. South westerly winds still raged but our anchorage provided shelter, with excellent holding in sand. The four of us had been on board for a week but it was a happy boat. Kathy and Jeff's hospitality was wonderful as always. Having said that, each of us had moments when serenity proved elusive, so we kept ourselves busy as an essential antidote to dissatisfactions that could have arisen due to the trip taking longer than anticipated. Jeff and Kathy spent time in the galley, gourmet pizza night proving popular. Lynton pulled in flathead, which also proved popular. I read, washed dishes and managed my head wound with assistance from my companions and the aid of a Keith Richards style headband that kept my dressing in place. I didn't know it at the time but I had broken a couple of ribs, which were often less than comfortable. There was a Scrabble set on board and

we also had internet reception, which enabled Jeff to stream Netflix. The submarine film *Das Boot* being one of his choices.

We were still a long way from Eden, but by 5 pm on 28th April we were able to follow the south westerly system. That gave us a good run with a reef in the main and the genoa to cross Bass Strait in 15 to 20 knot winds, which dropped off when we were just in sight of Gabo Island. Another north westerly system was expected but it did not eventuate and there was no significant hold up. We pulled into Eden at 1 am, then tied up at the skinny wharf the next day.

It was now 30th April and, after 10 days on board, hot showers, fish and chips and cold beer were in order. Kathy and I both sought out a doctor and a few more days of rest didn't go astray. Still, we were well south of Sydney and, as is often the case, the question of how long the crew could hang around before needing to catch a bus out of town came up. Perhaps this discussion arrived after spending a little too long in the Fisherman's Club, but an adage about doing the Eden shuffle from one side of the bay to the other until a suitable weather window arrived came to mind:

How long have you been in Eden?

Two days. Is that all. You don't even know Eden until you've been there for at least 2 months!

We left for Sydney at 10 am on 4th May, with four still on board. The northerly patterns had given way to another south westerly and this was also strengthening. Before we had passed Bermagui, I noticed a tear in the mainsail, just below the first reef line so we took it down and patched it. This led to further discussion about sail choice. Winds were over 20 knots and the following swells of 3 metres were showing no signs of abating. Weather reports indicated that the southerly was stronger south of us but that it would still accompany us up the coast of NSW. We opted for the trysail and double reefed genoa, tacking out to sea in order to maintain sail shape and then back in towards Jervis Bay. That gave us the option of ducking in to Hole In The Wall if we felt that we needed to shelter.

This configuration of trysail and genoa worked well but the wind had risen, and the swells had increased. The genoa wasn't stable, in fact it was getting caught up in the spinnaker halyard that was attached to the pulpit. We took it down and proceeded with trysail alone. It worked well and kept us on course through squalls that brought winds to more than 40 knots and lashings of rain. At one stage Jeff noted a wind strength of 45 knots, again, and he estimated seas to be at 5 metres. We were achieving some sensational speeds when surfing down waves, but *Beatrix* felt safe and secure with nothing but the smallest of sails to push us past the cliffs at Point Perpendicular and the NSW Southern Tablelands to Port Kembla and on to Sydney.

The great advantage of the trysail over a triple-reefed main has to be the fact that the boom remains lashed down and out of the way in heavy weather. We certainly appreciated this when wind gusts would have made an unwanted gybe difficult to avoid. The sail also alleviated the need to use a preventer, which would have been a further line to manage in awkward conditions. *Beatrix* has a dedicated trysail track so that the sail can be kept sheeted and ready to go, which certainly makes deployment easier. The fact that the trysail is not used very often only strengthens the imperative to get it out from time to time, and make sure that it hasn't become snagged by some other line.

In any case, we carried that sail through the Sydney heads and into Quarantine Bay on 5th May, where we picked up a mooring at 11pm, some 2 hours earlier than

expected. The next morning Lynton and I hopped on to a fast ferry to Circular Quay, leaving Kathy and Jeff to settle in to Sydney.

All up the trip took 16 days. Overall distance covered was 619 nm; strongest wind gusts recorded were 45-knots; highest SOG was 13.5 knots, when picked up by a formidable wave; the ratio of sailing to motoring was approximately 60%. Four sails were used in various combinations and degrees of reefing. Casualties included 3 beanies, one torch, one trysail bag and several million brain cells! As for *Beatrix*? She hadn't grumbled at all.

John Snowdon 2019.