

Learn to use the  
trysail before the  
trouble starts.







# When the smallest sails come out

A STORMY TASMAN CROSSING  
MAKES GOOD USE OF THE TRYSAIL.

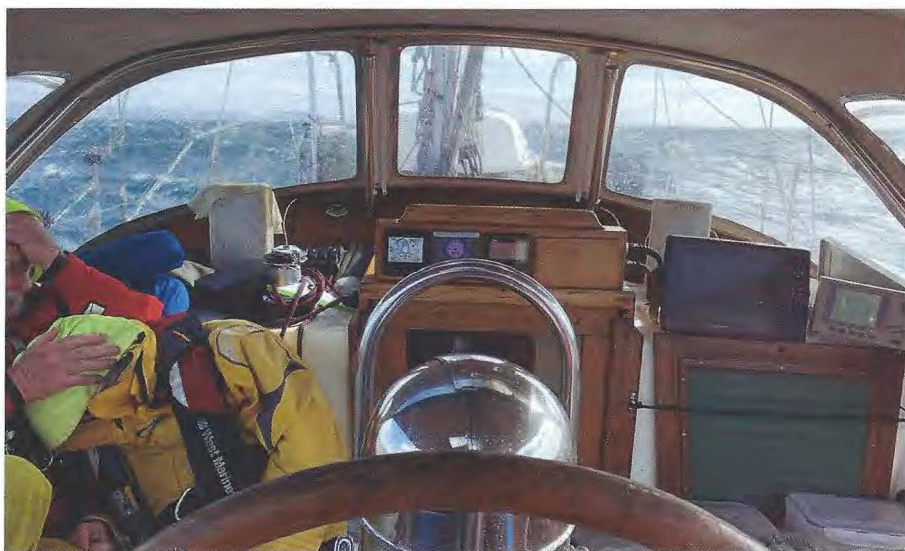
**JOHN SNOWDON**

**BEFORE** the Tasmanian winter set in Kathy Perkins and Jeff Stander set sail from Hobart to Sydney on their Kelly-Peterson 44 *Beatrix* with Lynton Blessington and I on board as crew. I knew *Beatrix* to be a comfortable and fastidiously set up boat that sailed extremely well. I also knew that Jeff and Kathy always paid close attention to the weather, having extensive experience with both blue water and coastal sailing. It seemed like a straightforward trip.

We slipped out of Hobart before dawn on April 21 to negotiate the Denison canal and the Marion Bay channel before making our way up the east coast of Tasmania in northwesterlies of around 20 knots. A southwesterly change was expected to arrive on the 23rd and the plan was to head to Eden in its wake. With this in mind, we punched into it and sheltered at Riedel Bay on Maria Island, Wineglass Bay on the Freycinet Peninsula and then Skeleton Bay at the southern end of Binalong Bay while the main change went through.

We had decided to head for Sellars Point on the eastern side of Flinders Island and to proceed to Eden from there, so we checked weather models thoroughly before leaving Skeleton Bay at dusk on April 25th. Then, as we passed the Eddystone Point lighthouse, on the northeast corner of Tasmania, it became clear that we were headed into stronger than the predicted 20–25kn winds. We had two reefs in the mainsail but with winds already gusting to over 30kn 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, although sleep was difficult when I was regularly airborne. Still, that didn't last long when a powerful slapping sound resonated throughout the boat. I pulled on my waterproofs, boots, gloves, lifejacket, harness and went back on deck.

Jeff had *Beatrix* hove to, and Lynton and he were grappling with a very tangled sheet that had worked itself loose from the staysail. Winds were over 35kn gusting to 40kn and the boat was doing her best to keep steady. I kept her that way until the guys returned to the cockpit. Back on course, reaching towards the shelter of Sellars Point 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, staying tethered to harness points at all times.

Jeff had a dedicated track for his trysail, and a custom-made bag by the mast for

ease of deployment. Even so, it proved a difficult task 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. Then, when we had done all this, we 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.

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With the boat both heeled and lurching in the unstable conditions we managed to lash the sail safely and secure the boom. Then, back in the cockpit, we nursed various aches and pains before resuming watches, with Kathy and I staying on deck while the others took a break. We were making reasonable progress with staysail alone, reaching on a port tack. The strongest gusts were at 45kn and SOG was around 7kn. We were happy with that and the modest headsail was sufficient to drive *Beatrix* past the substantial currents around Cape Barron Island and Franklin Sound to the relative protection of Flinders Island.

I went below at dawn and propped myself up in a sea berth to rest. When I awoke we were still about 10nm off Babel Island, on the east coast of Flinders. Lynton and Jeff had raised the trysail, which helped to steady the boat; the cause of its nocturnal entanglement had involved the halyard and one of the lazy-jack lines. The currents had driven us further offshore than we would have liked, but we made our way in to Sellars Point and were happy to shelter from the southwesterly and anchor close to the beach.

We stayed there for a couple of days, resting, recuperating and waiting for our window of opportunity to follow the southwesterly system. When that arrived, we had a good run, to cross Bass Strait in 15–20kn winds with a reef in the main and the genoa. The breeze dropped off when we were just in sight of Gabo Island and we pulled into Eden at 1am on April 29th, then tied up at the skinny wharf the next day and waited for another northerly pattern to pass. We left for Sydney when that system had given way to another southwesterly, with wind predictions of up to 30kn.

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 20kn and strengthening and the following three metre swells were showing no signs of abating. Weather reports indicated that the southerly was stronger to the south of us and that it would continue to affect us as we made our way up the coast of NSW. It was likely that we were in for some heavy weather again, so 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.

The combination of trysail and genoa worked well until the winds became stronger and the swells increased to around four metres. The genoa was becoming unstable and we decided to furl it and proceeded with trysail alone. This worked surprisingly well and kept us on course through squalls that brought winds to more than 40kn, accompanied by lashings of rain. At one stage Jeff noted gusts that again reached 45kn and he estimated seas to be five metres. We were achieving some sensational speeds when



surfing down waves, Jeff noting 12kn on one occasion and I saw the SOG clock 13.5kn when we were picked up by one formidable wave. Still, *Beatrix* felt safe and secure with nothing but the tiniest of sails to push us past the cliffs at Point Perpendicular and the NSW Southern Tablelands to Port Kembla and then on to the Sydney Heads. We carried the trysail to Quarantine Bay where we picked up a mooring at 23.00 on the 5th of May, some two hours earlier than our ETA and 16 days after we had left Hobart.

Post-trip discussion reflected on the way the boat handled with nothing but the smallest sails. *Beatrix* was not a light boat, particularly when loaded with cruising gear, but the staysail by itself was capable of driving her on a strong reach, and the trysail was also effective on a run. This was new territory because Jeff said that he had only had the trysail up a couple of times before, and then it

had been in conjunction with one of the smaller headsails.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the trysail over a triple-reefed main was the fact that the boom was lashed down and out of the way when the weather was at its worst. We certainly appreciated this when unpredictable wind gusts and odd squalls would have made an unwanted gybe difficult to avoid. The trysail also alleviated the need to use a preventer, which would have been a further line to manage in awkward conditions.

Although the trysail on *Beatrix* was kept sheeted and ready to deploy, the fact that it had been rarely used highlighted the imperative to get it out from time to time and make sure that it was free from obstruction. This trip emphasized the versatility of the sail, either by itself or in combination with various headsail configurations, and without a doubt it has become an option to consider using more frequently. ≈

**BELOW:** *Beatrix* in Hobart.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Exhausted, approaching Sellars Point.



### JOHN SNOWDON

John is a writer from Franklin on the Huon River. From here he enjoys some of Tasmania's greatest cruising grounds in his Brolga 33 *Narama*. He also likes to venture further afield and often crews on other boats.

