

.. *Investec Loyal wins close finish, but...*

Anthony Bell's Sydney super maxi *Investec Loyal* is the provisional line honours winner of the 67th Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race after one of the closest finishes in the race's history. She crossed the line just three minutes and eight seconds ahead of five-time line honours winner *Wild Oats XI*. The result is provisional because the race committee has protested *Investec Loyal* for an alleged rule infringement involving outside assistance from an ABC helicopter crew about the sails *Wild Oats XI* was using on the first morning of the race. An international jury will hear the protest at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania tomorrow at 10am.

Investec Loyal was notified of the race committee protest minutes after it crossed the finish line at 7.14pm this evening.

The development came at the end of an absorbing 24 hour duel between the two, which culminated in a match race up the River Derwent, though Bell denied he had been match racing; he was sailing his own race.

Nevertheless, sailing before a dying south-easterly sea breeze, *Investec Loyal* covered every gybe that skipper Mark Richards aboard *Wild Oats XI* made several hundred metres behind.

Bell paid tribute to the crew he beat, saying *Wild Oats XI* was the benchmark of world sailing.

"This was one the greatest experiences of my life. It was exhilarating. The crew all believed they could win and in the cause [Loyal Foundation]," he said.

"It was an amazing trip. It was a nervous trip, all the way."

Bell said he had one of the world's best navigators in American Stan Honey.

"It was one hell of a race. We kept our cool under considerable pressure," Bell said.

He said he was confident of winning in the protest room.

"We respect that there are rules in racing ... we are confident the outcome will confirm our victory in the race," he said.

For his part Richards said that no matter what happened in the protest room tomorrow, *Investec Loyal* had won the race.

"Those guys won on the water, we came second. That's how we think about it. They deserve to win," Richards said.

"Last night was a tough night. We had a fantastic lead and we ran into the new weather system and there was just no air. The other guys saw what was going on and just sailed around us.

"We clawed our way back and got into the lead again and the same thing happened at Tasman Island.

"You can't pick that sort of stuff. When you are the lead boat you just don't know where to go."

In the annals of the race, it will be remembered as one of the best finishes. The three minute eight second margin is the fourth closest finish in its history. In 1982 *Condor* of Bermuda beat *Apollo* by seven seconds; in 1962 *Ondine* beat *Astor* by one minute; in 1949 *Waltzing Matilda* beat *Margaret Rintoul* by 1m 51 seconds.

By Bruce Montgomery and Jim Gale, Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race media team