

Sydney to Hobart fleet shrinks

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- From: [The Daily Telegraph](#)
- November 25, 2011 11:40AM



Withdrawn: Midnight Rambler. Picture: Angelo Soulas *Source: The Daily Telegraph*

THE Sydney to Hobart fleet could be under 80-strong by Boxing Day with the field already reduced to just 94 following the withdrawal of two yachts today.

The 42-footer Polaris of Belmont and the 35-footer Midnight Rambler have both withdrawn from the fleet, which was announced as 96-strong on Tuesday.

Traditionally around 10 yachts nominated for the 628 nautical mile race pull out in the final weeks leading up to the Boxing Day start of the race to Hobart.

This year's chase for line honours will be an all-Australian affair with the Sydney-based yachts Wild Oats and Loyal expected to duel for the fastest time honours.

The battle for the prestigious overall honours is far more open with the likes of Victoire, skippered by Darryl Hodgkinson, an early favourite along with the likes of other proven performers Loki and Ragamuffin.

But with the race for the handicap honours very much weather dependant, it could well be one of the minnows of the fleet that dominates the category or even one of the 100-footers headlining the fleet.

This weekend, numerous yachts in the Sydney to Hobart will get in some vital race practice in the Sydney Short Ocean Racing Championship sailed out of Middle Harbour Yacht Club.