

Jessica's young guns try Hobart run for size

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JESSICA Watson is having a full dress rehearsal this week for her maiden Sydney to Hobart campaign as she prepares to skipper the youngest crew in the race's history.

The youngest person to sail non-stop and unassisted around the world, Watson will lead a crew of 10, all 21 or younger, aboard the 38ft (11.6m) Ella Bache Another Challenge. At the pointy end of the fleet, which stands at 96, are the two rival 100ft (30.5m) supermaxis.

Five-time line honours winner Wild Oats XI and Investec LOYAL finished first and second across the line respectively last year and loom as clear favourites again this year.

Divisional and handicap honours are the more realistic objectives for 18-year-old Watson and her crew of young guns.

By the Boxing Day start they will have trained together for 12 weeks.

Their preparations stepped up a level yesterday as Ella Bache Another Challenge prepared to sail to Hobart and then back to Sydney.

"Even though some of us on board have done this race, we do want to get as much as experience as possible," Watson said.

Among the boats expected to challenge for handicap honours are the 45-foot (13.7m) Victoire, the new 40-foot 12.2m AFR Midnight Rambler and 63-foot (19.2m) Loki.