

# New marathon for Fearnley as he tackles Sydney to Hobart

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HE has built a reputation as being one of the best male wheelchair marathon racers of all time, but on Boxing Day Carcoar's Kurt Fearnley will face a marathon race of a different kind.

He will do it without his racing wheelchair and this time the distance will be much longer than the 42.2 kilometres of a marathon.

Fearnley will tackle the Sydney to Hobart, joining the crew of Investec Loyal for the annual 628 nautical mile classic.

While he may be lacking in sailing experience and height is not be on his side, Fearnley's amazing upper body strength will be an asset to Investec Loyal. His fellow crew members will include former Wallabies Phil Kearns and Phil Waugh plus boxer Danny Green.

The CSU graduate will be located in the middle of the boat, working the electric winches and keeping the sheets ropes under control.

"I also manage to keep out of everyone else's way," he laughed.

Last week after Fearnley had his first experience of racing on a 100-footer maxi yacht in preparation for the Sydney to Hobart race, he dubbed it "wild" – and that was without passing the heads of Sydney Harbour.

But the triple Paralympic gold medallist, whose feats include climbing the 1504 steps of Sydney's Centrepoint Tower and crawling the Kokoda Track, realises the SOLAS Big Boat Challenge on Sydney Harbour was only the entree for what is served up en-route to Hobart come Boxing Day.

Raced in south to south-westerly winds with gusts up to 23 knots, maxis dominated line honours.

First was Wild Oats XI, two minutes, 51 seconds ahead of Anthony Bell's Investec Loyal, on which Fearnley was a crewmate, and 7:52 clear of Grant Wharington's Wild Thing, followed by Lahana at 9:43.

Fifth was Stephen Ainsworth's 63-footer Loki that was second on handicap to Marcus Blackmore's 52-footer Hooligan, which crossed in sixth place.

For Fearnley, the adrenaline rush began from the start off Shark Island when Investec Loyal and Wild Oats XI were side-by-side.

"It was close enough for me to board you guys at the start line," Fearnley said, looking at Wild Oats XI skipper Mark Richards.



NEW CHALLENGE: Carcoar's Kurt Fearnley will tackle this year's Sydney to Hobart as part of the Investec Loyal crew. Photo: GETTY IMAGES 121811kurt

“I was thinking about it. It was just wild mate.”

That was as close as the two yachts got. By the finish of the 14 nautical mile race off Farm Cove, it had become just another boat race.

Sure, Richards made mention of the “little tussle off the line” the boats had at the start and conceded the race “was a real challenge getting the big boats around the race track”.

But it was soon clear there was no stopping the defending Sydney to Hobart champions.

Bell, whose Investec Loyal also placed second to Wild Oats XI at Hobart last year, had to deal with a furling problem, but he joked: “We’re very good at coming second to Wild Oats, actually if our furling system starts to work at some stage we might actually shade one of these races.”

Not that that marred Fearnley’s day out.

“That wasn’t my mistake, so I was pretty happy with that,” he said.

“It was good just to get there and be on the boat while it was angry; while it’s racing. You get in there, do your job. I did everything that was asked of me and can’t wait until Boxing Day now.

“I’ve been part of some pretty good teams with my trips, three Paralympics and even the team that crossed Kokoda, we were a real tight unit.

“Now I have hung around with the boys for the past few months and it’s good to be part of [it]. The intensity on the boat, I love that.

“That’s why I chose to become an athlete when you are in front of 100,000 people in a stadium and you have to make the right choice, to be really on the game and contest right to the finish.

“I can’t wait to be out there on Boxing Day with another thousand yachts on that harbour.

“It will be a little different to wheelchair racing. But then I have that instinct of competition and you take it out on to the stage that doesn’t change no matter what sport you do.”