



the delivery of

Zig Zag

by STEVE HARRIS

OUR first open water passage in our Lightwave 10.5 catamaran would be from the Gold Coast to Hastings in Westernport Bay, Victoria. Over the past 10 months, our boat was a resident of the Hope Harbour Marina. Although we tried to take as many long weekends from our jobs in Melbourne to use *Zig Zag*, we only accomplished five trips to use our new boat. Our first trip saw us married aboard the boat and a honeymoon of 10 days. It was glorious except that my mother-in-law had joined us from the

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United States. To this day I have not quite figured out how this happened.

We had another couple to crew with us on the trip and they arrived in early January right after the New Year celebrations. The southerlies were blowing at this time so we all took a few sails to familiarise the new crew with the boat. The facilities at Hope Harbour Marina are great and we took advantage of these while we waited for the northerlies to come in.

We were all anxious to get going. Our crew had commitments in two weeks and we wanted to reach Melbourne to wrap up the sale and transfer of the business and start cruising. Our plan was to start from Westernport Bay and go north as far as we could and then catch

the northerlies back to the Gold Coast for the summer. It was to be our first cruising season and we were ready to begin.

The start of the trip was early Friday morning at 0400. We all had a quick breakfast and by 0500 we had cast off the lines and began to motor out to the Gold Coast Seaway. The predicted northerlies had not quite filled in and there was virtually no wind. The water was like glass as we glided along in the early morning hour. We ticked off the lights as we navigated our way down through the Broadwaters and finally at 0600 we exited the seaway and began the journey south.

The seas were a little lumpy from the southerly that had blown through earlier



every 30 minutes for something to do to break the monotony. However, this southerly change was more than we wanted to deal with so we turned around and ducked into Camden Haven. We had completed 228 miles in the first leg for an average of 6.7 knots. Not too shabby for the motorised start.

Camden Haven is a beautiful anchorage and we were lucky in crossing the bar as it was the fifth hour of the rising tide and very tame. We tied up to the pier in front of the local RSL, ate a quick lunch, and turned in for a nap. The plan was to have dinner at the RSL, turn in for an early evening and leave tomorrow on the rising tide if the southerly had blown itself out. Well, our crew was up and ready to leave at 1900 but we were still asleep and were loath to wake us. We actually slept all the way through the night and learned of the fabulous meal the following morning while we had breakfast.

That morning we checked out the weather on the BOM Internet site and saw that the southerly would blow itself out by noon and we would have another couple of days of northerlies. So we frittered away the morning and resumed our trek south at 1400. We passed over the bar with no problems and headed for the 100 fathom line. It was here that we

and we all were a little green for the first couple of shifts. Even our two British Shorthair cats (Lucy and Chester) were a little woozy. We had decided on four hour shifts between 0600 and 1800 and three hour shifts between 1800 and 0600. This would ensure that everyone rotated around the clock and good sleep would be had during the day.

With hardly any wind we motored for the first 10 hours but the predicted northerlies kicked in and we were sailing along at nine to 10 knots. *Zig Zag* had kicked up her skirts and was moving along nicely. It was a welcome relief not to be listening to the engines churn out the Saudia Arabian National Anthem.

The first night passage was a real treat for my wife who had no real sailing experience. Not knowing what to expect is a great worry and I remember my own first night passage as if it happened yesterday. No amount of reading can prepare you and after the second shift, you have learned more than you have ever read. Our shifts just happened to take in the sunset and sunrise and the first ones experienced on the open water were really special. I enjoyed the look in her eyes as we watched the sun descend over the

land in the far horizon. At 10 miles out it was hard to pick up the line of the land and it looked like the sun was setting on the water. The sunrise the following morning was just as special as clouds turn pink when the rising sun extinguished the grey false dawn.

After sailing for 34 hours, we got caught in a southerly change that created conditions that led to the dreaded bashing. Our passage up to this point had been flawless. The GPS and autopilot were handling the task of steering *Zig Zag* with no problems. We were reduced to taking a fixed position



were first visited by a small group of dolphins that played off the bows for almost 30 minutes. They tore from one bow to the other, leaping over each other as they tried to outdo each other's antics. You could reach over the side and almost touch them! They were absolutely comical and we were sorry to see them leave.



That evening we were treated to a show of phosphoresce plankton off the bows and the stern of the boat for several hours until the moon rose. Unfortunately we had to lock up the cat Chester because he wanted to sit on the last step of the transom and watch the show. Regardless of how many times Chester was thrown back into the saloon, his curiosity got the better of him and he immediately returned to his precarious perch on the bottom step of the transom. We were scared that he would fall off and we would never find him in the inky black waters. The humans won this contest of the wills by locking up both cats in the spare stateroom for the evening!

The following day saw us approaching Sydney. We picked up a weather

warning about an unexpected gale that was to bring winds over 100 kilometres an hour. We were ambling along at about four to five knots in light northeasterlies. After calculating our position and time to Sydney Heads, we discovered the iron spinnakers were needed to beat the approaching storm. We checked the fuel situation and had enough for the five hours it was going to take us to reach Sydney and beat the gale.

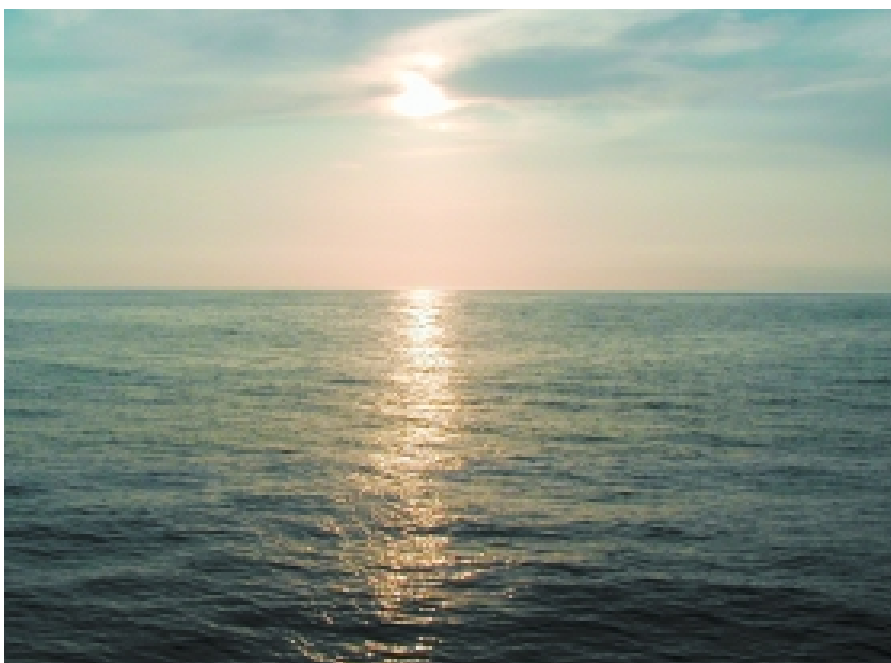
We entered through the Sydney Heads and headed directly for the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia. As we entered Rushcutters Bay, we found that there were no berths available. So we re-

fuelled and tied up at the abandoned docks that were set up for the Olympics. It was eerie because we were the only ones there - except for a million seagulls. We tied down *Zig Zag* with several extra lines and almost on cue, the gale came ripping through. We clocked 53 knots across the bows on the wind gauge. We sat around and toasted our good fortune and watched as trees were bent over and dirt and trash flew everywhere. Here we had completed 192 miles in the second leg of the trip in just 27 hours averaging 7.1 knots. A small improvement from the first leg.

The next morning we caught the weather forecast and the strong wind warnings were to abate around noon. We went ashore for a newspaper and some light provisioning and cooked up some one-pot meals for consumption along the way. By midday we were out of the heads and moving south again. The seas were a little confused but not too uncomfortable as we pushed ever southwards. The winds were light and we motor sailed into the evening. Finally about 2200 the winds picked up and we were moving along at eight to nine knots through the night and into the next day.

The following day we continued to make very good progress down the coast. The trip was uneventful and we were absorbed in reading and watching the scenery go by. I was really surprised at how few ships we saw during the trip. The count to this stage was three and these (of course) were all during the night. During the afternoon, we rounded the corner of New South Wales and after a successful gybe, were on course for Wilsons Promontory.

The Bass Strait has a reputation for changing conditions and disregarding any weather model and predictions. We were to discover how true this was in the next 30 minutes as the winds shifted northeast to southwest and increased from 15 to 25 knots. The seas boiled up



to three to four metres with a very short chop. A quick check with the local Coast Guard confirmed that these conditions would last at least for another six to eight hours. With the wind on the nose and the nasty seas, we decided that a tactical retreat back to Eden in New South Wales was in prompt order. So, we turned around and sailed two and a half hours back to Eden. We rafted up to a great big steel monohull at 1830 and decided to treat ourselves to a meal at the Fishermans Club at the top of heartbreak hill. Anyone who has been to Eden knows exactly what heartbreak hill is and for those who don't, it is an experience waiting for you. We had just completed 212 miles of the third leg of the trip in 30.5 hours averaging 6.9 knots.

The following morning we shoved off at 0600 to a quite morning, calm seas and no wind. It was Friday and the seventh day of our trip down the coast. We had seen two new ports (Camden Haven and Eden) and had sailed into Sydney Harbour (which we had seen on numerous business trips).

All of these were treats and it would have been nice to spend more time, but that was to happen on the return trip north when we were cruising. Now we had to push onwards to Westernport and finish the delivery trip.

By 1000 the winds had picked up to 20-25 knots and the swells had increased to three metres. We were surfing down the swells at 16 knots! After one particular swell, I looked over at my wife and she had a grin from ear to ear. It doesn't get much better than this!

Wilson's Promontory grew on the horizon as the day wore on and we passed the southern lighthouse and Skull Rock with the seas and wind running together just off the starboard aft. This will be our first stop on the way back north and we soaked up every sight as

we passed this beautiful World Heritage wilderness area. Then, we rounded the bottom of Wilson's Promontory and



turned for Westernport Bay. The very conditions we raved about all afternoon long turned against us as the wind and swell were on the beam. This resulted in a very uncomfortable ride that lasted into the night and finally abated about 0200. Needless to say, no one got much rest that evening.

By 0400, the wind had completely died and we were reduced to motoring. Our calculations showed that we would reach Westernport Bay just as the tide was turning on its way out. So we knew we had a long hard slog in front of us. At 0530, we went up on deck to witness the entrance to Westernport Bay. We wanted to see first hand our new home for the next couple of weeks. The very first sight and nasal sensory perception was Seal Rocks. A truly horrid and wretched smell floated off that island. There is a

thriving colony of seals and fairy penguins and the entire area is off limits to humans. You couldn't pay me to go anywhere near there with that stench.

Just as we lined up on the markers to head up the channel, the wind kicked up right on our nose. So we got to fight both tide and wind and progress by the GPS revealed 2.5 knots. We had to struggle all the way there in these lovely conditions. We could see the marina at Hastings through the binoculars and it was frustrating moving along at a snail's pace to the finish line.

We finally reached the marina and called in to announce our arrival. I had called the marina in early January to secure a berth and we were a day ahead of the date range I had given them. The marina graciously accepted us and Gary, the manager, came out in a runabout to guide us into the berth and catch our lines. What service!

By 0845 we had *Zig Zag* tied up and secure in her new berth. The final leg of the delivery was complete with

255 miles in 26.75 hours averaging 9.5 knots. This was to be our best effort for the entire trip and we had to motor the last 2-3 hours into the wind and fighting the tide! We were knackered and hungry! After getting checked in, we settled down to a great cooked breakfast at the marina cafe and followed this with a six hour nap.

We learned a lot about our new boat on this trip south. *Zig Zag* now has 900 miles under her belt and her owners are more confident of her abilities and their own. We can now focus on wrapping up our affairs and preparing for the cruise up north. What we didn't know at that time was that our estimate of two weeks to wrap up our business would stretch into two months and that our greatest challenges were on the horizon. But that is another story for another day. ❖