

EXCESS BAGGAGE A LABOUR OF LOVE

On Boxing Day 2018, the 74th Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race launched from Sydney Harbour, finishing 628 gruelling nautical miles later at Sullivans Cove in Tasmania. Behind the scenes, Rotarians were hard at work shouldering a behind the scenes part of the race they have handled for the past 25 years.



QUARTERS are tight on board yachts, with room for just a small number of essential items. The excess baggage of 85 yachts and hundreds of crew members must take a different path.

Rotarians took on the responsibility of transporting this huge volume of luggage after president of the Rotary Club of Glenorchy, Tas, Haydyn Nielsen got chatting with race director of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race Robert "Biddy" Badenach many years ago.

"He asked me if our Rotary club could help them out with the baggage handling. This was in July 1993, so I put it to the club and the rest is history," Haydyn said.

Every year, luggage is loaded onto a container in Sydney and brought by road and ferry to Hobart. Items have included everything from spare sails to giant teddy bears (every year a crew brings a teddy for donation to children's causes in Hobart).

Unloading the container is a major job, with around 20 Rotarians, family and friends putting in a mammoth effort last year to unpack in just over an hour. John Ratcliffe OAM, a local carrier, has provided a complimentary forklift the past six years, which is operated by the son of a Rotarian. The

luggage is then sorted alphabetically into personal bags, sails and other equipment required for the return sail to Sydney.

Club member Jenny Briggs and her husband Ken have organised the roster of volunteers for eight years and are on standby 24 hours in case a yacht comes in during the night. Sometimes three and four yachts arrive at the same time, with up to 30 crew suddenly pouring through the door to collect their luggage.

All manner of improvised transport has been used to cart the luggage around, including shopping trolleys, wheelbarrows and one of the Rotarian's utes for the heavy items – some sails weigh as much as 200kg. Obtaining a suitable facility can be a problem, as it needs to be large and close to the Hobart docks. The Rotary club has several distribution sites, including The Naval Depot, City Hall and Macquarie 1 and 2.

The project takes about four to five days to complete, with the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia providing the Rotary Club of Glenorchy with a donation in gratitude for their efforts, which is used towards community support.





“The yachties really appreciate the service Rotary offers and it is always enjoyable to meet sailors from all over the world,” member Mike Quinn said. “They are only too eager to tell tales of the trip down the east coast of Australia, even the ones that didn’t make it due to mishaps.

“There has even been Rotarians from Australia, America and other countries who have sailed in the Sydney to Hobart. One American, when he realised we were Rotarians, proceeded to recite the whole of the Rotary Pledge.”

This year will mark the 75th year of the race, with a huge fleet of up to 150 yachts expected. Hobart will be packed out with crews and their family and friends, as well as visitors, locals and one or two cruise ships. The club is already in planning mode, seeking out facilities able to cope with the influx of items they will have to handle.

Yet the challenge is one the club members always look forward to.

“It’s a memorable experience and a great opportunity for hands-on community service alongside Rotarians, friends and family,” Mike said. ●



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The 75th Rolex Sydney Hobart will take place in 2019. It has run each and every year since 1945 (Photo: ©Rolex/ Studio Borlenghi); Ken and Jenny Briggs OAM, who arrange all the details for the luggage transportation; A ute came in handy for moving luggage during the 2008 race; Scott Walker on the fork lift during the 2018 race; The 2018 unloading crew; The crowd on Constitution Dock, Hobart, welcoming the yachts as they arrive; Rotarians Rishi Acharya, Peter Floyd, club president Haydyn Nielsen and treasurer Rosie Marine; Past presidents Cheryle Osborne and Arnold Markham moving a mainsail ready for pick up; A race within a race – crew of *St. Jude* with the trophy competed for by some of the yachts.

