

Tasman Race Was Battle With Storms And Calms



The crew of the Auckland cutter Leda were all smiles yesterday as their craft bowled into Sydney Harbour. C. S. Wilson, co-skipper, is seated at left and his wife is third from left. Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Wilson are on the extreme right. Third from right is the navigator, Terry Hammond.

THE nine of us who crewed the 54ft yacht, Leda, from the New Zealand port of Tauranga will never forget yesterday's experience of sailing into Sydney Harbour ahead of the nine trans-Tasman racers.

Yesterday was the culmination of nearly 12 days of almost constant sail changing, lack of sleep, and anxious moments.

But none of us yesterday would have changed places with anybody. It may not be everybody's idea of sport, but for us it's just the life.

That life meant:—

- Leaving the fleet out of sight for the first 24 hours, then watching them all catch up as Leda lay becalmed off North Cape.

- Seeing the same thing happen again half-way across the Tasman, while we all whistled for wind.

- No fresh bread for 10 days.
- Never having more than four hours' sleep at a time.

- Being cooped up in 250 square feet of space for nearly a fortnight.

By
W. A. WILSON,
co-skipper of the
cutter Leda

- Not being able to have a bath.
- Changing into wet clothes at a.m. during storms.
- Driving through two blows in mid-Tasman.

This crew was not only the first to sail a New Zealand trans-Tasman racer first across the finishing line, but it was also the first ever to include women—wives of the owner-skipper.

Ask the crew what they think of having women cooks aboard.

They'll say: "It's fine to have anybody who'll do the cooking."

Kit and Erica Wilson didn't just cook all the meals, supply hot soups and tea for the night watches and keep the ship spick and span—quite a job, as any yachtsman will tell you. But they spent their spare time stitching sails—light spinnakers chafed and torn during windless, slatting hours in mid-Tasman.

They strapped themselves to the galley during the storms, got bruised black and blue, but still jumped to it when anybody suggested a cup of tea.

In Auckland, people were sceptical about women aboard ocean racers, but Leda's crew gives its two girls top marks.

They also give top marks to the Leda. Not only did she bring them home first but she also gave them the feeling that in any sort of weather she was absolutely safe, and also fast.

In light weather she could do no more than hold her own with the smaller boats—no one could ask any more. But when the wind blew, we felt we had a boat which would do everything we asked. And she did.

Head winds suited Leda. She had them only for three days, but she made the most of them.

But luck and the right wind are only half the story. The boat must be pointing in the right direction.

Without navigator Terry Hammond and a crew of first-class sailing men—brothers Frank and Harry Gray, Arthur Wratten, and Keith Coleman—all Leda's potential ability would have gone for nothing. They did everything asked of them, and more. And they liked doing it.

Exuberant Terry Hammond, never rattled whatever the emergency, possibly did more than anyone else to bring Leda first across the line. He navigated dead on Sydney Heads with consummate skill, worked the radio to such effect that tin-openers appeared from the sky and weather reports came from near and far.

Also, he kept in touch with the other three boats equipped with radio, overcame all the technical hitches involved in running such a set-up under such conditions, and still had time to help out on deck in an emergency. He was a tower of strength.

My brother and I have spent the last 12 years planning, saving for, and building Leda, rivet and plank.