

Never Again Sails in the Melbourne to Geelong Passage Race.

The biggest sailing event on the Victorian racing calendar, Audi Victoria Race Week was held between the 22nd and the 26th of January. Never Again an Elliott 7.4 was entered this year after her skipper and crew did the passage race as crew on two other boats last year. We entered the 'Cruising With Spinnakers' division rather than the 'Trailable' division as we were keen to do the passage race as the main event and the trailables do not do the passage race as part of their series, as such we were one of only 3 trailable boats in the division with the others being a second Elliott 7.4 and an Elliott 7.8.

The 9:30am starting gun for the Melbourne to Geelong Passage Race meant an early rise to get down to St Kilda for rigging and launching, once we got under way we motored the 1.5 miles to the starting area arriving only 15 minutes before the gun adding to a fleet numbering in the hundreds. Sails were hoisted and we spent the remaining time on the clock maintaining a very careful watch to keep clear of the many other boats. The starters gun went off in due course with us close to the line (or so we thought as the committee boat and the pin which must have been a mile apart, were both obscured by the fleet) yet in the light conditions and the turbulent air from so many taller rigs around us it took us a further 8 minutes to cross the line.

Once we were officially racing we headed for our first mark off Sandringham some 4 miles ahead, it was some time before we could get in to some clear air as the fleet stretched out ahead and astern of us. Once we found some air and our groove in the light conditions we set about chasing down some of the larger and heavier boats. The rest of the leg to Sandringham was sailed in light and trying conditions but after some time the breeze went off the beam and we were able to hoist a kite in an attempt to catch the zephyrs as they passed. Finally we reached the Sandringham mark at around

11:50pm as the breeze filled to 8-10 knots.

We held the kite around the mark and shy on to the next leg but could not sail to our course so we hoisted the headsail once more and dropped the spinnaker. Our next mark of the course was on the other side of the bay at the entrance to the Point Richards Channel some 16 miles away. We sailed along averaging 5 knots for the next hour and a half overhauling several boats in that time, much to our delight as one of the smallest entrants. For the following 2 hours though the winds once again became light and variable and we were slowed and eventually becalmed.

Slow progress was made averaging less than 2 knots for well over an hour and a half as we started to hear some boats withdrawing over the radio at around 4:00pm, the first triggering several to follow. By this time we had covered 18 miles of the 36 in 6 and a half hours and with 18 miles to go and 4 and a half hours to sunset and the end of the race, a result was looking unlikely. It was agreed that we wanted to be in Geelong by 9:00pm (just on dark) be it under motor or sail and given we had 3 hours of motoring time from where we were, it was decided that we still had 2 hours up our sleeve before we had to withdraw. As it happened not more than 15 minutes after the first withdrawal the long awaited breeze arrived with vigor, a fresh southerly picked us up from drifting pace to 6 and a half knots before we could get crew on the rail.

The weary skipper and crew sailed with new enthusiasm in to the channel on a close reach. The course now narrowed in to the channel bringing the fleet together once more and we enjoyed close racing with many others in the fleet. The breeze held up and we managed to finish the second 18 miles in just over 3 hours compared to the 6 and a half hours spent on the first 18 miles. The last leg of the channel had us close hauled with one tack to complete the last 400 meters to the

finish line. We finally crossed the line at 7:09pm, an elapsed time of 9 hours 39 minutes with still over an hour before sunset.

Of the 46 strong division we crossed the line 15th with a handicapped result of 32nd.

Racing continued over the rest of the weekend and through to Australia day however with work commitments from some of the crew preventing sailing on the Monday and Tuesday we decided to finish the regatta in the bar that evening followed by a leisurely sail back to St Kilda on Sunday.

**Gary Sawyer
Never Again**