



... battered Berrimilla skipper Alex Whitworth in Hobart. Photograph by SAM ROSEWARNE

## Rain, gale or shiner, this little boat reached home

By ANDREW DARBY  
in Hobart

A week ago, back in the 1990s, the Sydney to Hobart winning yachts screamed to a halt after a record passage.

About the same time, the doughty crew on Berrimilla were up in eastern Bass Strait, preparing to take a beating.

Late on Sunday night, they finally reached Hobart. Berrimilla was almost six days behind line honours winner Nokia, and last of the 49 official finishers.

The yacht stood undamaged. One crewman gingerly lowered himself onto a bruised coccyx. But it was skipper Alex Whitworth's twin shiners and badly cut cheek that told of the trials of their race.

Not once, not even after that injury, did they seriously contemplate retirement.

"It's a silly old cliché," said the ex-Royal Navy man, now a Sydney risk assessor. "But you do what you've got to do."

Whitworth was injured "on the second evening, or was it the third? It's a bit of a blur."

He was trying to set a storm jib, but his grip relaxed just as a green wall came over the bow, smashing his head into the forestay.

"You should have seen him when he came back into the cockpit," helmsman Peter Crosier said. "There was blood everywhere."

For four solid days, Berrimilla sailed into the southerly gales off Tasmania's north-east that changed this year's race from a speed trial for the leaders into an endurance test for the bulk of the fleet. While 30 yachts retired, the little 10-metre Joubert design plugged on, often no faster than one knot. Its GPS-monitored trail showed it zig-zagging next to Bass Strait islands, but never quite pushed back.

That was different from the second-last finisher, Breakaway, from Sandringham, Victoria, which also came in on Sunday night. After being knocked flat twice, then sliding backwards down a third mountainous wave, its crew decided to "lay a-hull".

Skipper Martin Power said Breakaway bobbed along like a cork while they were below with

the helm lashed and all sails down.

"Why do you keep going?" Power said. "Well, it's the Sydney-Hobart isn't it? You never give up."

Aboard Berrimilla, they eventually called on the bare protection of Skeleton Bay, near St Helens, on Tasmania's east coast, after the electrics became soaked. The crew anchored and dried out on New Year's Eve, watching local fireworks with a large bottle of overproof rum. Then they set sail again for Hobart, where they arrived after seven days, 10 hours and six minutes' racing.

Whitworth, who sailed Berrimilla to a divisional win in the previous year's tragic race, was emphatic no discredit should go to those aboard other yachts who did retire.

"Everybody makes their own decision," he said. "I have pulled out of other races. In this one, our boat came through undamaged." But what about his own injury, wouldn't that deter him? He replied shortly: "Why would it?"