



# the 61 hour dash home

WADE BISHOP and CHRIS DANGER are the proud owners of *Take It Easy*, the first Easy 11.6 (38 ft) catamaran designed and built by Peter and Ann Snell. They purchased *Take It Easy* in May 2011 in Pittwater and after a few months of 'visiting' their cat in from Melbourne, were itching to bring it down south, to its new home port of Paynesville in the beautiful Gippsland Lakes. What was planned as a two weeks delivery cruise, ended up being a 61 hour dash home.

**F**riday 12 August 2011-- The 'Delivery' team is assembled on *Take It Easy*, consisting of Wade and Chris (skipper and first mate), Sue our dear friend from Sydney, and Murray, Wade's brother. We are moored at Barrenjoey Head, just inside the entrance to Broken Bay, the lighthouse towering over us.

The night has fallen. We are sitting in the cabin comfortably, sipping our celebratory G&T, mood music playing, boat gently swaying. We are ready and it is a gorgeous feeling of peace, yet anticipation. We are each in our

thoughts, imagining the days ahead. Will we be able to go tomorrow? How much motoring will we have to do? How quick will this cat of ours be? How will it compare to our previous cat, *Medina*, a 29ft Jarcat? Will we get seasick? Will we be okay during the night watches? So many questions, but it's exciting. Our adventure has begun.

Looking at the weather forecast, we will have a couple of days of motoring into light southerlies, but then north easterlies are expected for two or three days, ahead of a strong change. Our aim is therefore to reach Eden as quickly as



**Brief stop at Bermagui, rafted up to the fishing boats.**

possible, to be in a position to ride the northerlies home. If things go as planned, we will be in the Lakes much sooner than originally expected!

On Saturday, it's a sunny, crisp morning. We are ready to slip the mooring at 7am, and leave the shelter of Broken Bay. Escorted by two trimarans, we round Barrenjoey Head and we are out in the ocean. What a buzz! Amazingly, the breeze is coming from the land, and although we are motoring, the sails are up, and we can point. So we stop the engines. I love that moment when it all becomes quiet, but for the sound of the

wind in the sails and the water lapping at the hulls, and the boat speeds away. We are doing 8.8kts/hr in 10-12kts of breeze. Woo ooh! There are white caps, we have spotted albatrosses already. We have just gone past Sydney Heads. And this was supposed to be a day of motoring. We are 'flying' effortlessly, smoothly. For the first time, we get a glimpse of *Take It Easy*'s capability. It is great because it feels 'easy' and because these sailing conditions were unexpected.

For most of the morning, the breeze stays in our favour. It is interesting following the coast: the sheer cliffs, the million dollar properties, the outline of the city in the background. For a brief moment, we even see the harbour bridge arched over the cliffs. Sue sees her home town from a new angle!

We take turns at the wheel, enjoying the conditions and marvelling at the smoothness of our cat, its speed and ease of handling. By lunch time though, we have to turn an engine on as the land breeze has disappeared and what little wind we have is on our nose. Still, with only one engine on to save on fuel, it is not too noisy. We pass Botany Bay, Port Hacking, Cronulla, Stanwell Park, then Wollongong.

With the drone of the motor, the sunshine in the cockpit, a nice little lunch in our bellies, we all feel a bit drowsy and some of us have a little nap whilst George the autopilot is in charge. By about 3pm we are motor-sailing past Port Kembla. There are quite a number of tankers across our way, so it pays to be alert. We are thinking: "These tankers are awfully slow. They are taking forever to get out of our way". Normally they appear on the horizon, and within 10 minutes they are on top of you.

We keep watching them, until I notice a chain at the bow of one of them ... On closer inspection, the seven of them are in fact stationary, all of them sitting on anchor! That would explain! We won't try to pass at the stern of the last one, we will just motor through the middle of them all! Mind you, one of them was not very happy seeing us so close to him. He honked, and honked in reproach! Okay, okay, we are pedalling as fast as we can!

As the night falls, we rug up and have dinner. We are very lucky, as Sue

# press release



Wade snoozing, but ready for action! (above)

Going past Sydney Heads. (right)



prepared three meals in advance, so we don't have to slave in the galley during the early part of the trip. Then, it's time to get organised for the watches. Everyone is prepared to stand a watch, knowing that if help is needed, we can call on Wade. We have decided that two hour watches is best. Sue is keen to stay up till midnight, whereas Murray is used to going to bed super early. So we send him off to bed at 8pm. Wade is on watch at 8pm officially, Sue at 10pm, me at midnight, Murray at 2am. Then it's back to Wade at 4am. After that, it's daylight and it's whoever happens to be up. Mind you, Wade stays up most of the night, only catching little kips of half an hour here or there, to make sure everyone is okay.

Night watches are a little daunting, especially the first time you do it. It is quite an experience. It is you, on your lonesome, on this little boat in the middle

of the big ocean. You are in charge, and although you know you can call for help, you hope you won't need to. It is a personal challenge. It is you and your thoughts and this immense seascape. It is cold, the ocean is ink black, and tonight the sky is clear, with the Southern Cross high in the sky, and a beautiful full moon. The moonlight shimmers over the ocean, sending a beam of soft silvery light over the water, right down to the boat. It is quite a serene seascape and a very special feeling.

Although the night starts well, by 2am conditions strengthen significantly, which was unexpected. With 20kts of breeze on the nose and a confused sea, poor *Take It Easy* is taking a beating. The wind is whistling, there is lots of slamming in the short chop, the engines cavitate frequently, the thumping under the hulls is loud; it is worrying. It is hard to sleep for

the ones off watch, and not exactly comfortable for the 'designated driver' who happens to be Murray. I struggle with nausea, doing frequent dashes to the loo.

Part way through Murray's watch, I get up a few times to look at the sea state and end up waking Wade up to suggest we need to alter course. "I don't think we should persevere in this heading. These are great conditions to break things". He agrees and we head closer to the shore, intending to pull in at Broulie or hide behind the Tollgate Islands at the entrance to Bateman's Bay if needed. But things eventually improve with quieter seas closer to the land, so we keep going.

By early Sunday morning, the wind has died down and the sea is much flatter, making the ride a lot smoother. We are still motoring though, as it is on our nose



as forecast. We keep ourselves amused as the hours pass: bird watching, reading, steering, snoozing, snacking, day dreaming ...

By about 2pm we are level with Narooma. It's time to ring Nipper, a friend of ours who lives there and was hoping to catch a ride from Bermagui to Eden.

He is going to miss out, as Wade is keen to keep moving rather than pull into a couple of ports.

We will stop in Bermagui briefly to top up the fuel, but won't stay overnight. It would have been nice to stop properly and have a rest. But the northerly is supposed to come in tonight and blow for a couple of days ... just what we need to get back to the lakes. So we reluctantly accept that we need to keep going.

It's around 4pm by the time we reach Bermagui. We raft up to a couple of fishing boats. Nipper comes to say hello, checks out *Take It Easy*, and takes Wade to the petrol station to fill up two or three jerricans. I feel a little sad that we can't even share a meal with him, but Wade is adamant we need to keep moving. We do manage to sneak in a warm shower at the Fisho's Coop – well, all except Mr Smelly Pants Wade, who is far too intent on getting going again and keeps hurrying us crew along ... I can tell when my man is keyed up: short dishing out of

orders, impatient tone of voice... We leave Bermagui by 5pm. It is dark by 5.30 and thus starts the long night.

We fall into our watch routine easily, deciding over dinner that last night's roster worked well. It is a calm night, perfect for motoring, which makes the watches a bit easier ... just the mainsail to worry about, sometimes not even that. So there is no sail trimming, we just need to look out for ship lights and keep an eye on the GPS. It is a cold night though: clear skies, milky way and full moon again, very chilly in the cockpit. So we stand our watch in full wet weather gear, then it's back to bed for a sleep ... except for Wade who, whilst off duty, sleeps on the couch, all dressed up, ready for action.

It is easy to tell we are going past Green Cape in the early hours of the morning during Murray's watch ... the motion of the boat changes, the wind picks up and the sea feels choppier. But it settles again once we have rounded the cape. In fact Murray and Wade set

sails and turn the motor off! We are now officially in Bass Strait.

At 6am, it is time to relieve the captain at the wheel. I am awake, so I get up and get dressed. Quick hug in the cockpit, brief handover, then 'I have the ship'. I absolutely love the dawns at sea. The light is soft, with pale blue haze on the horizon, and pink clouds.

We are passing Gabo Island. At last I see this landmark of weather forecasts by daylight. It's a low lying strip of land with a lighthouse at one end. It looks desolate. Behind it are the tall hills of Genoa Peak, Mt Howe and Mt Carlisle. There is mist rising from the ocean to a third of the way up the hills, which makes them appear like they are floating. The ultramarine ocean is calm, with just enough swell to gently lift *Take It Easy* up and down at the rhythm of a calm breath. There are lots of albatrosses coasting up and around the swell lines. It really is breathtakingly beautiful.

**We are in at Flagstaff jetty, Gippsland Lakes!**

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Murray wakes up from the saloon couch and joins me, and we enjoy the spectacle together: the big full moon, the albatrosses, the dolphins. In fact we can't resist going up to the nets to watch them frolic between our hulls. They are small but are fun to watch weaving in and out between the hulls and cavorting at our bow.

The rest of the crew surfaces ... By 8.30am it's bacon and eggs in the sunny cabin, courtesy of Murray. Now that's what we all signed up for! With the sun out, the day warms up. We are all in good spirit. Nobody is feeling sick, we know we are going to fulfil our mission. The last bit of tension will be the crossing of the bar at Lakes Entrance. And as Peter Dunn says in his SMS to me: "Don't take your eyes off the ball – not until you are in. Cross the bar, then celebrate". Yes Mr Coastguard! Our GPS track shows we will get there tonight between 7pm and 10pm, depending on

our speed. We check the tide charts. The tide will be flooding in – perfect!

The conditions are such that we can comfortably walk around the deck and sit at the nets. Seals, dolphins appear from time to time. We see a few different birds, some petrels, some shearwaters, a few terns and albatrosses. One big bird catches our attention: very large wings, albatross like in size and flight, but a dark chocolate colour and a black beak. We consult the bird book. It is a Great Winged Petrel – a new sighting for Sue and me. Later, we see another striking dark and huge albatross like bird flying powerfully across our stern. This time we can see a big orangey-yellow beak. Again we check the bird book. It is a Southern Giant Petrel, nearly two metres wing span, a Hercules! This is another new sighting for us – very exciting!

Everyone is relaxed, enjoying the day. At lunch time, we are savouring left over stew on toast, sitting in the saloon like royalty, surveying our watery surroundings ... Someone comments: "We haven't seen a boat for the whole day... and we did not see any during the night either!" Sue, Guinness in hand, 'bugger the antibiotics' – pipes up. "I thought I saw a ship last night, in fact a very big one, all lit up like a Christmas tree – but as we got



closer I could not see any green or red navigation lights, and started wondering what it was... She explains that by that stage, Wade had got up to check the situation. "Have a look, I am not sure whether it's a ship. I think it could be a town". Wade checks it out. "Yes... that's a town, a big town. It's Eden ... Well done, you haven't crashed us into it!"

By mid-afternoon, there is not a breath of wind. The ocean has turned into a millpond, flat as a tack. We can't even claim to be motor sailing: we are just plain motoring. *Take It Easy* the motor boat, that's what we are. The sun has gone away too and the temperature has dropped, so much so that Sue decides to go reading in bed to keep warm, I hide under a granny rug on the saloon seat, also reading, Wade snoozes on the opposite side, only Murray is out in the cockpit watching the horizon. Oh no, we are in the doldrums! With no help from the sails, we start the second engine to pick up our speed.

A few hours later, it is 7pm. The countdown has started. We are an hour out of the entrance. Anticipation builds. We keep ourselves occupied for a while, then the waiting is too much and we all done the wet weather gear and sea

**Gabo at dawn.**



boots to keep warm and get out in the cockpit, standing on the back bench to see over the cockpit roof. We are ready for the infamous bar crossing. Flat bar, flooding tide, bright blue leads lined up, rock walls hardly visible in the sea mist, Wade at the tiller, me checking the instruments and our run line.

We are in at 8pm and tied up at Flagstaff on our lonesome by 8.10pm. Mission accomplished! And yes Murray, we did know what we were doing coming in there, even if those lights did not make

much sense to you. Cheeky bugger! Always good to know the captain and his first mate are trusted!

It has been such a build-up since buying *Take It Easy*: the planning, the anticipation, the preparation, the waiting, the wondering whether the weather would cooperate. So it is nearly a shock to have completed this 366nm trip in 61 hours, in one big stretch. It is an odd feeling of relief, disbelief, and achievement.