

Richards (standing) on *Wild Oats XI* at the 2018 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race



MARK RICHARDS

On the art of balancing sail and power

Racing sailors and cruising powerboaters can be as divided as Democrats and Republicans. But Mark Richards is truly bipartisan in his approach to boating. The CEO of Grand Banks Yachts Ltd. (parent company of Grand Banks and Palm Beach Motor Yachts) recently took line honors in the 2018 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race at the helm of the super maxi *Wild Oats XI*. It is his ninth win, making him the most successful skipper in the history of the race. His sailing resumé includes two America's Cup campaigns—he was aboard the International America's Cup Class contender *oneAustralia* when it broke apart and sank off San Diego in 1995. That same year he founded Palm Beach Motor Yachts in New South Wales, Australia, where he grew up.

First boating experience: My mother always says the very first toy I picked up when I was a baby was a boat. I was actually an adopted kid. My parents were English. They weren't into boating at all, but they lived in an area close to the water, and I started sailing at the age of 6 with one of our neighbors. That was how it all started.

First boat ever built: I built a lot of little boats when I was young, sailing dinghies. I've been building boats since I was about 13—small 12-footers and stuff like that, using cold-molded plywood. It was a lot of fun.

Your dream boat: We've got a new Palm Beach 70, with the same warped hull as the other models. The first one has four staterooms and Volvo Penta IPS1350s, which will offer a top speed of 40 knots. The boat has fully infused carbon-fiber decks; it's almost America's Cup level in construction. It's very light, but very strong and efficient. It will use half the fuel of any other 70-footer on the planet.

Sailboat racer vs. cruiser? There's only one way to cruise. I love racing in sailing yachts, but I love cruising in powerboats.

Favorite nautical book: I'm a Clive Cussler fan.

On balancing work and racing: I've been running a business and racing boats for my whole life, so balancing the two is nothing really new for me. As it is with business, when racing you're only as good as the people around you. We have an amazing group running *Wild Oats*, the shore team and the boat manager. They all do a fantastic job. I'm pretty lucky—I can just sort of step on and go.

Scariest boating adventure: Probably the Sydney Hobart, because we get pretty extreme weather in December. We've been in 60- to 70-foot seas in the past. The seas don't worry me. It's when you're surrounded by thunderstorms and lightning, and you're the only thing on the ocean at the time. You feel pretty vulnerable when you've got lightning striking the water a few yards away. It can be pretty freaky.

Most memorable boating experience: Winning the Sydney Hobart was amazing. The cool thing about the Hobart is that a lot of people worldwide watch it. In 2017, they clocked about 15 million viewers on the website. It's a lot of pressure and a lot of adrenaline, but I'll tell you, it's the most amazing feeling when you leave Sydney Harbour with all those thousands of spectator boats watching and following. And it's a really cool feeling to be out on the ocean in front of those incredible machines and heading 628 nautical miles south. Pretty awesome.

Last word on boats and boating: I'm the most comfortable when I'm at sea. That's just me. —*Louisa Rudeen Beckett*



In one of the closest finishes in the history of the Sydney Hobart Race, *Wild Oats XI* (center) took line honors, with Mark Richards at the helm (see page 50).