

# Murphy was a realist

**By Barry Colson**

***Recently I had the pleasure of racing out of Morton Bay Boat Club with some really enthusiastic sailors.***

A crew's performance is always more cohesive when the individuals are keen optimists and never give up but when it comes to the mechanics and gear aboard, "Murphy's Law" is best applied – if it can go wrong it will go wrong!

The simpler the set-up the less chance of a foul-up. This lesson is currently proving itself in the single-handed, round-the-world race – the toughest test there is. These yachts are extreme and innovative.

Two schools of thought prevailed before the race. There were those who went all-out technologically with rotating wing mast complete with deck spreaders, canting keels, lifting asymmetrical boards forward etc.

For others the emphasis was on simplicity, lightness and reliability and – guess what? – the K.I.S.S. theory (keep it simple stupid) is prevailing, at least so far.

Mike Golding on Team Group 4 stated, "It's clear I have good speed. My biggest concern is gear failure."

It set the scene for what followed. Halyard chafe was solved by changing blocks and tangs on his rotating spar popped off but he nearly lost the lot when he dumped his spinnaker in the sea, the chute filled and rotated the boat around one of the mast's deck spreaders – but it held.

Sebastian Reidl, sailing an aluminium Una-rigged schooner *Project Amazon*, was forced to retire as his keel-located fuel tank had water infiltration and with the tank integral to the boat's structure, there was no easy fix. Mike Garside on *Magellan Alpha*, a new Finot 50, was not happy when his hydraulic ram controlling the canting keel sprung a leak and lost enough oil to lose control of his keel. Too much air and not enough oil left it hanging to leeward and him sailing on his ear.

Interestingly, those who applied the K.I.S.S. principle (fixed keel, rig and reliable gear) were (at the time of writing) well vindicated on leg one. It would appear the race will be won and lost on limiting gear failure and weather routing.

Cray Valley – using the K.I.S.S. principle – was invariably faster than the more complicated *Magellan Alpha*. Sailing upwind in very light conditions there was no difference as the swing keel was not canted (on *Magellan*) and the water ballast (on *Cray Valley*) was not taken on.

Once they began to heel that all changed. The water-ballasted boat takes on water to increase righting movement and so also increase weight. The keel remains central and propeller drag is unaltered.

The swing keel yacht cants its keel and becomes asymmetric underwater to such a degree it needs forward dagger boards to make it sail straight. This increases underwater drag substantially. When close hauled it is clear the swing keelboats lose lift and the dagger boards do not fully compensate for this. Add to this the fact the "swing keelers" lack the additional "power" of water ballast and you can see why they make considerably more leeway than the fixed keel, water-ballasted rivals.

Mike Garside sailing *Magellan Alpha* concluded that "the swing keel concept was basically flawed in upwind conditions". It should be said that the swing keels should prove superior in reaching conditions. However, I believe this race is often won or lost in light upwind conditions.

Leaving aside the questions of fixed versus swing keel, any slight deficiency is further exasperated by gear failure and complications.

Canting a keel, deploying dagger boards and rotating a mast single handedly all while charging along at 28 knots (boat speed) takes some organising and when things go wrong at this speed your are in serious trouble. Basic tasks such as eating and sleeping become impossible.

Previously I have expounded the virtues of these technological yachts but am forced to reassess my previous beliefs. At the end of the day these boats are still sailed by people and there is absolutely no point in creating a vehicle that is beyond the ability of even the most experienced crew to sail at 100 per cent.

It would appear that this (as well as budget restrictions) has resulted in the increase in the number of 50-foot entries in preference to the 60s as the crew can drive the yachts at closer to their full potential for longer and the physical demands are less.

There are lessons for us all to learn from these boats – most of us like to have things to tweak, adjust and generally play with but at the end of the day, the K.I.S.S. principle wins out. If you lay out your yacht and prepare her with Murphy's Law in mind, you will sail more comfortably with a lot lower stress level.

**BQ**

## ***TOWING TECHNIQUES***

*After watching an outboard careering out of control down the face of a stern wave on the end of a towline, writes Noel Stanaway, knowledge of the safest procedures won't go astray.*

When towing outboard or stern drive vessels, keep the leg in the down position, and steer the boat as if it was under its own power. Crew should be kept amidships on small vessels.

The towing vessel should rig a bridle between its towing eyes, and fasten the tow line around the bridle with a bowline which can slide along the bridle for easy steering. The vessel being towed should rest on the back of the second wave astern of the towing vessel.

**BQ**