

# We are sailing

The start of this prestigious racing event in Hong Kong harbour is a spectacle that is hard to beat



Some people are born with salt water running through their veins and, as soon as they are able, they go to sea. Others discover sailing by happy circumstance: they get invited aboard someone's boat, and thus begins a lifelong love affair. Either way, serious yachtsmen and women will say: "Once a sailor, always a sailor."

For such folk, Hong Kong is a haven. The yachties' home waters are some of the most scenic in Asia, while facilities, such as the excellent Aberdeen Marina Club, provide world-class marine services and a complete family-friendly social environment.

For serious blue-water sailors, Hong Kong also offers an exciting, stellar racing calendar. One of the most prestigious offshore events is the Rolex China Sea Race, held once in two years, in April, and attracting entrants of the highest international calibre.

The first 565 nautical mile race from Hong Kong Harbour to Subic Bay in the Philippines took place over Easter in 1962.

Five yachts braved the crossing that year – three from the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, one from Manila, and one from Japan.

The race evolved from a cruise to Manila undertaken by Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club member Sim Baldwin, using his yacht Morasum, a 40-foot yawl by Sparkman and Stephens, modelled on Carlton Mitchell's famous yacht Finisterre. Baldwin was keen to test Morasum's sea-worthiness. His adventure became a topic of conversation at the club, and members suggested the cruise should be repeated, but this time as a race, with a fleet of vessels.

Sim's crossing took eight days. The first race that followed was completed in six, and now the journey can be accomplished in as little as three days. Yachts in those days did not carry radios. Hector Ross, the winning skipper in the inaugural race, steering his Reverie, had no idea he had arrived in first place until he crossed the finish line.

Today's competitive yachts are high-

Hi Fi, Line Honours Winner of the 2008 Rolex China Sea Race ... for serious blue-water sailors, Hong Kong offers an exciting, stellar racing calendar.

2008年「勞力士中國海帆船賽」中首名衝線的Hi Fi……香港每年舉行的大型國際航海賽事，都是航海迷熱切期待的盛事。





tech racing machines, built for speed from strong but lightweight materials, such as carbon fibre. They have bigger and more powerful rigs (sails), and advanced electronic equipment.

While the skippers of today might cross oceans more swiftly and in greater comfort than ever before, they still face the same challenges. Peter Churchouse, owner of Moonblue 2, says the Rolex China Sea Race is a more challenging race than even the notorious Sydney-Hobart race, or the UK's Fastnet.

The South China Sea takes yachts much further away from land, he explains. Typically, the race begins with 20 to 30 knots of beam-on breeze. The seas off Hong Kong tend to be lumpy and unpredictable, testing even the most experienced of skippers and crew. The first night is always the hardest.

As the yachts approach the shores of the Philippines, the skippers indulge in a cat-and-mouse game of tactics as they pace their yachts under a clear blue sky. Here the seas are calmer, and crew members cast off their wet-weather gear to cross the finish line in brilliant sunshine.

Moonblue 2 is a New Zealand-built, custom-designed Warwick 64-footer. The 10-member crew enjoys an outstanding level of comfort. Moonblue 2 boasts such extras as air-conditioning, a business centre, a captain's bar and a gourmet galley, complete with wine refrigerator and ice maker. One of the many tough decisions the skipper must face is "choosing a nice Bordeaux to have with dinner."

There are no such luxuries on board Hi Fi, Line Honours Winner of the 2008 Rolex China Sea Race. Owner Neil Pryde had the Hugh Wellbourn-designed 53-footer built in the UK as a one-off, fast racing yacht, and it has served him well. Hi Fi was the top boat in Asia in the 2008/2009 season, and so far this season she has won the two "big ones": the Raja Muda Selangor International Regatta, in Malaysia, and the Phuket King's Cup, in Thailand.

Hi Fi's inside is stripped for speed, the vessel is empty save for a two-burner stove, a couple of rudimentary bunks, and a toilet. The skipper and his crew of "hired guns" (professional racing yachtsmen) don't mind – they are there to win.

The race was officially recognised by the Royal Ocean Racing Club in 1972, and has grown steadily over the years, drawing members of the international yachting fraternity to Hong Kong.

Rick Strompf, chairman of the Rolex China Sea Race, says the start of the competition in Hong Kong harbour is a spectacle that is hard to beat.

"Starting downtown, in the middle of a city, is thrilling for both the crews and the spectators," Rick says. "This race brings yachting people from all over the world to enjoy the best of our beautiful harbour."

So why do men put their lives on the line to go to sea in boats?

Peter Churchouse loves doing long distance. He says there is nothing quite like the feeling of seeing the moon rise over a calm ocean, and the sense of being at peace with the world.

Rick Strompf loves the strategic aspects – and the opportunity to "get away from work."

They all agree that the sea finally "gets in your blood".

"Besides, it keeps us young!" the skippers chorus.

## 揚帆競賽 樂趣無限

國際級帆船賽吸引全球航海高手雲集維港一起揚帆競賽，熱鬧盛況可謂一時無兩

海洋對某些人來說有無比的吸引力。有人天生喜愛大海，自小以海為家；有人則在偶然的機會下接觸航海玩意後，從此與海洋結下不解之緣。他們一旦愛上航海，終身都會與海為伍。

香港的維港可說是航海迷的天堂，除了景致迷人外，海港內又設有完善的航海設施，以深灣遊艇會為例，會所不單提供世界級的遊艇服務，還有適合一家大小的休閒設施。

此外，每年在香港舉行的大型國際航海賽事，都是航海迷熱切期待的盛事。其中兩年一度、在四月舉行的「勞力士中國海帆船賽」便是最矚目的賽事之一。

這項賽事自1972年獲英國 Royal Ocean Racing Club 正式確認以來，規模越來越龐大，每次比賽均吸引大批國際賽船高手雲集香港。帆船賽主席 Rick Strompf 說，在維港舉行比賽，熱鬧盛況可謂一時無兩。

「世界各地的航海高手雲集香港，在美麗的維港展開帆船賽，現場的熱鬧氣氛令參賽船員和現場觀眾興奮不已。」他說。

賽事起源於皇家香港遊艇會會員 Sim Baldwin 的一個創舉。據說他早年委託 Sparkman and Stephens 船廠，按照 Carlton Mitchell 的著名帆船 Finisterre，設計一艘長40呎的小帆船 Morasum。新船下海後，他為了測試其長途性能而揚帆出海，啟程往馬尼拉，結果航行了八天。他的壯舉為其他會員津津樂道，成為一時佳話。於是，其他會員建議延續那份精神，以比賽形式集體渡洋。

終於，三艘來自皇家香港遊艇會及兩艘來自馬尼拉及日本的遊艇，於1962復活節期間從維港啟程航行往菲律賓蘇碧灣，進行首屆比賽。船隊航行565海哩後抵達目的地，當時航程已減至六天，較 Sim Baldwin 的航程快了兩天。不過，當時船上的設備不及現在完善，並沒有雷達裝置，因此，即使船長 Hector Ross 勝出，把其 Reverie 駛到終點，卻未能察覺自己已經奪標。

時至今日，參賽船隻的設計都走向高科技，船身除採用堅固輕巧的碳纖維以提高航行的速度外，桅桿和帆也較以前更大、更穩固，加上船上精密的電子儀器，如今由香港航行往蘇碧灣只需三天時間。

此外，現今的船艙也設計得越來越舒適。例如，在新西蘭製造的 Warwick 64 呎帆船 Moonblue 2號，船艙不但配備了空調、辦公室、船長吧和廚房，還有葡萄酒櫃和製冰器。相信要決定選用那個年份的波爾多葡萄酒佐膳，會是船長的「艱鉅」任務之一。船上十個船員的海上生活有多舒適，由此可見一斑。

相對地，有些參賽船隻的船艙就設計得非常簡單。奪得「2008勞力士中國海帆船賽」榮譽獎的53呎賽艇 Hi Fi，由 Hugh Wellbourn 設計，在英國製造。為了提高船速，Hi Fi 的船艙設備可謂十分簡單，船長和專業船員毫不介意船艙內只有一個雙頭煮食爐、幾張床鋪和一個洗手間，因為他們的目標只是要奪冠。結果他們如願以償，船主 Neil Pryde 以這艘船贏過不少賽事，在08至09賽季贏盡亞洲區比賽。今年賽季開始以來，Hi Fi 已奪得馬來西亞的「Raja Muda Selangor 國際帆船賽」和泰國「布吉國王杯賽」兩項大型比賽的冠軍殊榮。

今天，縱使帆船的設計越趨進步，參賽者在航海時依然要面對難以預測的挑戰。Moonblue 2號的船主 Peter Churchouse 認為，「勞力士中國海帆船賽」較著名的「悉尼霍巴特帆船賽」及英國的「Fastnet 帆船賽」更具挑戰性，因為船隻在南中國海航行時，距離陸地相當遠。開賽時，一般的風勢是吹20至30海哩側風。離開香港水域後，海面非常大浪，風向亦變得難測。通常起航後首個晚上最難熬，就算經驗豐富的船員也不敢掉以輕心。

一般來說，當船隻駛近菲律賓海岸時，海上環境會出現180度轉變，海面變得一片風平浪靜，在陽光普照下，波光粼粼。此時，船員可以卸下防濕衣物，在船長領導下，與其他競賽隊伍展開大門法，爭取衝線。

帆船賽既然如此挑戰人類的極限，為什麼人們還甘願冒險，參與這種活動呢？

Peter Churchouse 熱愛長途賽，他認為在海上看著月亮從平靜的水平線上緩緩升起，那種與世無爭的感覺，不是其他活動可比擬的。Rick Strompf 則覺得賽船需要運用策略和思考，又可給船員一個放下俗務的機會，所以很有吸引力。

他們亦異口同聲說，航海令人充滿活力，怎不叫人著魔！



The cheering team from Hi Fi (previous page), and Peter Churchouse (above) onboard Moonblue 2, a New Zealand-built, custom-designed Warwick 64-footer, with all its amenities. Hi Fi 船隊預祝馬到功成（前頁）；Peter Churchouse（上）和他的新西蘭製 Warwick 64呎帆船 Moonblue 2號。