

Some anecdotes and a report for North American Tasar Sailors on the Tasar Worlds 2015, Busselton, WA by Jay Renehan

The Seattle Yacht Club Foundation, the North American Tasar Association, West Coast Sailing, Seattle Skiff Sailing Foundation, and Patagonia were all participants in sending an enthusiastic and high-caliber set of sailors to the 2015 Tasar Worlds in Busselton.

Wow, it seems like a long time ago now that 5 teams traveled to the 2015 edition of the Tasar Worlds, because it was. But now that sailing season has arrived and nearly passed, it is time for a recap of the event. I'll try not to repeat too much of what was previously reported "live" on the world communication forum (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), but no promises.

Yes indeed, the North American Tasar contingent visited Western Australia for the Tasar Worlds in January. It was, by all accounts, a worthwhile and rewarding adventure. After letting the trip breathe for a while, I thought I would recount the adventure for those of you at home that supported and followed us from afar. And it was very, very far!

The sailors included Lisa and Jay (the author), Anthony and Haley (reigning champs from 2013 in the Gorge), Mike and Molly, Bruce and Indy, and Phil and Nick. A trip like this isn't one planned over a glass of wine one night, it takes some work, a willingness to allocate some (or most) of your discretionary funds (and then some), and of course, enthusiasm. The planning probably began during the awards party of the 2013 Worlds in the Gorge, and by the end of the night, I think there were about 12 boats "in" for the trip. By the time it came to order the container, we were 5. How big of a container is needed to ship 5 boats? How does one find a container? And get it to Sail Sand Point? Insurance? How long does it take to get 10,000 miles? Will the longshoremen go on strike? Why can't we ship anything containing wood in the wood-floored container? If I pack my sailing clothes for summer in Busselton, will I have enough remaining to practice in December in the Puget Sound? Does practicing in December in Puget Sound have any relevance to summer in the Indian Ocean? I thought I was in (relatively) good shape for the 2013 Worlds at the Gorge, I'll still be in good shape in January 2015, right? I wonder if there are, like, um, normal grocery stores in Western Australia, it seems pretty far away from Sydney. Is it humanly possible to not go crazy on an airplane for that long? Are there crocs there? I don't think I'll answer all these questions. But I'll give you my account of the trip, as I remember it. Facts will only make the story worse.

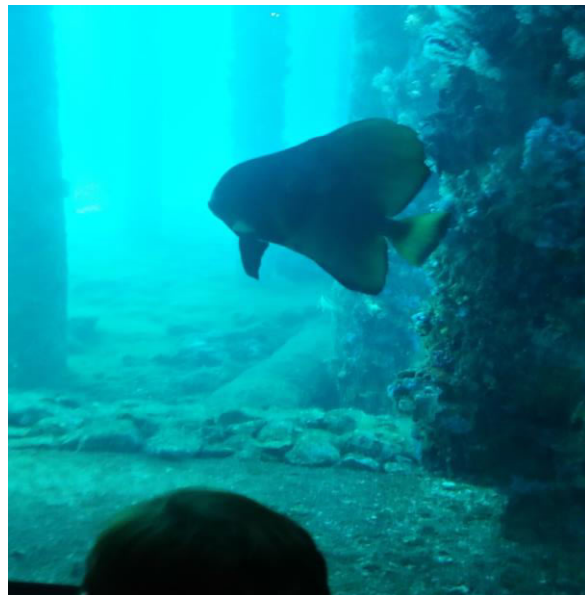
We shipped the boats from Sail Sand Point in Seattle late in October, with an early December arrival expected. Anthony dealt with the shipper, trucking, regulations, etc., and now knows more about that than anyone needs to. We asked and received some photos from Australian friends to determine the best way to pack our boats, and were successful. Lots of hands to lift the boats... but each team is fully responsible to tie down their own boat. On reflection, that doesn't make much sense: any one boat breaks free, and all of the boats are a mess.

We did indeed practice in November and December, grateful to the other sailors (Jay Leon, Chuck, Allan, Jonathan) for lending us their equipment. Lisa says that sailing in December in

the Puget Sound is equivalent to training at altitude: if we can push ourselves to sail when it is cold, rainy, and in an unfamiliar boat, sailing in the perfect conditions expected in Busselton will be easy-as-pie, right?

We heard from the obviously friendly and helpful Tasar fleet hosts in Busselton that our boats had safely arrived a couple weeks before our flights, certainly a relief. 5 hours into the flight from Vancouver to Hong Kong, the Haley offered us some candy and reminded us there was only 8 hours more... on this flight, then just a short 7-hour flight after that to Perth... Yeah, it is a long way from the west coast of Australia. We spent a couple of days in Perth and were somewhat surprised that the jet lag factor was close to zero. It is a casual and fun place to visit, the feel is similar to Seattle, except in December, it is sunny and warm! A few hours on the bus got us to the summer resort town of Busselton, the waters of Geographe Bay, and our host club, Geographe Bay Yacht Club. It is interesting how one can step off a bus with a number of strangers and immediately pick out the sailors as the people most likely to point us the best way to the sailing club, which we of course did without hesitation. Busselton is notable for the Busselton Jetty, 2 kilometers out to sea, where the water is deep enough for ships back in the day. Now the jetty is a tourist attraction, with a fascinating aquarium at the very end: the people are in the aquarium! Follow the stairs down to the seabed, and enjoy the view of the abundant and colorful sealife. I was amazed how calm it was only a few feet below the surface on a 20-knot day.

Bruce and Indi secured “camp north america” to house the north american sailors, and Angelo and Karen, Anthony’s parents, joined us as well. The house had everything we needed: A “barby” (Of course), two refrigerators, and location: a short walk / bikeride from the host club. Mike decided that all meals would be cooked on the barbeque, and they were.



The hosts at Geographe Bay Yacht Club and fast-growing Western Australian Tasar fleet were expectedly friendly, generous, and genuinely happy to see us. We were welcomed by the Mayor, who opened the event with a shotgun!



In addition to the people welcoming us, so did an armada of black flies, which truly drove me “flyrate” (thanks Nick). The flies show for only 2 weeks a year, we’re told, and are strongest when they see tasty Tasar foreign sailors working on a boat on the lawn. I think they mate with humans for life, I had one go 2 miles out to sea with me one day.

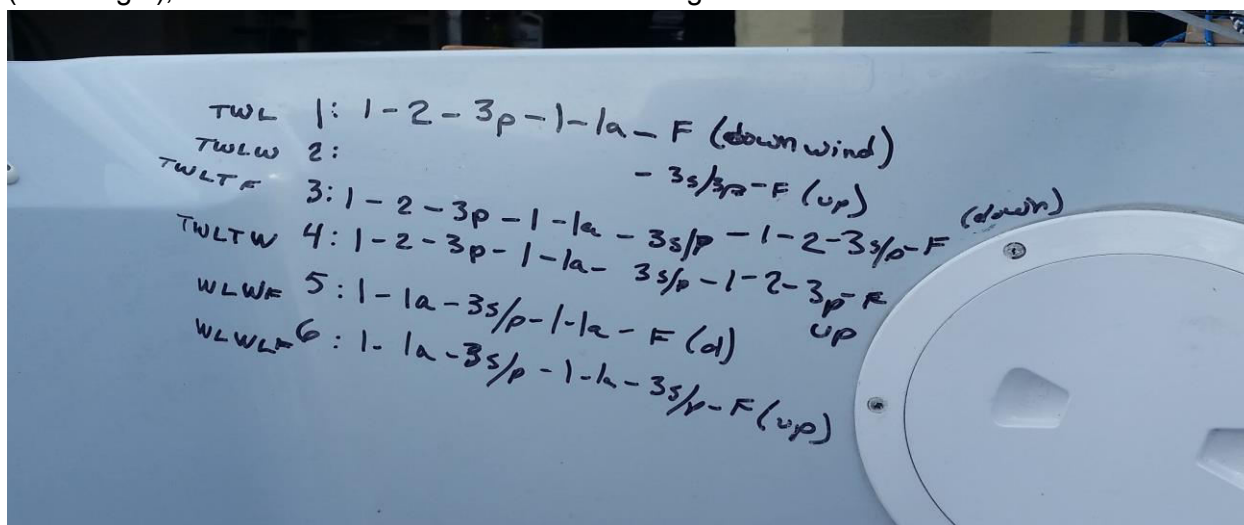
The venue was beautiful, but the sailing was challenging. Reportedly, there was an on-shore sea-breeze from the northwest (effectively an east-west shoreline), and there was also an off-shore seabreeze from the southwest. The strangest part for me was the water: crystal clear, and for a mile or more offshore, we could see the sandy bottom perhaps 20-30 feet deep (hence the need for the long jetty). The NA Tasar sailors, looking NW chic in our Patagonia gear (thanks to WestCoast Sailing), spent time together trying to get accustomed to the wave patterns, water, and wind. I think we understood 2 of these 3. The wind was certainly tough to read. Northwesterly, the windshifts were extremely subtle, small, and difficult to perceive. Without a compass, I would have struggled. Southwesterly (off shore), the shifts were not at all subtle, but very unpredictable, and seemingly random in duration: sometimes there would be only one shift on the entire beat. We had several days of practice, and that was good for most teams to discover the parts of the boat that didn’t repair themselves during the container journey. The practice days leading up to the regatta did reveal that we were indeed a 12-hour time difference from the west coast, we didn’t push ourselves too hard during this period, although in retrospect, a few more days or even some real racing at the venue may have helped the NA contingent performance (and perhaps had the opposite effect on performance at our day jobs).

The water and beach and location were truly amazing. Check out the photo from a helicopter of the fleet neatly arranged on the lawn of the club, with the support fleet anchored a few feet (meters) off shore. Yes, the water was that clear for a couple of miles offshore.



Video of opening ceremony <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zZStX06eJg&feature=youtu.be>

123 boats entered were measured in a short time, with little controversy. Hard to imagine a hundred boats more than most North American events! The schedule included an entertaining competitor's briefing, eerily predicting some future events regarding "threatening marine creatures," and courses with a number of legs not seen in North America for decades. We recorded the courses on our boat for easy reference. Yes, four of the six options included a "T" (for triangle), and those were the courses used during the event: we learned how to reach!



The starting line was effectively two starting lines, with a mid-line signal boat, and a starting line to weather and to leeward. As one expects at an event of this caliber, the race committee was not the deciding factor in the regatta: they were capable and competent, a good thing. What do 123 Tasars on a starting line look like? Yes, you can see the bottom (light spots) about 1.5 miles from the beach



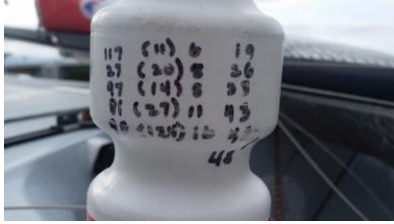
The practice race enabled the sailors to learn about the race committee and the challenge of the conditions: subtle shifts were the order of the day for the lighter on-shore breeze. The North Americans fared relatively well, but most stayed with the seemingly-not-Australian superstition and skipped the finish for the practice race, most of us feeling good about our performance. Spirits were high across the board!

It is a great feature of the Tasar fleet that fierce competition on the water has no detectable influence on personal friendships and ability to live in the same house. Mutual encouragement, free advice, and friendly banter, and sharing of food, equipment, spares, and repair expertise is my experience. Anyone having the opportunity to go to a Tasar Worlds should not hesitate to go for it, and find another team or a few to stay with, that's my advice. It's not all about sailing. The regatta itself included the highly-amusing nightly Ronstan half-hour, and of course a few sponsored evenings to keep the participants in the right frame of mind.



Lisa and I started the regatta on a high note. As I recall, it isn't the first time we've won the first race at a Tasar Worlds, but it turns out that it isn't how you start the regatta, but how you finish that matters. Yes, one day of sailing was definitely abandoned due to a shark. It was known to be in the area, and hinted at in the competitor's meeting. We finished the first race of that day with a "keeper" finish just behind Mike and Molly in a downwind finish. It was somewhat gusty and a number of boats had capsized during the race. In preparation for the next race, we sailed away towards the far right committee boat to begin our preparation for the next race. Well, the 4 people on the 35' sailboat were on the cabintop looking rather pale, and gesticulating anxiously towards us, and it was not the "we need help" kind of motion, it was "get the hell out of here" signal I guess. After a moment, we got it "go in!" We were somewhat bummed, as the conditions were prime for us: good breeze, offshore (therefore shifty and not too wavy). After we reached shore, we learned the reason we were sent in, certainly a first. AP over shark!

I won't bore you with the details of every race, other than to say it was challenging racing, and all the US teams had their ups and downs. I remember one race where the North American teams finished 2, 3, 4, just like back home! Some of the adages for racing in big fleets rang true: you can't win the regatta on the first day, but you can do a lot to lose it. Make friends with the other sailors, this always helps. Don't stand out to the umpires on the fleet, sometimes the umpires believe they have a mission to fulfill, and they intend to do that... Even with two drop races, consistency pays. As is typical, the regatta winners had the best drop races of any team in the fleet. Proper prior planning prevents p*** poor performance (the seven Ps). It is a long regatta: 5 race days, plus a lay day in the middle. In the end, we had a chance to compete on the last day, and went to battle with the scores handy on the water bottle (bow number, drop race, next drop race, score), but alas, resulted in no change in the overall finish.



I'm certain I speak for the 5 North American teams in saying that without a doubt, we would do it again. It was certainly not a trivial investment, but we all chose to prioritize this sort of venture, competition, camaraderie over other options, and are rewarded for our choice. It isn't that different than a North American Tasar regatta: it is equally competitive, and the shoreside activities are a similar blend of helping, competing, and getting to know one another, but it is at a significantly different scale! In my mind, the sign of a great time is that we wanted to keep going when the regatta ended: we just wanted to keep racing and enjoying the evenings indefinitely! The next Tasar Worlds is in Japan in July, 2017: we'll be there when the next host is sewn onto the Tasar Worlds flag, will you? <http://tasarworlds2017.org/>

