

MEDIA RELEASE
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Prime Minister's blessing for unique Sydney-Hobart challenger

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has endorsed an ambitious challenge by injured, wounded and ill Defence personnel crewing for the first time in this year's Rolex Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race.

The Prime Minister joined the crew at Darling Harbour, Sydney today for the official naming of the Volvo Ocean 60 *Spirit of Mateship*.

The yacht was bought by RSL (Queensland Branch) to provide sailing rehabilitation programs for wounded, injured and ill Defence personnel through the charitable organisation Mates4Mates.

Mates4Mates COO Michael Quinn said the Sydney-Hobart challenge was a great opportunity for wounded, injured and ill servicemen and women to develop the skills and fortitude needed to recover from physical, emotional and psychosocial issues unique to those who have served.

"One of life's great tests has always been man versus the elements," Mr Quinn said.

"Competing in this iconic race is a terrific opportunity for our Brave Mates to get outside their comfort zone, rebuild confidence and engage with people who best understand what they're going through.

"It won't be easy but they'll get there with the support of all Australians."

One of those ready to set sail on Boxing Day is Craig McCarthy who served in the Navy and Army for more than 20 years and has physical and psychological injuries.

"It's fair to say I've been pretty down since I was discharged in 2006, so I grabbed this opportunity to push myself and develop a new sense of direction; at the moment that's south to Hobart," Mr McCarthy said.

The only woman in the crew, Lance Corporal Prue Sanson, is recovering from a leg injury suffered in her role as an Emergency Responder with 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment based in Townsville.

Lance Corporal Sanson said the yacht race would be the experience of a lifetime and a long way from Army fire-fighting in north Queensland.

"The prospect of crossing freezing Bass Strait is a bit daunting but this is a great boost for my recovery, so bring it on," Lance Corporal Sanson said.

"I've been office bound during my rehab and working as part of a small team again is really important to me."

Spirit of Mateship has previously raced from Sydney-Hobart as Djuce and Southern Excellence and was a Norwegian flagged competitor in the 2001/02 Volvo Round the World Ocean Race.

It has been repainted, rebadged and extensively refurbished including a new sail wardrobe.

Skipper Russell McCart has finished 12 Sydney-Hobart campaigns and said the Brave Mates would be supported by an experienced crew.

“The Mates4Mates contingent is fully trained so there are no problems with their sailing capabilities but we’ll support them to be really competitive,” Mr McCart said.

“If determination is anything to go by, you’ll see them on the leaderboard.”

Mates4Mates Chairman Peter Davies said the sailing program, which includes the Sydney-Hobart race, is one of several practical ways the organisation supports wounded, injured and ill Defence personnel.

“Mates4Mates harnesses the strength of an iconic Australian trait – mateship - to help current and ex-service personnel rebuild their life skills and emotional resilience,” Mr Davies said.

“Every operation is unique but Mates4Mates provides a bond between servicemen and women from different deployments or different wars.

“We offer health care and welfare including confidential counselling, physical rehabilitation, employment support and mentorship.

“We also make a concerted effort to reach out to their loved ones because we know how testing and lonely it can be on the home front.”

For more information visit www.mates4mates.org or www.facebook.com/Mates4Mates.

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FAST FACTS - Spirit of Mateship

Make - Volvo Ocean 60

Designer – Laurle Davidson

Builder – Cooksons, NZ

Construction – Kevlar composite

LOA - 19.46 mt. (65 ft.)

Beam - 5.25

Draft - 3.96

- Formerly known as Djuice Dragons.
- Competed in the 2001-02 Volvo Ocean Race under the Norwegian flag.
- Built using SP unidirectional reinforcements and a wet-preg process, where resins are at an unprecedented level of accuracy in the construction i.e. almost no fairing compound needs to be used.
- First taste of Sydney Hobart Yacht Race was in leg 3 of the Volvo world race.
- Bought in 2012 by yachtsman Andrew Wenham, relocated to Australia and renamed Southern Excellence.
- Extensively refurbished and had significant success in a number of bluewater classics including the 2012 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.
- Bought by RSL (Queensland Branch) in 2013 and renamed Spirit of Mateship.
- Undergone further refitting including paint and a new sail wardrobe.