



BRIEF HISTORY OF LION NEW ZEALAND

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SAILNZ

The Ultimate Sailing Experience

Lion New Zealand's construction started at the end of 1983 and the launch date set for November 1984. This date was decided so Lion could enter the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Boxing Day.

The forecast for the start of the race was for the breeze to build to gale force winds from the southwest. Lion finished first in Hobart sailing through very stormy conditions. She survived huge seas and 60 knot squalls in the 1984 Sydney Hobart. Over half the fleet did not finish the race. Lion had proven her strength.

The crew got ready to deliver the yacht back to New Zealand and on to England for the Start of the Whitbread. Lion was one of the favourites to finish first in the 1985-86 Whitbread.

Peters Blake's crew were a happy bunch, very dedicated to winning the race. They had put their families and lives on hold in order to race and they would not settle for second best.

The Solent in England is the starting point for the race. On this occasion it was very foggy and there was the added problem of an out of control spectator fleet. The start line was chaos. On the 1st of October (Peters birthday) Lion tacked out to sea in 25 knots from the south.

LEG 1: The first leg taught most of the boats a lesson in preparation as they were hit by a savage storm forcing most of the fleet to limp into Cape Town. Lion finished the leg in second place behind UBS from Switzerland.

LEG 2: December the 4th Lion's crew had a goal in sight to be home by the 31st of December. A New Years celebration to remember and a huge homecoming.

On the 29th of December "Whale Strike." The crew named the whale Winifred. It had done a nasty job on the rudder. The boat was handling all right but they would need to fix it if the wind came from astern. The team engineered two spare rudders just in case their situation got worse. Instead of stopping for repairs they pressed on, wiping out several times on their way into Auckland harbour. Lion was the 5th boat into Auckland and did not expect much of a reception. They couldn't have been more wrong. They were greeted by an enormous ovation. Auckland's waterfront was packed.

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LEG 3: The Waitemata harbour was wall-to-wall boats as 7,000 craft and an estimated 300,000 spectators lined the bays and the race course, cheering Lion on her way. After a very packed and confused start, Lion was in third place at the turn around point at the mouth of the Hauraki Gulf. She was trucking along nicely doing 260-290 miles per day often in sight of the front-runners. Visibility was low and reports of icebergs were coming in. At this stage the Kiwis needed to keep their focus on Drum, as she was the only one challenging them for second place.

Lion was 1 day 18 hours ahead of Drum when they got to New Zealand. Near the end of leg three the wind died costing 1 day to UBS and 23 hours to Drum, leaving them with an 18 hour buffer going into the final leg of the race.

LEG 4: Lion's only objective was to "beat the drum" or face an embarrassing 3rd place. On Day 4 the log reads, "We hit another whale, only a small bump." Lion and Drum were sticking together, until a rainsquall gave Drum cover to gybe out and slip away from Lion unnoticed. Lion made the decision to go between the islands of the Azores. This paid off as they caught up to both Drum and Cote d'Or. Lion had gear failure in the night allowing the other two boats to slip ahead to the north of them.

Drum was 60 miles ahead, looking likely beat Lion's time claiming 2nd place overall. The breeze stayed around 25 knots allowing Lion to roar up the English Channel, unable to catch Drum but close enough to hold on to second place around the world.

Since the America's cup Lion NZ was bought off Peter by an American who owned it for 10 years. He then sold it to an Aussie who used the boat as a charter business. He renamed the boat Phantom of the Straits and sailed between Wellington and Picton. In 1995 he changed her name back to Lion New Zealand and Sail New Zealand brought her to sail between the Bay of Islands and Auckland.