

Mara Stransky's Offshore Challenge in a Laser Radial

On Saturday of the Labour Day long weekend 2018, I sailed out through the Gold Coast Seaway at first light. Heading offshore past South and North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands, I then rounded Cape Moreton, and reached across the top of Moreton Island before beating back down the west coast to finally rest off Tangalooma, arriving just before dusk.

This trip clocked up 78nm (146km) and took a total of 11hrs 44mins.

Although the forecast had sat fairly steadily between 15 to 25knts in the week leading up to my trip, the southerly front hit with a fair bit more ferocity than we had envisaged, rapidly blowing out to 25 to 35knts once I was on my way. By the time I rounded Cape Moreton the weather station there was recording 33 to 40knts, so it's safe to say we certainly got a bit more than we'd bargained for!

Once out however, there was really no option of turning back or having a break, so it became a matter of hanging in there and surviving it the best I could. My parents accompanied me sailing in *Fantasia* and were keeping me in sight, which was not always easy in such conditions but it was comforting to know they were there.

Before the SE swell fully developed, there was also an E swell and when the front first whipped up the sea, the waves were incredibly steep and awkward, making capsizing very hard indeed to avoid. Happily though, I managed to convince myself they would lengthen out in time and things would improve. I'm not entirely sure I was right, as although the waves did lengthen out, other issues developed as the wind continued to increase. I was no longer able to surf but was just sent flying down giant liquid ramps, pressure building in the rig right to the bottom, where I'd either slide onto the next one and repeat, or run into breaker foam, which would immediately cause the rudder to ventilate and me to go for yet another swim! It wasn't long before capsizing simply became a matter of 'when' rather than 'if'.

After 2 hours of humming foils, negotiating breakers, slamming off wave crests, being constantly hosed and having no real thoughts, other than 'which way to attack the next set of rollers' or 'when the next best time to stretch my hands and wipe my sunnies would come' started to become tiresome. So you can imagine after 6 more hours of the same, I certainly had a few low points, where I questioned the sanity of this whole undertaking and wished I had've taken up a less boisterous past time like gardening to fill my long weekend with!



The most difficult part of the trip was off Pt Lookout, at the top of North Stradbroke, which in fact was about half way, but I had lost track of distances by then. The waves were so confused there between the islands. If I had the chance to stop then, I probably would have but there was no hope of resting at that stage. Looking back, I think that was the turning point for me, as I had already learnt so much about big wave riding and my fear had transformed into determination to survive and see this through. The sheer speed and power was exhilarating. I had discovered port tack provided a much better ride, as I was crossing the face of the waves. I also felt less likely to capsize. I just immersed myself in the moment and focused on my small world between the waves.



I preferred to stay close in towards the shore as I could gauge my progress better against the land, rather than feeling like a tiny dot in the wide ocean. Finally rounding the massive Cape Moreton was an enormous relief, as it marked the end of the huge ocean swell and as I began a flying reach across the top of Moreton in the relatively protected, stunningly aqua waters, I felt I was in a dream. However, the swell was still providing waves big enough for some surfers to catch the inshore break. The last 18km was in many ways the hardest, as it was a long beat against the tide. Without the adrenalin created by battling the majestic forces of the ocean, as well as the building fatigue, it became a true test of will to keep tacking down the west coast to finally arrive in the protected anchorage, behind the wrecks off Tangalooma, where my very welcome home Fantasia, was waiting for me.

I have been asked why I set myself this goal...

I guess I wanted to test my mental toughness and physical endurance, to see what I am capable of when really put to the test. .

A long distance trip in a Laser is something I have wanted to do ever since I heard of the 300nm challenge, which has still not been achieved. Perhaps having already done so many sea miles in ocean sailing, it all seemed very possible, just a smaller boat! Being totally in charge and also being limited with what I could carry in way of equipment and supplies seemed an exciting challenge.

Now that I have begun a search for sponsorship to assist me in my 2020 Tokyo Olympic campaign, I hoped that I might gain some recognition for who I am and just how much I am willing to put into any goal I set. It has been noted that I can be single-minded and very determined when I set out to do something but surely that is a trait any Olympian needs.