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Escaped Aussies at Audi Hamilton Island Race Week

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'Escaped Aussies - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week' [Sail-world.com](http://sail-world.com) [Click Here to view large photo](#)

They're the sort of people you would expect to be unbearably arrogant: wealthy young men with high paid corporate jobs in the world's richest cities. Every year they get together and sail at an international regatta or two, choosing an event on the basis of location and reputation.

They call their network of friends the 'Escaped Aussies' because they all have some kind of connection with Australia, either as citizens or they were posted here for their jobs. This year they sailed on board a Beneteau 47.7 chartered by Mariner Boating in the Premier IRC Division at Audi Hamilton Island Race Week. It's the kind of activity that you would expect to be popular with this demographic.

But like many people, the globe trotting Escaped Aussies aren't as straightforward as they seem. The first really notable thing about them is that whenever they visit an international regatta they spend a lot of time selecting a worthwhile local charity to support. At Hamilton Island they raised over \$4000 for Yalari, an organisation that promotes the education of indigenous youth.

The Escaped Aussies ten man crew put in \$100 each and they raised another \$1000 from fellow Beneteau crews racing at Hamilton Island. Escaped Aussie crew member Stuart Nash works for Macquarie Bank, and his employer kindly agreed to match every dollar that they could raise. Raymarine donated a hand held VHF and the Oatley family threw in a case of wine which were both used as fundraising prizes.



Escaped Aussies in action - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - Sail-world.com [Click Here to view large photo](#)

Yalari was started by an indigenous teacher called Waverley Stanley after his positive experience attending Toowoomba Grammar School in Queensland. Waverley wanted to give something back to his community and provide other indigenous youth with the opportunity to receive a first rate education. With the help of venture capitalist Philip Latham, Yalari was born, an organisation that provides scholarships for gifted kids to attend some of the country's best schools.

It's an idea focussed on long term sustainable strategies for indigenous communities and Waverley said that it gives children the chance to reach their full potential.

'You know, all men are created equal...And it doesn't matter whether you're black, white, brindle, purple or corrugated, you have got the opportunity to be who you want to be. If you want to be a lawyer, you be a lawyer. If you want to be a doctor, you be a doctor.'



Macquarie Bank's Stuart Nash - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - Sail-world.com [Click Here to view large photo](#)

The idea of supporting a local charity began when the Escaped Aussies attended Antigua Race Week in 2000. They were struck by the contrast between the beauty of the Caribbean island and the large number of luxury yachts visiting for the regatta, and the absolute poverty of the shanty towns a short distance away from the marina.

A local man observed that many of the sailors came, enjoyed the beautiful island and its facilities and left without having any contact with the community. It was a comment that got the group of friends thinking. It struck them that 'nobody ever looks around' when they brought their yachts to second or third world countries and they decided that it was time to change the way they travelled.

Using the internet, they located a reliable local contact and researched which charities were operating in the area.

Eventually they selected a local orphanage which was caring for more than 100 kids. Every day

new children would arrive with another five babies dropped off the night before they visited. The Escaped Aussies all put in \$100 each, drove to a nearby supermarket and filled the car with essential food items, then drove directly to the orphanage to deliver it. Some of them were moved to tears by the sight of a small child proudly carrying a huge watermelon into the orphanage.

'We realised that if you put the money in the right place at the right time you could have much more impact' commented navigator Marcus Ginder.

From that point forward they decided that every time they visited a regatta they would find a way to support a worthwhile local organisation. They choose a charity on the basis of three simple criteria: the organisation must be local, their support must have a direct impact on the lives of vulnerable or disadvantaged people and their support must be able to be organised mostly before the regatta begins.



Darren on the helm with Marcus to the left - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - Sail-world.com [Click Here to view large photo](#)

The core of the Escaped Aussies group formed after they met and became friends while working in Sydney. It's a group that includes Americans, Canadians, Britains, Australians and a number of other nationalities. Time passed and their companies posted them to different countries, but they were determined to find a way to keep the friendship active. Being a smart bunch of guys, they sat down and came up with a list of ideas of how to stay in touch.



Brett kicking back - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - Sail-world.com [Click Here to view large photo](#)

'It's easy to make a new friend, but it's hard to make an old friend' an Escaped Aussie crew member noted.

One of these ideas was meeting up once or twice a year to race at an international regatta. The idea took off and since 2000 they have participated in 16 events including the Kings Cup, Les Voiles de St Tropez and J-Fest. As the laconic American Brett Bonthron observed: 'we're very partial to the good weather regattas...'

For the group, the regattas are more about renewing friendships and being part of a team than winning races.

'As ten individual guys we are completely hopeless on our own. But somehow between us we manage to haul ten tonnes of Beneteau around a 16nm course without breaking anyone or damaging anything' said Bonthron.

This spirit of group co-operation extends to their pre-regatta planning and organisation: everyone on the boat has an assigned role that extends far beyond the traditional marine roles of trimmer, helmsman, navigator etc.



One person working, one person taking a call... - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - Sail-world.com [Click Here to view large photo](#)

There is the Vice President of Fun, CEO, COO and VP of Provisioning. They have written a manual, packed with valuable information and sometimes an unintentionally hilarious read, and posted it on their website. It outlines the best way of preparing for a regatta and includes topics such as organising accommodation, managing funds, race tactics and chartering a suitable boat. It could almost be described as a bi-lingual document; it speaks in both the language of the corporate world and the sailing world.

For the Audi Hamilton Island Race Week the group approached Mariner Boating, the specialist boating holiday company, for help chartering an IRC rated race boat. Mariner Boating had already chartered the Beneteau 47.7 for a group of clients at Meridien Marinas Airlie Beach Race Week so it was a simple matter of bringing the boat to Hamilton Island.

Trevor Joyce from Mariner Boating explained that his company has recently extended beyond their established base of organising boating holidays in exotic locations.



Escaped Aussie Zach at Whitehaven Beach party - 2007 Audi Hamilton Island Race Week - [Sail-world.com](http://www.sail-world.com) [Click Here to view large photo](#)

'We're carving a bit of a niche in the race charter area. We're trying to find boats that are competitive that are also available for charter. It's not easy and it's not cheap either because if you get a boat with a decent set of racing sails, it's an expensive bit of hardware.'

Joyce sailed with the Escaped Aussies for one race of their Hamilton campaign and said he greatly enjoyed the experience.

'The ribaldry going on during the race was hilarious; they're just good, regular guys... And here they are out on a 47 footer out in IRC premier cruising trying to sort out how to get themselves to the starting line on time, how they come around the pin end on starboard and gybe onto port, get the pole up and hoist the kite and all that sort of stuff. And so far they've done it all and got it all happening...'

The ten member Escaped Aussies crew during Hamilton Island Race Week were: Darren Shipard, Marcus Ginder, Stuart (Good Stuart) Nash, Rob Allan, Zach Abrams, Brett Bonthron, Kieran Duck, Jamie Clouten, Alan Slothower and Stuart (Evil Stuart) Fox.

Mariner Boating contact details:

Address : Suite 802, 83 Mount St
City : North Sydney
State : NSW
Postcode : 2060
Country : Australia
Phone : +61 2 9966 1244
Mobile: 0412 295 656
Fax : +61 2 9966 1255
Email : info(at)marinerboating.com.au

<http://www.marinerboating.com.au>

Escaped Aussies contact details:

<http://www.escapedaussies.com>

by Helen Hopcroft

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