

Tales from the Rails

AIRLIE BEACH RACE WEEK - AUGUST 2026

The Adventures of Magoo and Burke

The Black Betty crew came together as most do, over a rum. Magoo (aka Macca, aka David McKay) had planted the seed with Drew a few weeks before, but proceeded to butter up Bernard Parker at the CSC presentation day. When Bernard mentioned the proposal to Drew, he replied with: "If you go, I'll go."

And so the plan was hatched. Soon after, Bernard recruited Marshall Harrington to form quite a formidable crew, but notably a crew made entirely of skippers.

Burke's recruitment drive also took place at the bar, with Tayla being signed up alongside No Mercy regulars Dean & Mark, and Zali and Mick to fill gaps early in the regatta before Deano's arrival.

Fast forward to the Friday before the regatta. The Black Betty was packed during the week by Magoo and Drew. The correct sails were located in Magoo's container full of sails (not even kidding) and even an unknown #2 jib was found as a bonus. The cover was clipped up, and everything was ready for the journey North first thing Sunday. Only problem was, Magoo's trusty Lexus decided to pack it in. Jack Mac to the rescue: extracting the key barrel, whittling down an exactly-shaped screwdriver as a makeshift key, and hey presto the Lexus was back!

A rum or two was had on Saturday night to celebrate, the boat was hitched up, the console fridge stocked, the magic screwdriver was inserted, and Magoo headed off on Sunday morning - first stop, his daughter Mouse's place to collect his travel companion Michael, who at 14 was unable to assist with driving duties, but did however provide an ear to listen to 30 driving hours worth of stories!

While there may have been a few question marks over the Lexus, there were absolutely none over Magoo's ability to take on another Northern campaign. At 79 years young, he was again happily trailering his toy thousands of kilometres, and proving that age is no barrier when road-tripping across the country for a regatta is in your DNA.



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The Road to Airlie

On Monday, Burke and **No Mercy** set off on their journey north, unsurprisingly without issue.

Magoo, grandson Michael and Burke took three long days to make their way to Airlie Beach.

Sometime, over the last few years, Burke appears to have spent a little too much time with Magoo. The man who historically would have been quite at home in a fancy motel each night, now apparently prefers slumming it in a caravan park and sleeping in his rooftop tent. It's unclear exactly when this transformation occurred, but the signs are concerning. Burke was even heard mentioning something about a "lodge", on Magoo's recommendation - whatever that means.

Meanwhile, the rest of the **Black Betty** crew boarded a flight on Wednesday and headed for Airlie ready to assemble the boats. Upon arrival, they discovered - at great surprise to nobody - that communication within the team may have been somewhat lacking.

Magoo and Burke now weren't arriving until Thursday morning. The accommodation wasn't booked until Thursday. The boys had nowhere to stay. Fortunately, this minor logistical issue was dealt with in the traditional manner: a few beers were had, alternative accommodation was found, and everyone carried on. The next morning featured a few sore heads. Not surprising for one or two of the Black Betty cohort, but the third was a little uncharacteristic. The first hangover in 5 years was mentioned in passing...

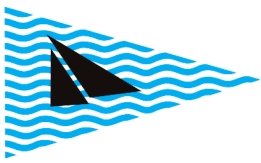
Thursday: Training?

On Thursday, the boats and skippers arrived in Airlie Beach, and the teams headed up to the team house, which was absolutely stunning. Perched high on the hill overlooking Coral Sea Marina and the plebs below, it was the perfect spot to base ourselves for the week.



The first of two carpark issues presented itself at check-in, with Drew and Burke grabbing the keys. 2.1m the clearance bar stipulated, and narrowly clearing that, we thought we were good to go. Except for the fire main valve hanging somewhere more like the 2.0m mark, crunch. No matter, reverse out and go around that. Crunch. Roller door motor box. A carefully plotted entry path around the various obstacles had us safely parked up. Safe for now...

The two-car parking spot required the cars to park **one behind the other**, ordinarily not a drama. Once the boats were unhitched and masts raised, Magoo drove in first and Burke followed behind, on the pre-determined hanging-obstacle free route, and cars were unpacked.



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As the boys left to head back to the Club to get the boats in the water, Magoo jumped in the Lexus, put it in reverse and... BANG. Reversed straight into Burke.

"MAGOOOO!"

After a few colourful words were exchanged between Burke and himself, because arguing with old mate was a pointless exercise, the damage was assessed and thankfully wasn't too bad.

The Black Betty crew were keen to get out for a test sail, familiarise themselves with the boat and work out how everything was going to come together. All the crew, that is, except their fearless leader. I've been sailing for 75 years, I don't need practice, Magoo explained.

Yep. **Magoo went to the bar while his crew took the boat out for a practice sail.** Priorities... "Check and see if these two kites I forgot I had fit" was mumbled as two sail bags were chucked aboard whilst they pushed off the dock. This proved a very worthwhile exercise for the remaining skippers, who despite many years of sailing under the belt, definitely needed the practice!

That afternoon, Drew grabbed the trusty screwdriver, jumped in the Lexus and drove two hours back to Mackay to collect Burke's second crew member, Tayla, after flights into Proserpine weren't arriving at an agreeable time for a Thursday evening departure and racing starting Friday morning.

The pair eventually arrived back at around midnight, and the team had left the door ajar. This time...

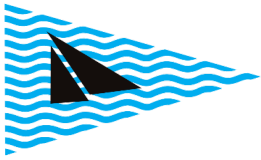
Race 1: Four Skippers, No Crews, No Navigators

Friday morning began with bacon and egg rolls at the dock and listening to Magoo answer **400 million well-wishing phone calls, as seems to be his morning ritual.** Then it was time to race. Magoo, Drew, Marshall and Bernard headed out of the marina berth under sail because "we're a sailboat."

No Mercy, meanwhile, headed out under motor because "that's sensible", or something silly like that. With Deano not arriving until Sunday, **Zali stepped in to fill the final spot on the No Mercy crew for the first day of racing,** joining Burke, Tayla and Mark for Race 1.



Both boats were competing in the **Sports Boat Div 2**, despite Black Betty flying what was apparently the cruising non-spinnaker division flag, and despite originally being allocated into Div 1. Burke and Magoo negotiated the division re-allocation on the basis of **"I'm a pensioner you know?"**.



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The first race was a drag race around Double Cone Island. By some small miracle after not knowing what time or where they were starting, Black Betty had a cracking start and stretched her legs on the first downwind leg, with Magoo at the helm. They found themselves **surfing past a TP52, Class 40 and GP42 on the run down to the first rounding island**. The boat was lit up at 18 knots, the crew were keeping the boat on its feet going full bam-ba-lam, and everything was looking very promising.

When they went past the Class 40, the crew joked that Black Betty was probably worth about as much as their headsail. When they went past the TP52, that was revised to being worth about as much as their spinnaker sheets!

Despite having **four skippers on board**, nobody had actually discussed the navigation or knew the course. An onboard course book was not super practical on the submarine that is Black Betty. They found themselves so far ahead in their division that they had no idea where they were going. Ridiculous in hindsight, as the course was literally round the island and back. Black Betty headed towards a second island, pacing a fancied sportsboat they'd just gybed alongside, instead of turning for home. Turns out the modified Thompson 920 *Roadrunner* was in IRC division, doing a longer course. Whoops.

The next issue arose when the spinnaker needed to come down. All four skippers said in unison, righto, let's get the kite down... and nothing happened, waiting for the "crew" to do their job. Marshall and Drew realised: oh s&*#, we're the crew!! With the two "foredeck skippers" in extremely unfamiliar territory, the kite eventually came down with only a few crustaceans in tow.

No Mercy took advantage of the navigational error, Black Betty's lead disappeared, and a major point of contention for the rest of the week was born. Apparently, having four skippers does not necessarily mean you have one navigator.

The Magoo Trimmer

Somewhere along the way, Bernard found himself in the unenviable, but apparently very important position of sitting in front of Magoo. This meant that Bernard was no longer simply a **mainsheet trimmer**, he had become the **Magoo trimmer**.

His responsibilities included: keeping the mainsheet under control, tucking Magoo's little toes under the foot straps so he didn't fall out the boat, helping him across the boat every time they tacked, and grabbing the tiller through maneuvers when the old boy stacked it and dropped the helm.

It was a full-time position. **Mainsheet in one hand, Magoo management in the other, and sometimes the tiller as well. Who said blokes can't multitask?** As the week went on, Bernard became increasingly proficient in all aspects.

It was just another example of the teamwork that made Black Betty work so well. Magoo could get on with what he does best, steering the boat, while Bernard made sure everything, and everyone, stayed attached to it.



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Old Magoo

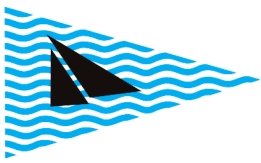
For all the jokes about Magoo's chaotic approach to the campaign, one thing his crew agreed on all week was just how impressive he was on the water. At **79 years old**, Magoo was racing a 20ft skiff with the same enthusiasm he has always brought. Each race, he would take the helm at the start and usually steer the first leg or two, before handing over to someone else - everyone got a go.

But it was his **downwind steering** that really impressed. The Black Betty crew could not speak highly enough of Magoo's ability to steer the boat downwind. Once Black Betty was up and humming (literally), Magoo was in his element, catching every wave, keeping the boat on track and making the most of the conditions.

There were plenty of people happy to take over the helm when Magoo needed a break, but the crew all agreed on one thing: **you'd be hard-pressed to find a better person to have on the wood downwind.**



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Near Death Experience

Race One wasn't without its moments of excitement.

On the way back to the finish, Black Betty was working home on starboard tack. Magoo had decided he'd done enough steering for the day and handed the helm over to Drew.

All four crew were hiking hard and focused on catching that bloody Burkey after the navigational mishap. It was then that Marshall happened to take a quick look underneath the boom. A 5-tonne **40ft catamaran, Cut Snake**, was coming across on port tack at 10+ knots and was on a collision course with all 300kg of Black Betty. **"I don't think they've got us", Marshall advised.** Drew reacted in a split second and tacked the boat, avoiding the approaching catamaran by **millimetres**.



It was an extremely close and potentially dangerous situation. Had Drew not reacted when he did, Cut Snake's leeward hull would have hit Black Betty at the chainplates, and with Magoo sitting second from the bow in very unfamiliar territory, the consequences could have been dire.

Thankfully, the quick reactions of the crew meant the boats missed each other, and everyone lived to tell the story. Just. With protest hailed, and turns dutifully completed by the Cut Snake, they came back and rolled us to windward minutes later. Thanks a lot.

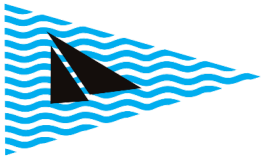
Later that evening, over a few drinks at the bar, the skipper of **Cut Snake** admitted that she hadn't even seen Black Betty until they tacked away. Once the adrenaline had worn off and everyone was safely back on dry land, the crew were able to laugh about it. It was later discussed that there was some irony that **Magoo almost died on a starboard tack**, which would have been a very uncharacteristic way for him to go!

Race 2: Modesty?

Saturday brought beautiful conditions and a long work out for the crews as the fleet headed out towards North Molle Island.

No Mercy enlisted **Mick Stuart** as the fill-in crew member, joining the team for the day's racing. No Mercy found themselves out in front of Black Betty and, naturally, were hiking their hearts out to keep the boat moving.

It was during this race that Marshall coined what would become one of the running jokes of the week. Whenever the No Mercy crew were hiking over the lifelines, Marshall decided they looked less like a sailing crew and more like a collection of dead bodies. From then on they were affectionately known as "the corpses", and just like that, the No Mercy crew had a new identity.



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From that point on, whenever the two boats came close to each other, the Black Betty crew would keep an eye out for the tell-tale sight of No Mercy's crew hanging over the rail. **"Here come the corpses!"**

Seeing his corpses, I mean crew, working so hard, their kind and considerate skipper, Burke, offered some valuable advice: **"Look up and enjoy the sights! You don't want to spend the whole race staring at your toes!"** A lovely sentiment.

This was in stark contrast to the skipper of Black Betty, who had a slightly different approach to crew motivation: **"LEAN HARDER YOU PRICKS!"** And as Black Betty watched No Mercy stretching their lead upwind, another recurring call came from the helm: **"Let's get that Burkey!"**

Black Betty eventually got back in front as they rounded the island and launched the big bam-ba-lam, but once again found themselves facing some navigational challenges along the way, almost missing the opening between North Molle Island and Mid Molle Reef.

No Mercy ultimately took out the win for Race 2. The crew were stoked, and of course **extremely humble** about it.

Race 3: "Bloody Magoo"

By Sunday, No Mercy's regular crew member **Dean Langton** had arrived and the team was complete. Before heading out, Burke filled the fuel tank - with **Magoo's fuel**.

No Mercy towed Black Betty out of the marina but didn't get very far before the engine began spluttering... and then conked out completely before Black Betty sailed off towards the start. **"Bloody Magoo and his dodgy fuel. I should have known better,"** Burkey said.

The fleet headed down the bay towards Grassy Island for another day of perfect sailing conditions. That evening, celebrations continued into the early hours for some members of the crew, with lay day on Monday.

At around 1am, Tay and Drew **levitated** up the hill to the accommodation, only to discover that the door had been locked. They knocked, no answer. They called Bernard, no answer. They called Burke, no answer. Then they called Magoo. Through the door, they could hear his phone ringing at full volume, waking up anyone in its vicinity.

Luckily for Tay and Drew, the old boy had apparently never learned the benefits of putting his phone on silent at night. If it was, he risked missing a morning call from one of his adoring fans. Eventually, Burkey woke up, opened the door and let the stragglers in.



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Lay Day

Monday was lay day.

The less-hungover portion of the No Mercy crew - **Burke, Mark and Dean** - headed to Bowen Beach for a dip in the crystal clear water. After waiting 40 minutes for them to seemingly head out and catch their fish and chips, they eventually headed home.

Bernard, meanwhile, chauffeured Magoo around all day, with the **trusty screwdriver continuing to provide reliable service**, taking him out for breakfast and a trip to Shute Harbour for lunch.

Tay and Drew took a slightly different approach to recovery. **Straight to the pub for a schnitty brunch, and a hard solo or two.** Everyone recovers differently...

Race 4: Burkey Gets Screwed

Tuesday morning brought more discussion about the fuel. Magoo was adamant it was brand-new fuel, purchased and mixed up just before leaving Sydney. Burke remained unconvinced...

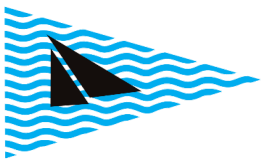
He swore the fuel looked cloudy when he poured it in, but decided to follow Magoo's suggestion and investigate whether the problem was in the carby. As they worked on the engine, Magoo offered some very important advice: **"Whatever you do, don't drop that screw in the water, Burkey."**

I don't think we need to tell you what happened next. **Plop.** The screw was gone. Burke looked at Magoo. Magoo looked at Burke. And somewhere beneath No Mercy, a tiny screw was beginning its new life on the floor of the Whitsundays. No Mercy had to sail out of the marina that day.

For what we actually came to do, though, go sailing, we were greeted with a beautiful southerly breeze. The course took us around North Molle Island, a route the Black Betty crew had already become very familiar with. This time, the navigation went much more smoothly, and Black Betty blasted away downwind, taking out the double on scratch and handicap.

Unfortunately for No Mercy, Black Betty seemed to have forgotten just how *humble* the No Mercy crew had been following their win earlier in the week. That afternoon, Magoo received at least **300 phone calls from his fans**, all of which he was delighted to take in the living room in front of everyone. And every conversation seemed to include the same question: **"How'd you go today, Burkey?"**

Once was funny. Twenty times was a) annoying if you sailed on No Mercy, or b) hilarious if you sailed on Black Betty.



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Race 5: The Final Countdown

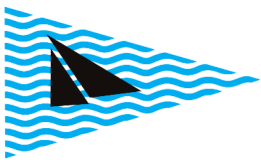
Wednesday morning was very light. No Mercy still had no engine and the bay was a complete glass-out. Racing was postponed on the water for two hours while everyone sat around waiting for the breeze to fill in. It was extremely hot, particularly for the Black Betty crew who were sitting inside a boat with a black deck soaking up the sun. A quick dip was not an option with multiple shark sightings in the starting area. The Jaws theme song was heard over the VHF.

Eventually, racing got underway with a shortened course in the bay.

After racing, Burke headed off to the mechanic to get a screw (pardon?) and, perhaps wisely, purchase some **fresh fuel**. Magoo still swears the carby was the issue!

With five races completed, No Mercy sat in **first place overall**, with just one race remaining. The competition was getting serious.

Some members of the Black Betty crew were particularly forthcoming with their suggestions for how they might deal with the opposition. **"We could sink them?"** This remained a suggestion only.



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Race 6: Right Place, Right Time

Thursday was the final day, with winds originally predicted to reach 30+ knots. Thankfully, the forecast didn't quite deliver that much excitement, with around 15–20 knots making for some fast and fun legs around the bay.

On the final gybe into the bottom mark, Magoo found himself on the leeward side of the boat just before the manoeuvre. Normally, this may have looked like another one of those classic Magoo moments where everyone wonders exactly how he ended up there. But, as usual, things somehow worked out.

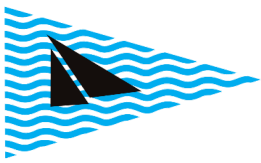
Bernard turned the boat into the gybe and, as Black Betty came onto the new side, Magoo was perfectly positioned exactly where he needed to be. Bernard handed the stick straight over to him. No scrambling across the boat, and pipping two larger IRC division yachts on buoy room in the process. Needless to say, **he was pretty chuffed with himself.**

Whether it was expert tactical positioning or another happy Magoo accident is still up for debate. Either way, it worked.

Black Betty must have reconsidered their earlier strategy of sabotage, as rather than attempting to sink No Mercy's direct competition, they decided to blow the entire division out of the water. Black Betty went on to take the **double on the day**, but No Mercy came through to take out the **overall win for the regatta.**

A fitting end to a week of close racing, plenty of banter and just enough chaos to keep everyone entertained.





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Post Match Celebrations

The presentation night happily coincided with Miss Zali's birthday, and needless to say it was a big one for the less sensible crewmembers. Following the presentation, dinner and the pub, Zali really started hitting her straps, getting up on stage and busing out some Eminem karaoke for everyone's listening pleasure. The night continued through Airlie Beach's bars and nightclubs, wrapping up at 3:30am and beyond for some. Luckily the door was left ajar for the ferals this time!

And So the Adventure Continued...

The teams returned to the Club on Friday to finish packing up and have one last beer at the Whitsunday Sailing Club, some dustier than others. When the hard solo doesn't do the job, you know it's been a big one...



Tay, Drew, Marshall and Bernard headed to the airport at midday for their 2pm flight. Burke, Magoo, Mark and Dean were planning to head home later that evening.

In true Jetstar form, the 2pm flight was delayed due to an "engineering issue".

In what seemed like a fitting end to an event full of questionable logistics, both flights ended up leaving within 10 minutes of each other at around 7:30pm.

So, after days of racing, road trips, rooftop tents, navigational errors, homelessness, beers, bacon and egg rolls, late nights, early mornings and champagne sailing in the crystal clear Whitsunday waters, the Airlie Beach Race Week adventure finally came to an end.

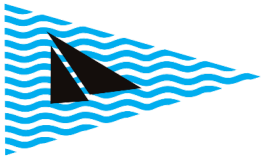


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A huge congratulations to everyone involved, and especially to **No Mercy** on taking out the overall division win.

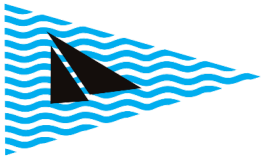
And to **Magoo and the Black Betty crew**, what an effort. At nearly 80, with two busted shoulders and no voice by the end of the regatta (thank God), Magoo is still towing, rigging and racing his skiff-on-steroids around the Whitsundays, proving that age is no barrier when salt water is in your veins. His crew couldn't speak highly enough of his downwind steering throughout the week, and watching him out on the water doing what he loves was a special part of the trip.





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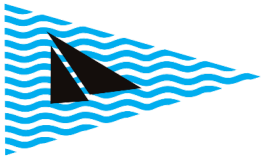
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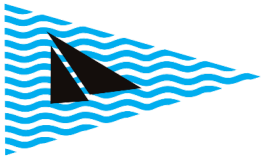
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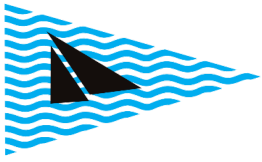
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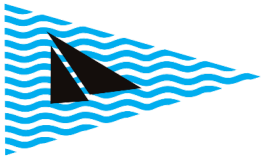
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