



AUSTRALIA

## Mini 12 "Australia II" sails across Bass Strait

From information supplied by Peter Chadwick

### Ron's solo sail no small effort

By ANDREW PROBYN

BASS Strait is a formidable stretch of water for any sea-going vessel. But when your yacht is no bigger than a surf ski, the sea's treachery seems greater.

Knowing full well the dangers in store, veteran Geelong yachtsman Ron Spence decided to sail solo across Bass Strait in his tiny 3.75metre (12ft 6in) fibreglass yacht.

Mr Spence, 70, a retired engineer, left Apollo Bay on Saturday and arrived late on Tuesday in Stanley, Tasmania.

The 280km trip took longer than expected because he had to break his trip at King Island because of bad weather.



Mr Spence's friend and sometime sailing partner Graham Martini said his mate had overcome ill health to achieve his goal.

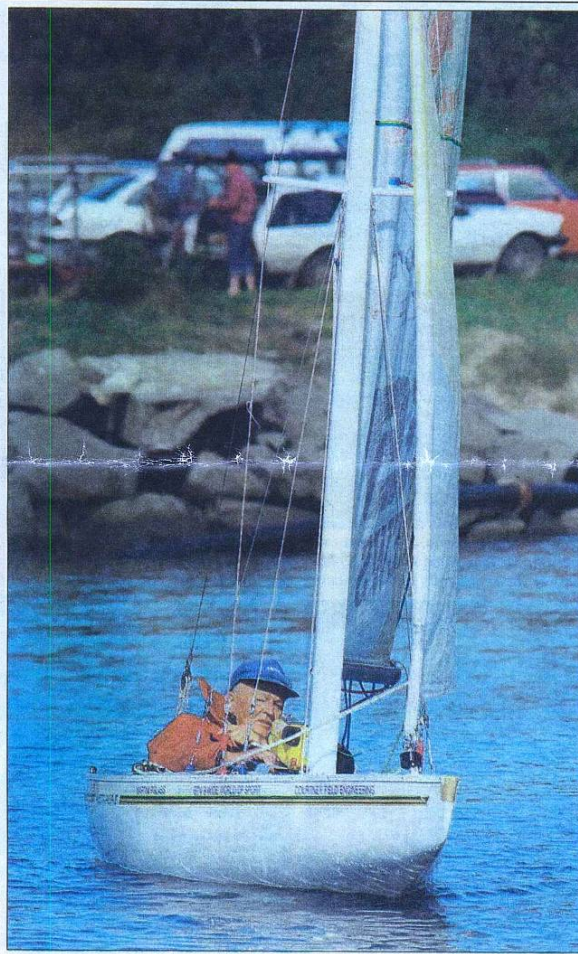
"Ron suffered a stroke a couple of years ago and since then he's had rheumatic fever which immobilised him for six months," Mr Martini said.

"He's a really remarkable fellow — very lively and intense — nothing seems to worry him."

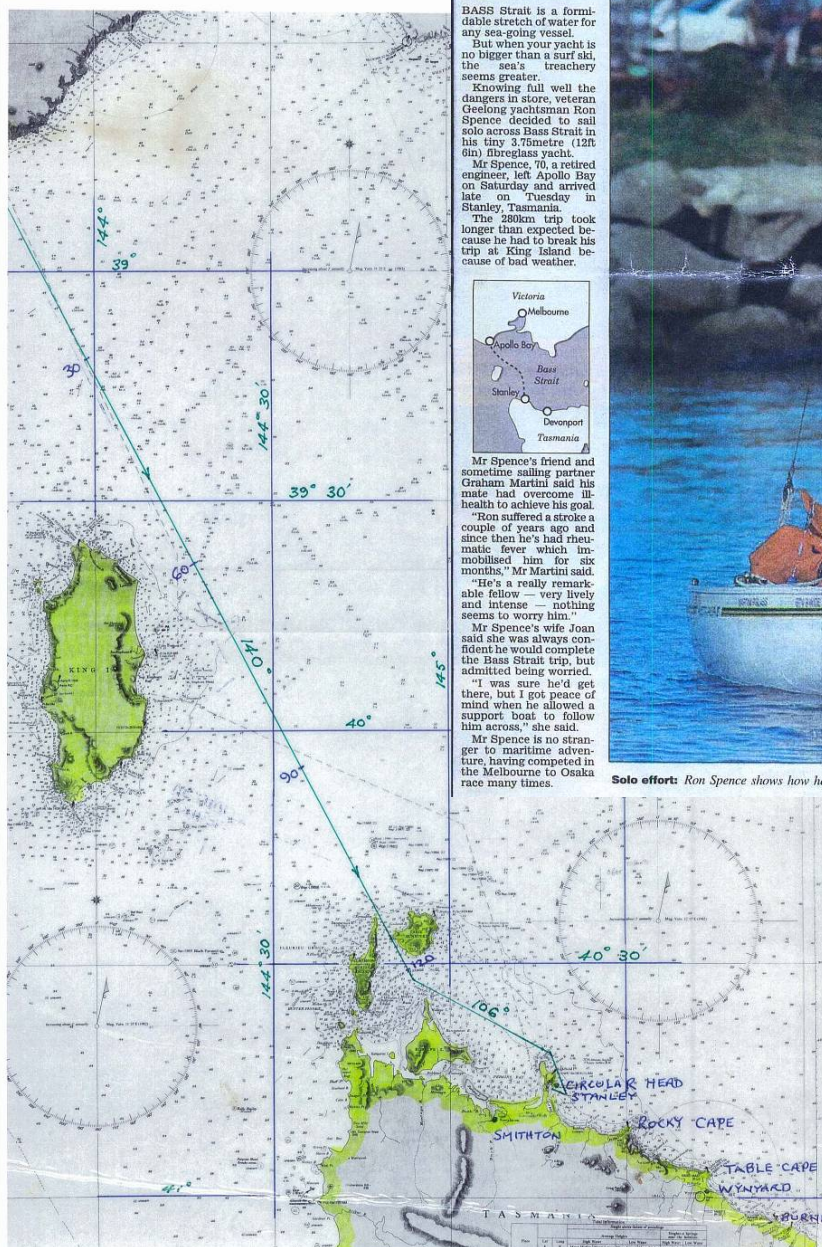
Mr Spence's wife Joan said she was always confident he would complete the Bass Strait trip, but admitted being worried.

"I was sure he'd get there, but I got peace of mind when he allowed a support boat to follow him across," she said.

Mr Spence is no stranger to maritime adventure, having competed in the Melbourne to Osaka race many times.



Solo effort: Ron Spence shows how he sailed his tiny yacht across Bass Strait. Picture: GEELONG ADVERTISER



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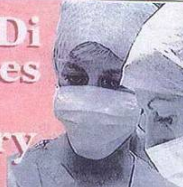


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# Strait conquered

## Veteran yachtsman crosses in 12-footer

By Mandy Woodward

BASS STRAIT yachting veteran Ron Spence yesterday completed the biggest boating challenge of his life.

At 10 a.m. he arrived at Stanley after crossing the treacherous stretch of water in a 12-foot version of America Cup yacht Australia II.

What made the challenge even more amazing was that Mr Spence (69) suffered a stroke three years ago.

"He has great determination and when he sets his mind to do something he generally succeeds," said friend Dr Glyn Priddle.

"If you were a betting man you would be very foolish to bet against him."

Dr Priddle was one of three support crew who sailed across in the 32-foot masthead sloop Quickmatch.

The voyage, which left Apollo Bay in Victoria at 11.30 a.m. on Saturday, was not for self-gratification as Mr Spence raised \$8000 for charity.

The support yacht was used to assist Mr Spence with navigation and radio communication.

However, originally, Mr Spence had planned to do the crossing alone.

Dr Priddle, who is also a yachtsman and has sailed with Mr Spence for years, admitted he was worried about the trip.

"With his past medical history, I did not know how he would react to the hazards of the trip," he said.

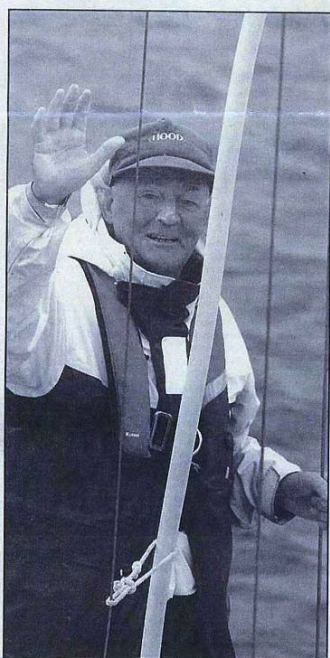
However, as Mr Spence clearly admitted he is a "very stubborn person".

He said the idea for the trip started as a small niggling in the back of his mind that he would like to tackle Bass Strait in a smaller boat.

In November last year it became more serious and he started to look around for the right vessel.

It eventually came in the form of a loan from boat owner and Queenscliff publican Warwick Henderson.

Mr Spence then waited till autumn for the crossing because this time of year usually provides the most stable weather.



**SALT OF THE SEA:** Yachtsman Ron Spence waves to well-wishers on his arrival at Stanley after crossing Bass Strait. Picture: Phil Payne.

Luckily, the weather during the crossing was relatively calm, apart from on Sunday afternoon when 30-knot winds and rough seas forced an unscheduled stop at Grassy on King Island.

However, Mr Spence said he was not concerned about any danger.

"I've been retired for 11 years and cannot find enough time to do everything I want to do. I'm comfortably off and if I did not think I'd make it, I wouldn't have gone. Life's too good at the moment."

He said he always had it in his



**A DROP IN THE OCEAN:** The diminutive size of 69-year-old Ron Spence's Australia II replica is illustrated as it passes Stanley wharf after the Bass Strait epic. Picture: Phil Payne.

mind that he was never more than 25 miles from land at any one time.

Anti-cramp tablets, six apples, a container of dried fruit and nuts and liferaft barley sugar kept him going through the trip.

The unscheduled King Island stop also allowed for a 12-hour sleep.

Mr Spence left Grassy at 9.30 a.m. on Monday.

Dolphins accompanied him at times, but he said the most magical moment was seeing an albatross.

Mr Spence is a veteran of Bass Strait crossings, participating in the

Sydney to Hobart about seven times and the Melbourne to Hobart about five times — a race he won in 1973.

He also holds the race record for the Queenscliff to Devonport race, which he set in 1990 with Fuji Logi-Tech.

This crossing raised \$8000 for Geelong United Way, a collective of charities.

Mr Spence will return to Melbourne on Quickmatch, which will leave Stanley when the weather permits.

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