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# Syd Fischer hopes to go with sea boots on

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At 86, sailing legend Syd Fischer will take part in his 45th Sydney to Hobart this year.

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"O

ne of the great attractions of sailing with Syd is that he is determined to always do well," says Tony Ellis, who has sailed 40 Sydney to Hobart races with 86-year-old skipper Syd Fischer. "I think he'll just keep doing it. He loves the camaraderie and it being a team sport."

With days to go before the start, Fischer is down at Sydney City Marine, the large boatyard below the Anzac Bridge that he bought in 2011 when it went into administration. He watches as his 30-metre super maxi Ragamuffin 100 is lowered into the water and a team continue with the boat's final preparations.

Fischer has always been a team player. He played first grade rugby league for the Manly Sea Eagles and was also involved in surfboat racing, as a sweep (captain) for North Steyne and Bilgola surf lifesaving clubs.

"You shouldn't get up yourself," he says. "That means you're self-interested and not a team player. Nobody's special in a team. It's the team that is special."

That said, Fischer's crew for this year's race is an impressive collection of professional and amateur sailors, including the boat captain, David Witt, an 18-foot skiff world champion and Volvo Ocean racer, and British yachtsman, Matt Humphries, who at 22 was the youngest skipper to compete in the epic Whitbread Round the World race.

This year will be Fischer's 45th Sydney to Hobart race. He won line honours in 1988 and 1990, and won the race overall in 1992. He holds the record of oldest skipper in the race with Auschwitz survivor and businessman John Walker, who skippered Impeccable at the same age in 2008. After years of steering Fischer now leaves that to others, but he still plays his part in making the boat go faster. He quietly observes what's going on and asks leading questions, what Ellis refers to as "prodding". Also, as his balance is not as good as it used to be, he has given up the night watches and gets some rest.

However, Fischer is not winding down. In October he won line honours and became the record holder for the Hong Kong to Vietnam race on Ragamuffin 90, his 27.4-metre Dubois yacht. He bought Ragamuffin 100 in 2012. Previously known as Investec Loyal, the Elliott yacht won line honours in the 2011 Sydney Hobart, and last year, as Ragamuffin Loyal, it came second over the line. Earlier this year, Fischer did his first Transpac Race (2225 nautical miles from Los Angeles to Hawaii) on it, and won monohull line honours. Since then it has been up on the slips at Sydney City Marine undergoing further modifications.

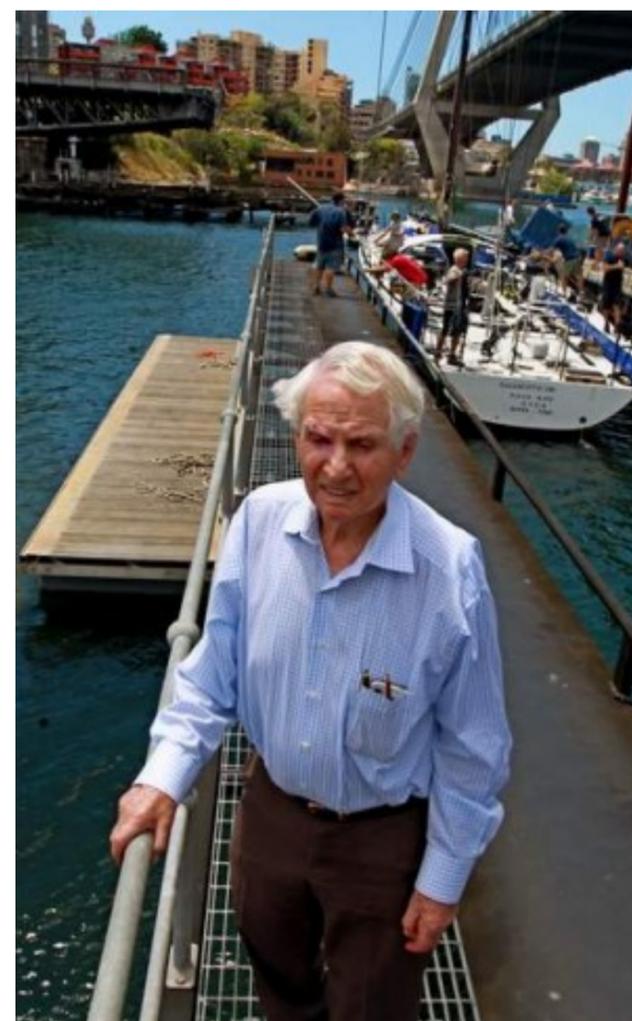
Fischer has won numerous yachting awards and an OBE for sporting achievements. He has competed in eight Admiral's Cup races, seven of which he was captain of the Australian team, and he has run five America's Cup campaigns. His last America's Cup campaign was in 2000. After that, he'd had enough.

"It's a real challenge to put a team together, and I never had the money that Bond or some of the Americans had," he said. With people in the game such as billionaire Larry Ellison, Fischer says he definitely would not do it now.

James Spithill, who skippered Ellison's Oracle Team USA to victory this year, steered Fischer's boat, Young Australia, in the 2000 America's Cup, making him - at 20 - the youngest helmsman in the event.

Fischer first met Spithill, when at 17 he won NSW Youth Yachtsman of the Year.

"I liked his style," Fischer says, "and I asked if he'd like to come out on a bigger boat." Fischer took him out that Saturday on his 15-metre yacht



Old salt: Syd Fischer oversees preparations on Ragamuffin 100 this week. Photo: Ben Rushton

and told Spithill he was steering. "He was using the helm too much," Fischer says. "I said, 'We'll balance it, just limit the movement of the wheel and get boat speed'. That's what he did and we won the race."

Fischer saying he'll die with his sea boots on. "I've told the crew that if I do happen to croak, put me in a sail bag, but win the bloody race."

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