

Offshore Insights with Mark Richards of Grand Banks Yachts



With a storied offshore racing career and his role at the helm of Grand Banks Yachts, Mark Richards brings a rare perspective that bridges high-performance sailing and world-class yacht design. From skippering *Wild Oats XI* to multiple Sydney-Hobart victories to leading innovations in bluewater cruising, Richards shares insights that Marion Bermuda Race (MBR) skippers-especially first-timers-can take to heart.

Q: You've had incredible offshore racing success, including skippering *Wild Oats XI* to multiple Sydney-Hobart wins. What's the biggest mindset shift sailors must make when preparing for a long offshore race like the Marion Bermuda Race (MBR) compared to shorter coastal regattas?

A: Distance races like the Marion Bermuda and Sydney Hobart are not easy-they can be mentally draining. A lot of these races are really won at night. About a month before Sydney-Hobart, I shift my schedule and begin staying up at night so I'm acclimated. You have to know how draining it can be and prepare yourself to stay fully focused for long periods.

Q: The Marion Bermuda Race encourages celestial navigation and traditional seamanship. How do you balance modern technology with classic sailing skills in offshore racing?

A: Driving a boat is still done by feel, and that's essential. Finding the balance is key. On our boats, when we're going downwind at 35 knots, everything happens fast-we rely on the best technology to support our decisions. But tech doesn't replace the skill of the helmsman; it enhances it. Safety and performance both depend on that balance.

Q: You've spoken before about teamwork and trust onboard. For teams doing the Marion Bermuda for the first time, what's your advice for building strong onboard dynamics?

A: Everyone must know their limitations-it's not just about having the best sailors. Before you leave the dock, identify your least experienced crew member and have honest conversations about strengths and weaknesses. As skipper, transparency helps build a cohesive team. Offshore racing is serious, and when your crew knows you take that responsibility seriously, it builds trust. That's what

creates a winning dynamic.



Q: Nutrition, rest, and endurance are often overlooked in offshore prep. What strategies have worked for you during long-distance races?

A: Start resting before the race and be ready for long nights. I've taken the helm all night and it's made the difference. Races are often won at night, so arrive rested and prepared. Don't underestimate the physical and mental endurance required.

Q: At Grand Banks, you've emphasized performance and luxury in offshore cruising vessels. What design elements from racing have influenced your approach-and any comfort tips for MBR sailors?

A: It might sound surprising, but many principles we used 40 years ago-like prepreg composite construction-still apply. Light, strong boats perform better and are more efficient. Our yachts are designed to perform well in the mid-speed range, around 21 knots, while also offering a 2,000-mile range at 10 knots. Just like in sailing, efficiency is everything.

Q: What are some of the most common boat prep oversights-even among experienced sailors-that could make or break a race like MBR?

A: Preparation. I can't say it enough: prepare, prepare, prepare. We think through every worst-case scenario and ensure we're ready with a plan. That mindset applies to our racing and to business. You also need to really know your boat-when to reef, how it feels in different conditions. That's all part of being prepared.

Q: What's one unforgettable offshore moment that shaped how you approach seamanship or leadership-and how does it influence your work today at Grand Banks?

A: Just crossing the finish line is always a thrill. But starting the Sydney-Hobart on Boxing Day, with its deep tradition in Australian yachting, stands out. You're surrounded by a huge spectator fleet-it's a moment you never forget. Enjoying that moment grounds you, and it reminds me why we do what we do.

Photo courtesy of Wild Oats XI

MARION BERMUDA

