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Toughbooks in Action

Sydney to Hobart Yacht finds the way with Panasonic Toughbook.

Sydney-based 38 foot racing yacht, "Swish", competed in this year's Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race using navigation software loaded onto a Panasonic Toughbook CF-29.

Mounted on the yacht's chart table, the Toughbook played a vital role in the crew's safety throughout the race.

Swish is an experienced yacht, which over the past five years has completed numerous major east coast races; however this was the yacht's first Sydney to Hobart race.

Swish finished third in the 38 division and placed 39th overall. Steve Proud and William Hutchinson, co-owners of Swish and

members of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in Kirribilli, said as experienced yachtsman, safety was one of the most important elements of yacht racing.

The yacht has used Panasonic's Toughbook notebooks for the past three years and recently upgraded to the latest model.

The navigation software which runs on the Toughbook is called Ray Nav software. It combines a GPS, chart plotter and yacht performance data (speed, conditions of the boat) to analyse how the yacht should be performing under the weather and wind conditions.

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"Having the Toughbook with the navigation software provides a great sense of security and comfort for the skipper" said Hutchison.

"It's extremely reassuring, especially at night, to know where you are in relation to headlands and reefs," said Hutchison. "Not only does that give you an advantage while racing, but also as a general safety tool. There is also a data logging feature which records the performance of the yacht and enables the crew to replay races or coastal journeys after the event.

The Toughbook is connected to an external GPS receiver which is part of the yacht's instrumentation. It also has a CDMA modem which enables the crew to log on to weather reports from the Bureau of Meteorology.

Before using a Panasonic Toughbook, the *Swish* crew used a "small black and

white screen chart plotter for the basic navigation functions but found the larger, colour screen on the Toughbook to be of great benefit.

"Obviously in this industry the environments we are dealing with are some of the toughest," said Hutchison. "From time to time, a wave will come down into the cabin. Normal laptops used by other boats don't tend to last too long due to the pounding and banging and the salty environment which causes corrosion."

"The Panasonic Toughbook has a well deserved reputation for being able to withstand harsh situations, which is perfect for our yacht. We've had to sail and compete in a variety of wind and sea states and to be equipped with a reliable, hardy product is very reassuring."



Commenting on the 2006 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, "Steve Proud said", "The Toughbook performed very well during the race. It was an easier than average race, but nevertheless there were situations where there were 45 to 50 knot winds and a very confused sea state. The yacht was crashing and banging fairly violently. At one stage the boat fell off a big wave with a crash and other electronic equipment including the radio and the wind instruments failed, but the Panasonic Toughbook continued to be operational. It didn't skip a beat the whole way."

"Steve also noted" another instance where the Toughbook became the crew's lifesaver. "We hit a storm very suddenly off Port Macquarie," he explained. "The wind speeds reached over 150 kilometres an hour. The mainsail tore below the headboard within two to three minutes of the storm hitting, and we decided to cut it adrift. We had no idea where we were, but fortunately the Toughbook continued to function and assisted us in finding our location, leading us out of the storm."

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