


# Howard Roby

ANAESTHETIST  
OCEAN SWIMMER

## Howard Roby

B.Sci (Med) 1975  
MBBS (Hons) 1978  
D. Av Med (Otago) 1994  
FANZCA 1992  
FJFICM 2002

Pictured here at Rottneest



When Howard Roby came third in his age group in one of the original Cole Classic ocean races at Bondi Beach, the trophy – an embossed dinner plate – recording his triumph replaced his numerous medical testamurs in the prime place above his desk.

“I played a lot of water polo as a student and it helped me retain some semblance of sanity through that period. But once I started working, the long hours and being on call, it all became too difficult. As an anaesthetist, you don’t always have control over your time and inertia gradually took hold. Ten years later, I was unfit, overweight and grumpy, when my wife one day suggested I take myself for a swim until my mood improved.

“It was good to be back in the water but like many in my profession, I am very goal directed. It was difficult to maintain enthusiasm without a challenge, and that’s where ocean swimming came in. It provided the challenge and a focus.”

Most doctors, he believes, are obsessive compulsive – although long distance swimmers are possibly further along the scale than most.

In 1988, an 11 man relay team of which he was a member won a place in the Guinness Book of Records for continuous distance swimming. They swam 900 kilometres continuously in 233 hours in the 25 metre pool at the Sydney Football Stadium.

In 2002, he teamed with a friend to swim in the race

from Perth to Rottneest Island. For people unfamiliar with the event, the 21 kilometre distance between Perth and Rotto covers a frequently choppy strip of water with the added attraction of occasional (big) sharks. Swimmers mostly compete in teams but there is also a solo category.

Determined to attempt the event as a solo competitor, he returned to successfully complete the race in 2004. A later arthroscopy on his shoulder (and a few additional twinges in his knees) was a small price to pay.

His current swimming is a moderate three to four mornings a week, part of a group which includes some medicos but a greater number who are not. Through the summer months, and depending on children’s sporting commitments and other demands, he participates in ocean swims at some of the great Sydney beaches, Bondi, Bronte, Manly, Whale and Palm Beach.

“Swimming has been an important part of my life. I enjoy the exercise and the fitness, being able to eat what I like without worrying about weight. I sleep well at night, and it is an outlet for competition.

“It has also given me a whole life outside medicine, which I appreciate enormously.”