

The Vineyard - 2014

This was my SOL Yacht Club anniversary race. My try-out in the Turkey Chase in 2013 had easily persuaded me to start investing €35 a year to support what seemed likely to become a bit of an addiction for me (if it hadn't already! I had been a founding member of Les pauvres Suisse au vent des Globe in 2012 in another parallel universe). So, when the Blue Peter went up at The Cows at 15:00 UTC on Friday evening, down came my proud SOL burgee and up went Code "B" Keep Clear/Dangerous Goods/Racing.

What a great community of friendly fanatics we have. The chat is always good and often very informative. Rainbow Chaser – despite being mightily distracted by the World Equestrian Games in Normandy – found time to point out the existence of local knowledge to be found on FaceBook. I linked to the URL to find a short clip of a be-blazered gentleman – perhaps a Flag Officer of our hosts The Stamford Yacht Club – sporting a very fine moustache, tipping the middle of the Sound as the way to go. Hmm..

I next saw javakeda inviting one of his compatriots to have a look at <http://solfans.org/> which must be something quite new as I had not come across yet: a joint blog initiative by java, kroppy and NZL Scotsman. It's well worth a look; java has a wealth of knowledge that he doesn't seem to mind sharing (!) and kroppy has developed a tool called 'spinnacer' which I haven't checked out yet, but I suspect is going to make my own 'wonderful workbooks' partially redundant. And from Scotty, there is a 'blow-by-blow' account of how he was just pipped by rumskib in the Sail Around Turkey, as well as a comprehensive introduction to the free-to-air router qtVlm.

Anyway, back to the Java King's invite and what I subsequently gleaned, quote:

The wind is forecast to clock 90° in the first six hours, giving racers a port tack start, and then a long reach up Long Island Sound on starboard. Slipping through Plum Gut, the starboard tack continues until the clocking wind forces a tack toward the sea. By that time, TWS is just over 6kts.

Now when confronted with conflicting Delphic predictions, my policy is to always back the more hirsute sage, so when the "P" dropped, it was off to the Long Island shore as fast as my Santa Cruz 52 would go. I think that was 6.3kn at 81.2° TWA in 4.8kn TWS or thereabouts. This first hitch on port into the shore, was possibly the trickiest part of the whole race. How much should one leave the veering wind tighten your TWA before starting to bear off? How should you let your TWA gradually come up to close-hauled? And, how long should you continue close-hauled into the header before tacking onto starboard? Not easy and only answerable with SOP judgment.

I didn't sail the curve very well, but did time the tack just right; rumskib did it the other way around and went into shore too far, IMO. Winston4 got both pretty spot-on. By now the first WX had come through and our predictor lines were showing a nicely freeing fetch which could take you all the way on one tack out of the Sound to the Buzzard Bay Light. Different to javakeda's prediction and tempting. But the more South you kept the more wind you would hold; rumskib hadn't gone as far into shore as he had for nothing. And I vaguely remembered in last year's race jinking through Plum Gut had paid (others) dividends as well. So I held my height, luffed up at Mulford Point and steered deftly through the little strait between Pine Point and Slartibartfast's Slip-Up offshore.

I was not alone, but plenty of the southern group kept North of Plum Island too, and not much later the best of them (HappyHour) was top of the leaderboard, whilst our schism further out to sea were down in the 50s. More hmm..

I now made my best move of the race, choosing to not fight the heading breeze but instead to foot free and fast into what was eventually going to turn into a lift. Most of the others did the opposite and stayed pretty close-hauled out in the slightly bigger breeze. Imagine my delight to find myself third on rounding the Light with only Winston4 and Dingo, who had kept further South, barely ahead of me. Barely ahead of me, but barely behind me were Franci, rumskib, naccr, rafa, Tyger, simemali, sassy63, number1, and javakeda (naturally enough). We had all gone out to sea via Plum Gut.

I am a compulsive trimmer and, failing sheets and guys to adjust, I tend to sail online with my hand on the tiller making continuous small heading changes, switching from constant TWA to COG as I think appropriate. No idea if this helps, but somehow or other I passed Dingo and kept the chasing pack at bay. But then – it always happens – a near disaster. Away from the puter doing a household chore I missed the luff up back into the Sound at Mulford and careened on 15° or so off course into lighter wind for a minute or two. Dingo went ahead and Franci came up alongside. Winston4 was gone. Uhoh..

Always correct an error fully. Never hope maybe you had been reading it wrong anyway. Tiller down. Trim. Trim, trim. Hard luck, Dingo, great, great race. Well done Winston4; a perfect race.