

The Hong Kong Kettle - 2014

Just back from eight days of irregular watch hours taking a Lagoon 52 from Pula to Palma IRL, setting my alarm for 03:55 Summer CET was not a big ask for me. However, as usual, plenty of other SOLers from the Old World were also awake for the off just outside Victoria Harbour, to join our friends from (somewhat) more attuned time zones.

With very small variations in pressure and angle for the initial reach to Lo Shue Point, the only sensible course IMO was a straight line. Of course, those who sailed slightly freer holding more for the middle of the Lei Yue Strait generated slightly more resolved VMC and were the early leaders.

At Lo Shue, a first and important decision was required: pass to the north or the south of Tung Lung. I had only done a rough distance check and in terms of sailing distance there seemed to be very little in it. Pressure too was as good as equal either side of the island. Angles then? Opinions were pretty evenly divided. I went south, as did dingo and tyger. karriv, notably, went the northern route, together with karaoke and a few others.

Whatever it is with my ship bonknhoot, she always seems to take a while to get going. In other words, for reasons beyond my ken, bonk, by the time we got to the turning mark out beyond the Tahong Channel, was a clear couple of boat lengths behind the leaders of the southern group. Moreover, the northern group had a small jump on all of the southerners.

Rounding marks is as much an art form in SOL as it is IRL, and the same rules apply; i.e. if you come barrelling in with sails well-eased, you will overshoot and stall (loose performance in SOL parlance) as you try to change gears to a close-hauled course. Thus, as we came away from the mark, any advantages the northerners had gained had been handed back.

With the wind now 'freshened' to more than 7.5kn, our Open40s could point above 40° TWA, with the result being that a single fetch on starboard into a mildly heading breeze was going to get you all the way to Steep Island. karriv and a few others had had that spotted and were well away before bonknhoot tacked and then eased sheets a bit. How it was that I was able to hang in with that bunch to leeward and actually pass some of them as we slowly but surely started getting headed off I confess to not fully comprehending. Perhaps there was 0.1kn more wind that bit to windward. Perhaps the leeward bunch were pinching a bit. Who knows?

As we tacked for Steep and eased sheets to take the corners off the island, I was more than a bit "steeped" (in luck, as they say in Ireland; Paul W and Jamie Mac will know what I mean), and as we started down the run, bonk miraculously went P1. Since the predictor line was modestly heading us off onto a progressively more southerly course, I was surprised nobody had gybed earlier when I did. However, after I gybed, that they had reason was immediately clear, as 30 minutes or so down the track I would be going into another but much more severe heading bend and on the outside of the bunch. I was going to have to gybe back early, so I noted the extent of the bend and drafted a layline for gybing back onto, after my initial gybe back. Do you follow?

I gybed and hoped the bunch to the East would be less aware of the extent to which they would be able to soak down to Po Toi and would tend to leave their gybe onto starboard a little late. They did and I gybed ahead of them to windward and set about furiously adjusting TWA for continuous max downwind VMG. It worked and bonk went into the sequence of final course changes to clear the various points around Po Toi, Beaufort and Bluff Head still P1, 0.2nm ahead of Tyger. And so it stayed. Thank you Hong Kong, thank you SOL and thank you fellow competitors.

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