

3CR Caen Channel Craig 2014

As we have reached November the 3CR was the penultimate race of the 2014 SYC championship. There are two throw outs in the series score allowed. Because of lack of time I had to abstain from racing in two events. Therefore I really wanted to get a good result in this race. And I like the boat and the course.

Those were three reasons to enter the race, although at the time of the start the first leg of the RTW race was not finished yet and the Southern Oceans Dash was scheduled to start the following day. And I had an occasional look at the weather situation for the Aleutian Cruise TR. I think three to four simultaneous races are too much, even for an addict like myself. Hopefully the SRC will be more considerate in the future and propose a less densely populated race calendar.

The race started on Saturday the 1st of November at 18:00 UT in 10 knots from the SSE as a 33 mile reaching leg towards the first mark at Saint Marcouf. I remembered from previous years that the direct course to the mark was obstructed by some small islands. A short while into the race I decided to deviate from the initial straight line course towards the southern tip of the first island in favour of a more offshore course, because the wind was veering slightly to the South. That change did not pay off, because I rounded the mark around place 25.

On the next leg across the Channel the direct course was blocked by a big dent in the polar diagram. Most competitors chose the fast reaching course to the NNW initially, barely clearing the coast of Normandy near Point de Barfleur. Around midnight UT we bore away to a run to the NNE that brought the fleet across the Channel and I could get some sleep. After the 0430 WX on Sunday morning it was time to switch to reaching mode again. When I reached Bembridge at the Eastern tip of the Isle of Wight shortly before 6a.m. it turned out I had gained a few places and advanced to 3rd.

The course through the Solent was uncomplicated, because in SOL we don't have to take tidal currents into consideration. I sailed in a straight line from Bembridge to Ryde and to the mark off Cowes. From there it was a close hauled course towards Hurst narrows at the Western entrance of the Solent, all on port tack.

Above about 11 knots of wind speed the polar diagram of the mini 6.5 has a peculiar shape. One can point rather high at 35° TWA or crack off to 50° TWA for a substantial increase in boat speed with a small dent in between. Because of a predicted backing of the wind I took advantage of the latter when I left the Solent in second position behind PetrM shortly after 08:30 UT. Because the wind was still turning to the right we began to tack in short legs along the opposite coast after crossing Christchurch Bay and Poole Bay.

After clearing Anvil Point and Saint Albans Head I sailed for about 10 miles into Portland Bay before tacking to starboard into the open water of the Channel. The next tack around 19:20 UT on Sunday evening brought me on a course across Lyme Bay towards Start Point.

I could fetch Start Point, but not the next Headland, Prawle Point. After I tacked South I met again with PetrM, who had delayed his previous tack and followed a more offshore course. It was interesting to see how we were following different strategies. He was pointing in order to clear Bolt Head and proceed into Plymouth Bay while I was sailing more aggressively towards the right shift which brought me into Salcombe Bay and required two more tacks. I can't say which strategy was faster, but it was good racing.

After about 5 miles into Plymouth Bay we tacked around 03:30 UT to starboard on a SW course and back to port at around 08:30 towards Lizard Point. PetrM was again tacking a bit further offshore. Once past the Lizard the wind direction was progressively turning to the left. This allowed to switch between pointing and reaching mode. When PetrM's and my course converged again it became apparent that I had gained a small lead.

As an aside, it is funny that the SOL map has an island at the approximate position of Runnel Stone (50°01.3'N, 005°40.4'W), whereas the real Runnel Stone is permanently submerged since its head was chopped off by a steam ship in 1921. That led me to fantasize about a future SOL enhancement where each BBQ results in a small dent in the coastline. In the long run that could lead to a SOL world completely covered with water and put an end to the permanent threat of an unexpected BBQ.

I had to do the turn around Gwennap Head at the South of Cornwall on DC. The turn itself was OK, but still somewhat inexplicable to me there must have been a stale DC command in the queue, because 0.2 miles after rounding the headland my boat resumed its previous course. Until I noticed what had happened I had already lost about a mile over PetrM. That reminded me of the 2012 Carib Rum Race, when I lost a first place position to PetrM because of a TWA sign error in a DC (presumably the most popular error in SOL).

Luckily I was still slightly ahead of nacrr in third position, and that order never changed for the remaining 650 miles of the race.