

Gasparilla Raid 2014 Because the start is inside Charlotte Harbor the first challenge of the Gasparilla Raid is obviously to get out of the bay without running aground.

From last year's event I remembered that the fastest route at that time was through Matacha Pass between the Florida coast and Pine Island to the west. The other options are through Pine Sound between Pine Island and the outer barrier Islands (La Costa, Captiva, Sanibel) and directly into the Gulf of Mexico through Boca Grande Channel south of Gasparilla Island. Those were the three options I have been considering prior to the start. Eventually I decided to enter the northern Pine Island Sound and exit through Captiva Pass as a compromise between getting to the better breeze offshore and covering less distance. And I really wanted to avoid the maze of islands in the east.

I started on DC, but left an hour early from work in order to be able to navigate through the small islands of the northern Pine Island Sound. It was fun to find a route on optimum downwind TWA through the obstacles, but it was more fun to eventually get into open water. StInGFI was following a similar strategy, but found a path with two gybes less, and that gave him a small lead when we entered the Gulf of Mexico around 17:30 UT, slightly ahead of the majority of the fleet exiting through Boca Grand Channel further North. At that time Jawz was at the top of the leader board, following the most direct eastern route, but I didn't envy him at all because of all those small islands obstructing the way.

Offshore the northerly breeze was gradually increasing from 6 knots to 11 knots, but later that night and the next morning it was predicted to back to the north-east. I decided to gybe to port at about 22:00 UT, a little earlier than most other boats. I feel that was crucial for the outcome of this leg. I went to sleep after setting a bunch of DCs based on the 22:30 WX. They were supposed to steer the boat through yet another Boca Grande Channel, this one separating Boca Grande Key and the Dry Tortugas at the end of the Florida keys. The DCs were good enough. When I woke up the next morning a little late, the boat was still afloat and clear of the hazards, requiring no intervention. A few other boat were not as lucky. Notably StInGFI and karriv had breakfast on the beach of the Dry Tortugas.

The remaining 50 miles to the first mark were a fast reach in a north-easterly wind decreasing from 10 to 6 knots. I gybed around the Treasure Ship mark around 09:10 UT more than half a mile ahead of freudenoli, and the eventual podium winners peskasail and maduro.

My strategy for the leg to Isla Perez was to stay north of the rhumbline in expectation of stronger winds, especially towards the end of the leg. And I wanted to stay away from Cuba, because I had crashed into that island twice in the 2011 edition of this race. Not repeating that mistake was one of my objectives for this race. When using a coarse resolution my router suggested a more direct course, but I decided to disregard that.

As a rule I don't closely follow the tracks of my competitors. Partly because of lack of time and partly because I work with the theory, that if I can find the fastest route to the next mark, there is nothing the other boats can do about it. Just like in IRL sailing.

Anyway, when I did look at the fleet the following afternoon, I found that I had obviously lost the lead to a group of boats led by maduro, Ned\_Leo and zappe that had followed a more southerly route and were approaching Isla Perez from the east instead of from the north.

Rounding Isla Perez required a high speed gybe first followed by heading up to close hauled shortly afterwards. It was further complicated by the fact that I was doing my first run of the Ornö Runt race at the same time, and that was requiring constant attention. But quite a few other boats had various degrees of difficulty rounding the mark, too. I was lucky to be still in the top ten when I left the island, trailing maduro by over 4 miles.

The 480 miles long finishing leg was upwind first. Towards the end the wind direction was predicted to shift from initially north-east to east. Therefore I favoured the right hand side of the course. I was able to pass a few boats and even close the gap to maduro to about half a mile, but because I was again not paying attention to my competitors, I can't really say how that came about. Luckily I found the time to take care of the boat on the approach to the finish. That saved me from the embarrassment of missing the finish line, as I did in 2011, so I have achieved my second objective for this race.

Thanks everyone for racing, congratulations to race winner maduro and podium finisher peskasail

rumskib / November 2014