

Race Report for Zembu in the SWR2014-2015 Leg 4 - Sanya to Auckland.

I should say first that due to lack of time, I don't race lots of SOL races – also that the main reason is to compete with a friend of mine, sailing “thenemesis” rather than to reach the first few places.

We just do the long races, because doing that together with the use of the Bluewater Weather Router, gives a lower intensity of participation – for us, the short races require too much involvement over a short period.

For this race I began with little hope as some minor emergency made me forget to check on the day before the race what the start time would be. So I woke up around 0730 UTC on the 8th, my first thought being “I wonder when that race starts”.

Then found that it had started approximately 1.5 hours before. So I got going, noting my opponent's two emails “Why don't you start” and “You must be spitting blood!”.

The next difficulty was that I was to be away from home on holiday in St Lucia from 10th Feb to 25th. (But I could use a pc there). By evening of the 9th we were near the North of the Philippines. My trusty opponent had agreed to shepherd me around there if necessary (although we are competing – we behave with the utmost chivalry in preventing groundings). However the dc course I set on 10th just after the 0430 wx took Zembu around the North of the Philippines without need for help, and I was able to get back on line at around 1800 St Lucia time which was 2200 UTC.

From there the weather led the excellent Bluewater to guide me North Easterly, and as all participants will know many were led to go very far North. However, for some good reason Bluewater did not send me so far North, and I was pleased about this as Zembu's turn to the South East came before “thenemesis”, so giving me a lead.

But would this last, I wondered; fearing that he and those who were still further North but travelling faster to the East would eventually overtake me as they came South East on stronger winds. However as we know, most of those Northerly folks were delayed!

On the long journey Southwards Bluewater kept me mostly on a maximum VMG course, keeping Eastwards. No point in going too much Westwards to go faster, as to get back from there would mean loss of speed. I was surprised to find that Zembu's position varied up and down between 2nd and 7th for much of that time.

In this period the excellent Smo took the lead and I was surprised to learn that he uses no router, so well done that man!

By 25th, the journey home from holiday meant another 18 hours out of touch, but there were no obstacles in Zembu's way and the wx's in that period must have been consistent as I found Zembu's position very close to Bluewater's forecast..

By 27th after the 2230 wx, I was beginning to think that I might have a chance of winning and I emailed “thenemesis” - “I think I have a good chance of winning this one. What do you think?” He replied “Very probably.”

Coming Southwards offshore from New Zealand it was obvious that Zembu had to go to the East (as confirmed by Bluewater); so out towards Great Barrier Island and then South West and South East across the Hauraki Gulf.

By this time I was running many routes on Bluewater – to help choose whether to go North or South of Motutapu Island. There was just a 2 minute difference but it made me choose the Southerly route.

I noted later that most had chosen the other route, but I still felt confident. But at the turn around the Southerly promontory of Motutapu, it seemed to me that the others had made faster progress than I had expected.

On the last 6 nm stretch I chose a curving track, aiming to keep best speed I could, intending to reach the finish line near its closest proximity. At the last, as Exmeromotu coming from the North East turned around the North Head waypoint, I was pretty sure he had won. I panicked and altered course slightly, taking the shortest route, which was also at slower speed. As Exmeromotu said on chat, maybe had I stayed as before things would be different.

It was certainly an exciting 15 minutes at the end. A surprise for me to be in such a position, which I think shows that there is a lot of luck in sailing. But of course I would get no-where without Bluewater and the advice I had from Aaron Gage, his tools, and the advice and tools of Eddie Dost (Brainaid).

I take great consolation from the thought that unless Exmeromotu also started 1.5 hours late, Zembu completed in a shorter travel time!