

Beach To Beach 1 – 2015

With guests arriving for the weekend, I had decided that the two scheduled SOL beach runs were not going to have a bonknhoot entry, until, when I had a quick peak “just for piggy” I realised that Leg 1 wouldn’t really interfere with the weekend! Still smarting from a disastrous missing of the finish line in Ensenada, I simply had to change my mind.

Now before I lose you in the labyrinths of my mental machinations, some heartfelt praise for the winner and runner-up of this year’s edition of what turned out to be a very lengthy sprint are appropriate. A first Gold Medal for Tupsu, and yet another Podium for A2, as ever building his race from behind(-ish). If A2 was on the Ladder, I’m pretty sure he’d be challenging rumskib for the overall lead. Hurrah, hurrah. One each, let’s not get carried away.

K, I downloaded the detailed polar and compared it against the polar we sailed on Winnebago – still the same. I checked the beacons and the Line in the Sandy Strait were where they were last year – yes. Finally I checked the weather forecast – oh dear.

Clear enough was that the only course out of the traps would be a straight beeline to the corner out of Tin Can Bay. But what course should one head up to at the corner: close-hauled, or what would become close-hauled when it would be time to tack, or a course equivalent to max VMC, or something in between? I set a DC of 28⁰ to fire in what I thought would be c 12 minutes after the start, which I would fine-tune as I approached. Turned out that it wasn’t 12 but 2 minutes after the start I set the DC for, and it duly executed, but luckily I noticed this quickly enough. Put paid to any notions of an early lead though.

Regathering my composure, I rounded nice and sharply onto the re-pre-set course and immediately luffed up another 2⁰. The wind was that bit freer and the extra 2⁰ of point were costing very little delta boatspeed. Memories of Newport – Ensenada where I had sailed far too free into the initial big header en-route to San Clemente were still fresh in my mind.

Approaching the lay for T1 the wind was still heading and freshening, so we all carried on, quite a number going all the way to the beach on what in due course became a lift. Now in ‘normal’ SOL winds, it always pays to get inside a lift, so I tacked earlier than the bunch to find to my dismay that on starboard I was also sailing on a lift, meaning that on tacking back I would necessarily be more headed off than the guys who had carried on. In other words: Mistake no 2.

This phenomenon is one of the big differences between sailing a high resolution grib of 2nm intervals fed with data from an advanced forecasting model like WRF which takes account of local topology and more, and sailing to a grib of 0.5⁰ (is c 30nm) resolution fed with data from a model that takes account of synoptic (i.e. atmospheric pressure gradient) variation only. At least, that’s my understanding of it!

In practice what that means is that if you have a sound or channel with low-lying coast either side, the wind in reality and in the WRF model will funnel (or tunnel) down the middle and fan out to try and cross the beaches at more of a right angle. Intuitively maybe, that predicates that the wind down the central funnel has to be that bit stronger than the wind fanning out over the beaches.

Anyway, that’s what appeared to be happening and it sure makes for great racing. We are very very lucky to be able to sail short races on SOL that challenge us as much as these WRF-fed races do, and which reduce most routers to back-of-the-envelope aids. Hip hip hooray for ITA, UCAR and NCAR.

Back to the race, where based on the above intuition I now opted for longish tacks through the funnel of max pressure and least ‘bent’ wind. This worked well and I would like to think that after a while, bonk had gone into P1 on the basis of distance made good to windward.

Unfortunately all good things come to an end and as we started to approach the wider part of The Great Sandy Strait, I had to decide whether to cover the bunch heading West towards the mainland beach or the more spaced out yachts over my shoulder to the East. The Big Kahunas were fairly evenly divided over the two groups. I decided I would sail on on starboard tack until TWS started to fall and then tack East and back more into the middle. Mistake No 3. As soon as I tacked TWS started to drop more quickly and I probably waited too long before tacking back again and then when I did I couldn’t clear the beach and had to put in another hitch.

Tupsu and Blue Spirit now had a jump on bonk, and it was neck-n-neck with A2 and Henrys. Continuing on into ever more quickly building pressure till you could lay Snout Point on port remained the only thing to do. I tacked a little early but Blue Spirit went even earlier; Tupsu and Henrys got it spot on, and A2 overstood a little.

As we tacked back onto starboard at Snout, it was Tupsu from Henrys from bonknhoot from A2 from Blue Spirit. Various options as to how tight or loose to sail into what was going to a huge 90⁰ header as we closed on the line were not going to make a difference, but timing the final tack in would.

Tupsu went first and a probably a little early but had enough of a lead to hold on, but A2 got it spot on. Bonk, tacking only a server jump or two later went just that little bit too deep, whilst Henrys badly overstood and Blue Spirit set the controls for the middle of the line.

I tried to bomb down over A2, but he had me and Tupsu had us all. Great race!

bonknhoot / May 2015