

Barqueing Mad

My old dinghy mate Finn picked me up from Cork Airport on a balmy (for Southern Ireland) Wednesday afternoon. In DC editor notation, it was 2015/06/10 14:30 UTC, and we drove down to Crosshaven where Finn keeps his X46, Coirín on the Club marina. *In anticipation of these things, I had thought the better of entering bonkhoot in the first episode of SOL's Tall Ships Fest from Klaipeda to Szczecin, which had started earlier that week.*

Our IRL plan was to head off for Northern Spain on Friday morning, when the rest of the crew, comprising Finn's sister and Finn's eldest son and our mutual friend Des, would have joined us. It was going to be the start of two months of me-bumming around the seas off Spain, and to get me back into the feel of IRL sailing we immediately went for some sea (well, harbour) trials.



Lines away, down the Owenabue river, out past the pier at Currabinny, hold South of the Curlane Bank, up sails and a sharp turn to port at the Dognose Buoy, north up to Cobh Roads. She sails well does the X46 and as we rounded the Spit we hardened up for some short tacking past Cobh railway station and the Cruiseship Terminal. We continued on up what were now the lower reaches of the river Lee, past White and Black Point, to finally turn back in Monkstown Bay, where I had learned my sailing back in the early 70s. Cork Harbour, one of God's great gifts to mariners!

Friday morning, and with Roche's Point abreast we quickly hoisted the gennaker and were immediately ahead of schedule as we reached due South in a perfect, very atypical light to moderate Easterly. Atypical, so it didn't last and soon we had the headsails down and were continuing our progress under engine, and then the engine broke down, and it stayed light variable for the best part of three days, reducing our progress to an average 50nm per day. It is always good to be a bit over-actualled for a passage.

Drifting across the middle of Biscay, two birds spotted us and landed on the steps moulded into the aft transom. Guess what, they weren't gulls, they were pigeons. None of the crew were fanciers (as in pigeon fancier: a person who keeps and breeds pigeons, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>) but we noticed they had coloured bands on their little legs, so decided they maybe were in a race and had lost their way, or perhaps were supporters of some charity or other. One had a pink band; probably collecting for Breast Cancer Research I said.

And then a third one joined them. A bit of a show-off; he had three bands, a dark pink one, plus a dark and a light blue one. Help for Heroes, obviously.

Finn wasn't happy the pigeon shit was good for his teak, so we tried to shoo them away. Not sure whether that was cruel, but the late-arrival bachelor was not for shooing, and every time simply circled twice and then landed somewhere else on the boat, ever further distant from Finn. We decided maybe he was just a bit exhausted; after all the nearest land was some 200nm away, that's 400km in pigeon-speak. So we fed him, and as he seemed intent on staying with us all the way to our landfall, which was now going to be A Coruña rather than Vigo as originally planned, I decided he had to be Spanish and we called him Pedro. Pedro El Pigeon (pronounced with a hard guttural 'g').

Pedro perhaps wasn't much of a flier, but he sure was quite a sailor. For a pich-i-ohn. He settled on a spot forward of the cockpit on the sidedeck, which when the wind came back turned out to be the weather rail (must have had a degree in Meteorology as well). Now, Pedro being light of weight, we did not mind he didn't dangle his legs over the side. We weren't doing that either. However, we were mucho impressed by how he just faced into the building breeze with his feathers puffed out and his shoulders hunched up and how time-and-again he regained his footing, shook his body and re-perched himself after being drowned by yet another green one.

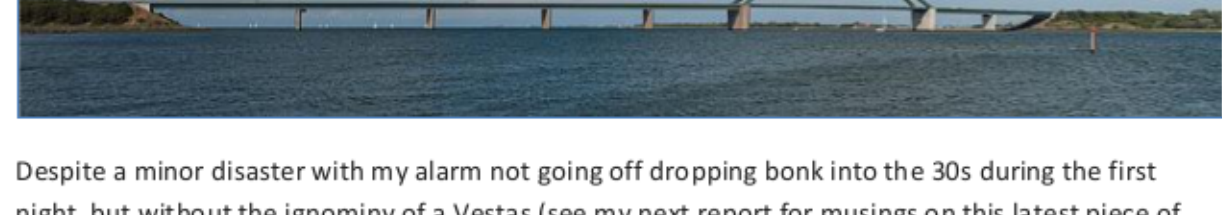
One mile out from A Coruña exactly a week after leaving Crosshaven, and once again with Coirín becalmed and motionless, Pedro left us forever.

Now of course none of this interfered with further Barqueing on SOL, although it did stop bonk from entering one or two other SOL races. But it was only the start of bonk's skipper's IRL nautical adventures, which next required him (that is me) to travel to Mallorca where an Oyster 72 was being taken out of mothballs (well barnacles, sand and dust) for a passage to Gibraltar. But first I had a few days to kill, and to find the local Volvo Penta man and see what could be done with the engine. Nice place is A Coruña, rich in history including a failed attack by Francis Drake, who later hid from his Spanish pursuers at the head of the Owenabue river, whence we had just come.

As almost everywhere these days, the marina had wifi, but not a lot. The only reliable connectivity was to be got in the office. There were plenty of yachts in, wanting to continue their passages, since a bit of gale had settled in post our arrival. In consequence, most mornings the office reception tended to be just a little crowded with yachtsmen checking passageweather, windydy and other sources via their tablets and assorted devices. As you can imagine I got frequent strange looks and the odd question, as I sat there oblivious of them all, racing bonk in the Ilha do Pico Sprint Marathon.

There was one minor problem - the office closed from 22:00 CET to 08:00 CET every night - and with the Sprint turning into a Marathon as Saturday progressed, I abandoned bonk somewhere South of Pico on an ENE heading. I slept well, and sometime around 11:00 the next morning I had a quick look at our SOL site. I do not know why I did this, but the result was that I spent that whole Sunday glued to my monitor as well, responding to the continuing questions with observations such as "well, it goes easier on modern materials" and "it's better for the planet", and "it's drier and cheaper". What had happened of course was that my boat-sitter "A Mão de Deus" had seen bonk careening off the page, and had logged into her to put her about so that she was now on a WNW heading North of the island. Obrigado Deus!

Monday morning I caught the train to Madrid, where I changed station (no sinecure) to catch the Alta Velocidad Española to Valencia and then the nightboat to Palma, where Dermot met me early in the morning. Basic prepping of the Oyster was still on-going and our ETD was already drifting forward (or is that backward? In the wrong direction anyway). It was looking like we would still be in Palma for the duration of SOL's Kieler Woche, which of course was/is a counter for the SOL Cup and was starting that evening. We got a 4G card and the Yachtspot working and at 19:30 CET that evening bonk was off, drag racing east out of the Kielerbucht towards the Fehmarnsund.



Despite a minor disaster with my alarm not going off dropping bonk into the 30s during the first night, but without the ignominy of a Vestas (see my next report for musings on this latest piece of SOL jargon; shall we call it 'solgon'?), this race went well, and certainly kept me in contention in the Cup with a P7 just behind Tyger (who should have been asleep, but clearly wasn't).

An hour after the finish we dropped lines and motored out into the Balearic Sea where there was no wind to be found for an uneventful passage that is starting to grow familiar: pass between Ibiza and Formentera, round Cabo de Gate and then head for the Rock, passing one resort monstrosity after another along the Costas. Oh, how much more I prefer the coasts of Galicia and Asturia to those of Andalusia!

Now the idea was to complete a sale-and-purchase, re-flag our ward to the BVI register and then return to Palma for a complete refit. Technically straightforward, but practically complicated, with lawyers seeing great numbers of 'beren op de weg' (bears on your path) and with the section of the UK Registry of Shipping & Seamen that looks after overseas protectorates being rather backlogged as a result of an imbalance between demand (particularly from pleasure craft) and supply. So we hung about, and about, and I got some serious food poisoning, culminating in an overnight lay-up in hospital on a drip, and then went home.

But what about the barqueing, I hear you ask. Well yes, I have digressed more than a bit, but to return to the theme of SOL at least, here is a précis of bonk-connected events in that universe, after arriving in Gib.

I asked psail to start bonkhoot in the Capetown-Hobart before leaving Palma. I found time to get in a good run in the Triple Tee (Tristan Time Trial), whilst in Gib.

I did a good sprint round Groote Eylandt when I got home, but a small slip put bonk out of the T10.

The first two of these events do connect with bonk's barqueing, bizarrely. This will become clear later.

Back home, pretty much the next event on the SOL calendar was the second leg of The Tall Ships Series, confusingly dubbed Race 1, from Belfast to Aalesund. In an email exchange with Joao, skipper of psail, I said I was probably not going to race as I would be travelling again IRL later in the week and that I expected I would not be able to be online for the finish, but at sea. Joao, however, said that was a big pity, because The Tall Ships are fun and interesting, and next thing I knew he had put a CC into bonk and she was off out of Belfast, slightly late.

Noblesse oblige, so I took the helm and went for a passage West of the Outer Hebrides, which, as Dave Cameron might say, was 'the right thing to do', and easy to deduce as Kenza, DIKKE, ITA, rumskib et al were showing the way. As I left the house, a big decision had to be taken. Tack early to pass South of the Shetlands or late to romp down over the North of the Shetlands. Qt said early and I set some DCs accordingly and asked Joao to keep a BBQ watch. Wrong call, and in the end a dreaded tack was needed to get into Aalesund. Result: bonk p14, DIKKE (who had been astern of bonk passing the Hebrides) p10.

Ha! Barques and dreaded tacks: the very thing that was on my mind when I mentioned the Triple Tee, which was held in TP52s. IMO, tacking our barques is not nearly dreadful enough, since performance loss where it is by exit boatspeed is almost non-existent at 2-server jump intervals along a coast in a tightly turning windfield. On the other hand, gybing our TP52s, VO70s, GB90s and Maxi100s is far more dreadful than is necessary or realistic as we well know.

Within the remit of a study group, IMO I made good progress towards an alternative to the PL rules we currently sail by, and the question arises how to progress this to an agreed design, coding, testing and implementation. The main features were:

- Only manoeuvres to be penalized.
- Manoeuvres limited to tacks, gybes, hops and stops.
- Hops identified by checking old and new TWA's versus 'lines in the sand' made up of rectilinear segments (20 "TWS, TWA" data-pairs or so for every polar that we race)
- Perf Loss is dependent on TWS and varies from a max of 35% (perhaps 40%) always at above 20kn to as little as 5% or 10% in champagne conditions (say 8kn) and then increases to say 85% at 0kn TWS always.
- The above variations in the Perf Loss characteristic to be dependent on Type of Boat - hi- or lo-performance 20-30fters, 40-50fters, maxis, small multis, and big multis.
- Recovery Time is determined by Elapsed Time (ET) since last manoeuvre and is a maximum at ET = 0.
- This maximum varies per Type of Race - Ocean, Passage, Coastal, Inshore, Daylight - and is say 2 hours for an Ocean race and just 2 minutes for a Daylight race.
- The Recovery Time initially imposed reduces as ET increases to a minimum at say ET = 2.5hrs for an Ocean race and ET = just minutes for a Day race.
- The minimum Perf Loss is again dependent on Type of Boat.
- Boat-dependent parameters are the same for tacking or stopping, and half these values for gybing or hopping.
- Once imposed, the Recovery Time and the associated Perf Loss count down in a simple linear fashion.
- If a further penalty is incurred during a penalty countdown, the Multiplication Rule applies to determine the adjusted Perf Loss and the Addition Rule the adjusted Recovery Period.

Just saying, like.

Now for that other bizarre connection: Cape Town Hobart. Unfortunately between all the moving about IRL, I never got around to developing an interest in that race and my trusted boat-sitter just DC'd bonk on-and-on-and-on, so far beyond the call of duty that even the bats in the belfry (humour not disrespect intended) could notice that bonk and psail were sailing identical tracks.

When challenged, Joao immediately and embarrassingly retorted psail, but the track had been all mine, and once I became aware of what had happened, obviously bonk was retired as well. All of which made it impossible for me to consider anything else than a second Tall Ships DNS for bonk when the gun went for Leg 3 a.k.a. a Cruise in Company from Aalesund to Kristiansand, since shortly after the start I was going to be in a plane back to Galicia, and although I would be a day or so in A Coruña, I was going to be well out on the Bay of Biscay heading for Baltimore, West Cork before that race would finish.

Small detail: DIKKEHENK p1!

Naturally enough, all the moving about in June (cruised Sicily as well early that month) and July had not been helpful to my SOL ranking. I've been home a few weeks now and working diligently at a recovery.

Leg 4 (or Race 2) of The Tall Ships - Kristiansand to Aalborg - provided the first opportunity in that direction. It could have gone better, but equally it could have gone a lot worse. There were four distinct sections to the race:

- A run SW to a buoy marking the entrance to the Kattegat (or was it the Skagerrak?).
- A reach due E to a mark offshore Jutland.
- A beat/fetch NE to the top of the Skagerrak.
- A broad reach S that turned into a fetch and then freed to a Finish nowhere near Aalborg.

There was little to separate the leading boats at the Skagerrak (yes, I truly believe the Norwegian Sea between Jutland and Norway goes by the name of Skagerrak). bonkhoot was in the hunt in p6 or so and DIKKE was already in p2 c 0.2nm ahead of bonk, just trailing kenza, who went on to show us all the ropes of Tall Ships sailing. The strategy that worked was to hold up to lay the rhumb for extra pressure and better angle, followed by a well-timed gybe onto starboard to east the entrance mark.

Unfortunately, the second section proved more troublesome for bonk, who, by sailing too straight, missed out on the better pressure closer in to the Jutland shore, thus falling back to p14. DIKKE and kenza meanwhile consolidated their lead over the fleet.

For the third section, bonk's luck turned. By keeping slightly further North, an upwind hitch on starboard tack was minimized and p6 was regained. DIKKE lost ground but stayed in p2.

The run down into the Kattegat (yes) offered two options - keeping a bit more East for better pressure early on, or keeping a bit more West for better angle later on. As long as their strategy was not exaggerated nothing much was lost or gained and at the Finish it was still kenza p1, DIKKE p2 and bonk p6.

Overall, DIKKE won the series with a very solid set of results.

Three cheers and bottoms up for DIKKE!

Tillyekke og Skål!!!

