

Log Vineyard – 2015

The Vineyard is without a doubt one of the best coastal races on the SOL calendar, as reflected once again by a good – but not good enough – turnout in 2015. Being one of the twelve counters for the SOL Annual Championship must help its popularity with SOLers (see the table of entry numbers for the ‘SOL Cup’ series so far this year, adjacent), but there is more to it than that. A bit low on actual starts BTW (so far) – this year’s Vineyard – but only the Sail Around Turkey of last month saw a bigger entry.

Race	Entrants	Starters	Finishers
Sail Around Turkey	223	193	137
The Vineyard	220	142	c 100
Antwerp to Belfast	189	169	145
Kieler Woche	188	147	115
Aalesund to Kristiansand	180	159	134
Auckland to Tauranga	178	134	121
Boston to Newport	164	144	120
South Atlantic Chase	149	122	102
New Hebrides Slalom	147	122	105
Valetta Sprint			
Caen Channel Craic			
Black Gold Rush			

So, what makes it great? Well... it is a true IRL classic on iconic yachting waters, it doesn’t go on for weeks, and our hosts honour us with prizes! That’s more than enough for me to wanna race.

This year, a great race got even better, the race being held in high data density NCAR/UCAR WRF grids. Better because:

1. Hourly TWS/TWD datapoints on a 0.1° grid allow the modelling of complex local coastal wind.
2. Hourly TWS/TWD datapoints on a 0.1° grid give far less opportunity for divergent interpolation between routers and SOL.

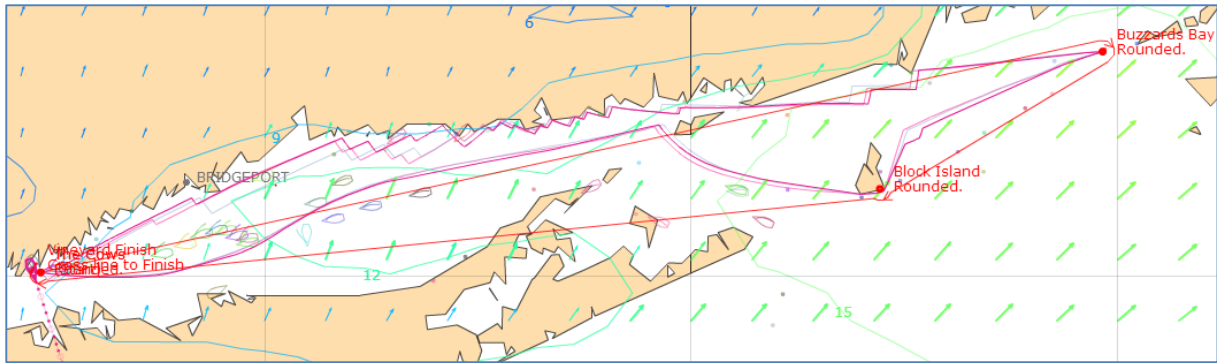
Complex local winds make it almost impossible for even the best routing software to find the absolute optimum navigational solution for a passage from A to B, as I am sure all who struggled upwind along the Connecticut coast towards Buzzards Bay, whilst referencing their Qt’s and BWR’s, will readily agree. I use QtVIm and, although its simplification (sometimes) and optimisation routines help it to improve its initial best solution based on 5 minute time intervals and 3° heading variations, the winning track when sailing in WRF conditions is always subtly different to what it deigns to propose.

As for the second point, if you do use a router, you will consider it important that the solutions it offers, although not wholly accurate, will be consistently reliable. With low density ($2^{\circ} \times 2^{\circ}$ was the standard for SOL ocean races until not so very long ago) synoptic surface-pressure-only-based grids this is simply not the case, and what your router becomes instead is a fruit machine that gives you high precision and reliability in winds above say 10kn, and non-sense in winds below say 6kn, and one or the other in between.

OK, the race! Three parts:

- an exhaustingly long beat to the Buzzard Bays Light,
- a run across to Block Island,
- a reach across to Fishers Island for a gybe onto a heading wind back up the sound.

Below you see a snip of the tracks of the three podium placers; yours truly in bright pink, kenza in light pink and Dingo in blue grey (same shade as the breaking dawn!). The wind is Sunday afternoon’s.



As you can see the greatest variation in chosen routes was on the upwind leg. There was less TWS under the shore, but always better TWA as you came back out from it. And most disconcertingly of all, courtesy of WRF, these differences varied all the way along the coast, and changed with every WX updates. Neither kenza, nor Dingo, nor bonk got it completely right and as we worked our way through the rocks of Fishers Island Sound Friday midnight local time, it may have been kroppyer, back racing online after a salty Summer, who held the lead. rafa and MustangMark also were right up there, with a last tack into shore by them and others being rewarded handsomely by the 04:30 UTC.

That WX held more surprises though, including a quite different predictor line for the approach to the Buzzards Bay Light Buoy if you tacked North up beyond Point Judith to the lay, than if you stayed South of the point. kenza spotted it, I was in "Follow kenza" mode, and Dingo got it right as well. Simultaneously, rafa and Mustang got it quite wrong and BBQ'd the point; commiserations. That was the race there and then, well almost, because ...

I may have had an opportunity to take the lead on the run to Block Island when kenza and Dingo kept up high, I felt following their routers too slavishly. I soaked down a bit more, whilst still keeping a slightly hot angle. It looked quite good, and then I gybed, unintentionally too early, due to a safety DC I had set before I had retired for a quick nap. karriv in P4 who sailed even deeper into that gybe certainly made up a bit of ground on all three of us.

It remained very close on the reach from Block to Fishers; kenza maybe lost a little ground and Dingo nearly passed him at the gybe. But not, and another WX allowed the followers to close a bit on our trio, by gybing earlier than we had. More bumpy TWA predictors ahead, patchy TWS pressure across, and quite different lines on smallish changes in heading and chart position, and yet another WX to change everything again.

Nobody took it easy and speed and headings never steadied up, and karriv and DikkeHenk got ever closer, but in the end I held on for my second Mount Gay cap, this time for P3 behind Dingo instead of P2 ahead of him, with kenza taking over the role of Worthy Winner from Winston4, who this year is trying hard to learn how to sprint.

Thank you Stamford Yacht Club for indulging us, and thank you fellow SOLers for the fun and competition.