Log Seattle to Vancouver – 2015

This race from the SOL archives got a new lease of life a year ago, when it was used as a test event with NCAR/UCAR WRF weather. We had by then trialled these new high resolution gribs once already for a run from Boston to Newport, but that had been a very windy affair. F8 winds blowing over or onto slightly elevated sandbanks tend to stay synoptic, so we didn't notice much of a difference, but on Puget Sound in the depth of Winter... we sure did!

Last year I finished fourth after having led for large parts of the race. I was glad noblesse did not oblige me to write up how I did that, although I did reflect on it briefly in my report about another SS-fuelled (Skipper Stupidity) fourth place off the Coromandel peninsula a month or two later.

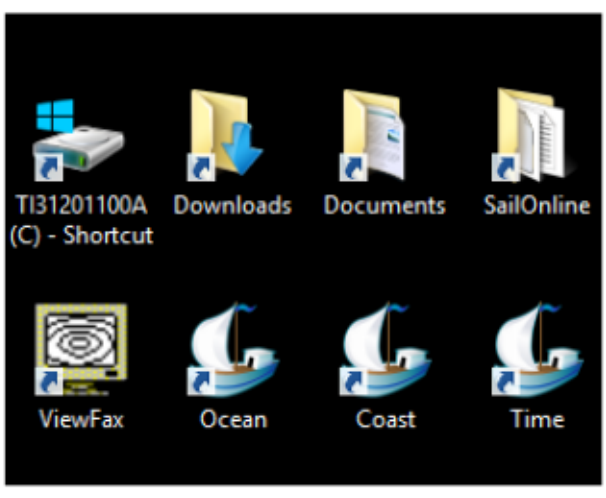
"Memories of a race from Seattle to Vancouver earlier this year flash back, but on that occasion there were mitigating (said he: ed) circumstances: a series of marish hard-to-read radically shifting WXs."

So this year I finished second after having led for large parts of the race, and again there were some hairy WXs and again in particular the last one before the short leg from Point Gray to the Finish proved fatal for pauvre bonk: plus ça change, plus c'est la même.

Second! I should be thrilled, but no I am not. Instead I'm grumpy and annoyed with myself, with my nervy bad decisions, my mistakes, everything. And noblesse obliges me to write about it. Huh!

Alright then.
I sail router-assisted, that is I run the router to get a feel for the strategic options and how the weather is going to develop and then follow what seems to be the best thing to do loosely, sailing by hand mostly and DCs if I can't be at my monitor or need to sleep, keeping a close eye on what I know about my boat's polar (spreadsheet analysis) and about my competitors (hmm's data center).

The router I use is QtVlm. I have three directories on my C drive, each with a full copy of the package: Ocean, Coast and Time. There are three links on my desktop, each to one of the .exe files in these three directories. It's a trick I learned from Kipper1258. It may seem like a lot of hassle and profligacy with ROM, but it means I can have several (up to three obviously) windows open each running qtVlm, without increasing the risk of a 'crash', so that when a new WX hits, I can run routings for all the races bonknhoot is participating in quickly and simultaneously.



I think there is a belief out there in Sol-land (like Holland also flat), that routers become unreliable and redundant with hi-res gribs. If so, it needs, like flat earth theories, the Richard Dawkins treatment. I can't speak of other routers, but Qt becomes unreliable (as a what-if simulator for SOL) when:

1. the rate of change of data over time is high, making Qt's assumption that TWS and TWD at the start of its minimum time step of 5min applies over that 5min wildly inaccurate compared against SOL's same assumption over its normative time step (server jump) of 15sec.
2. the rate of change of data over space between two data points is high, making Qt's scalar-like interpolation of TWS overestimate TWS when compared to SOL's vector approach.

The second point means that in fact hi-res gribs give more reliable routing results than lower-res ones, because, simply put, the data is more densely packed and at the data points SOL and all routers must agree (it's the same gribs they are fed). I fear this may be double Dutch to some who read this, so let me put it another way.

- I am more confident in my router's advice in shifty goo, sailing hi-res, than when sailing lo-res.

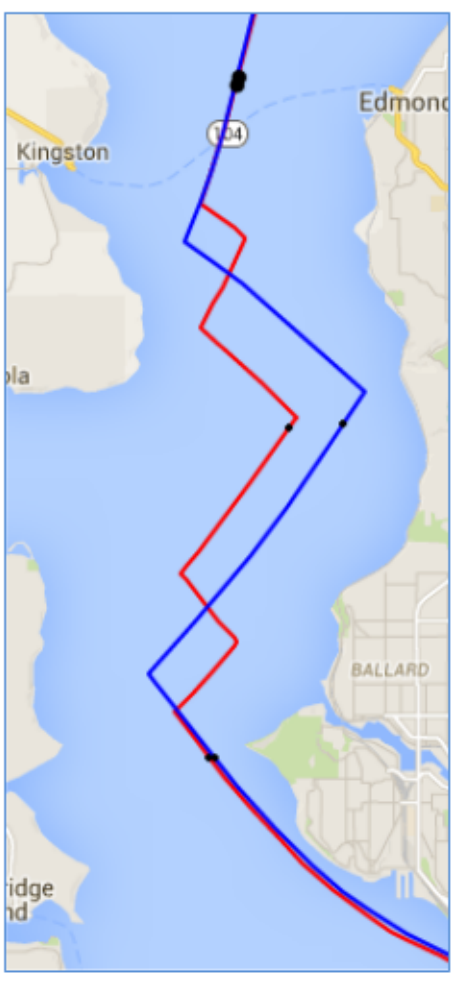
So, with this as background to one or two moments, this is how my race went... in moments (in another life I might have been an Italian football manager).

Coming out of Seattle I eased sheets to romp out from under the shelter of the land to get into the stronger breeze and then hardened up. Got that very right.

Beating North I stuck to a N-S line I had drafted along a meridian where the grib had highest TWS. This worked even better and I went into the lead.

Then I confused Speed and Course on my Instrument Panel and instead of making a small course correction I put bonknhoot almost head-to-wind. I fell back a bit!

Approaching Henry Island off the NW tip of San Juan, I had recovered to P2, a server jump or two astern of Lou. I recognised that my router's advice to go wide around the outside of Henry was a result of its inability to think smaller than in 5min time steps and I opted for short-tacking through the narrow Mosquito Pass between Henry and San Juan. Right call, but Lou did the same.



bonknhoot = red
rumskib (see later) = blue
same elsewhere

Perhaps Lou had a BBQ, I didn't see, but back in more open water, I had gained a 0.2nm lead on him. How best to negotiate the passage East through the island maze ahead. I was inclined to trust the router and head her SE to take advantage of a rapidly clocking wind and come up from the South on a big lift. But nobody else followed, so I corrected and kept North to cover and stay in the stronger breeze. My lead was gone and after a while Lou went P1 again.

Reaching from Blakely Island to Lawrence Point on the eastern tip of Orcas Island, I managed to squeeze back into the lead by keeping that bit East of the rhumb line for that bit more pressure.

As we rounded the point, all the leading boats opted for courses to skirt through or near The Sisters, approximately due N. But rumskib, who was outside the leading group, and I think Robert1, did not and kept close to the Orcas shore. A WX followed, the wind headed, Lou tacked East and next thing I knew rumskib and not Lou was in P2 about 0.85nm directly behind me.

rumskib and I were now also trucking East and lining up to tack North somewhere SE off Point Roberts. When I tacked, rumskib tacked and it was soon clear that I had gone that bit too far and was hitting significantly lighter wind, so that as we curved up on a big lift towards the jetties jutting out from the shore and I tried to sail down to cover Herr r, my lead reduced to about 0.4nm.

The wind had been dropping and continued to drop and as we approached Point Gray, rummi had whittled my lead down further to about 0.25nm.

I think it would be honest of me to say he had me just a little psyched at this stage, especially as the last WX had put the route to the Finish across a proper proverbial hole. This situation had cost me a podium in the same race last year!

I had run qT several times and had come to the conclusion that an early tack in was the right thing to do. This was a mistake, for two reasons:

1. As already mentioned, even with data at intervals of 0.05 degrees of lat and lon, really big variation in TWD will make Qt overestimate wind strength in between. 0.05 degree = 3 nm so that was significant for the short leg to the Finish.
2. I forgot to change the Finish co-ordinates in Qt to those of the favoured end, so was routing for the middle of the line!

These blunders aside, I had said to myself I would wait with the tack till the spaceship tacked. But as we were still sailing into a dying breeze, he was continuing to close, and so I changed my mind, tacked and said I can always tack back. Of course, I didn't tack back, well at least not properly and not straight away. And that was that. Herzlichen Glückwunsch, rumskib. Das war irrtümlich Gut!