

Our race was a long and interesting one and a true ocean test. I have great respect for the sailors who are preparing to undertake the race for real. The M20 had over three weeks of tricky shifting winds and the odd period of easier trade wind sailing. The race could be split into a few stages: Bass Strait, Tasman Sea, Coral Sea, Solomon Sea, Solomons to Guam and Guam to Japan.

The start was quite difficult with a wind shift, inconveniently overnight for me. I didn't sail well and lost over an hour before we had even passed Wilson's Promontory. The remainder of the Bass Strait was easier with a couple of tacks approaching Gaby Island. There was a classic NSW coast frontal system that resulted in a 180 degree wind shift off Sydney. I did well out of the shift and gained most of my lost time by staying further offshore. There were some more wicked shifts off Brisbane but then the wind stabilised and built for the voyage north through the Coral Sea.

We were already looking ahead at the challenge of where to go through the Solomon Sea. Each weather update told a different story and optimal route predictions swung from west to east to middle to west again. I decided that changing strategy each update was not going to end well, so I choose the middle path and sailed almost due north for the entire Coral and Solomon Seas. The relatively fat and slow polar means that avoiding weather systems is difficult and sailing straight is often better. This strategy worked very well. Many suffered in wind holes and were stuck for days. The early leaders lost out. I was in a podium spot entering the Pacific Ocean and the trades.

I tacked early and ended up taking quite a westerly course and was one of very few that passed west of Guam. Initially this was a promising route, but each weather update seemed to favour the east. I was losing my podium spot and beginning to wonder how I could recover. We had a week of champagne reaching, must be wonderful to race for a week in 12 knots on the beam in real life.

The weather became more unstable approaching Japan. I held the run on starboard for longer and was able to make an initial gain. I briefly held the lead about a day out from the finish but a couple of weather updates went against me. Kipper1258 sailed superbly for the entire race and well deserved his first win. I'm delighted to be on the podium in this great race and ahead of so many talented SOLers.

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