

Jester Azores Challenge 2016

Having just completed the minefield that was the Van Isle 360, I was thankful to find something a bit more relaxing on the horizon. A slower boat and open oceans promised many good nights' sleep while making the trip south from Plymouth to the Azores.

Still, a relaxing voyage doesn't mean that it won't be a competitive one, so how best to maximize my chances of doing well? A convenient start time and an efficient rounding of Rame Head put me near the front of the pack and I was pleased to note that my course put me in the vicinity of some of the SOLers that always seem to find themselves at the pointy end of the fleet.

From there, the fleet just kept getting spread wider and wider, as boats searched for any sort of strategy that would give them an advantage. I kept finding myself in *kenza's* wake, but could not see a way around him. A couple of tacks and a gybe later and it became clear that it would not be a win for longreacher, but could I get a podium? One last tack, and it would be a fairly straight run for home.

The tack would come very close to the 10:30 weather report on Monday, and pretty early for those of us in my time zone, so for the first time in this race, I set an alarm and got up to make sure I was still looking at the same weather patterns as I had seen prior to crawling off to the bunk. As it turned out, I could have slept in, the tack went smoothly, and I again settled in behind *kenza*.

My only concern at this point was that most boats tacked a bit earlier, and now my podium position had slipped to 9th. Had I thrown it away at the end? I was pretty confident that my better wind angle would gain me back those positions by the finish, and as it turned out, I was right. Hour after excruciating hour, longreacher inched back on the boats to the east. By 23:00 on Tuesday, I was in 2nd, still following *kenza's* wake, but now confident and content with a podium finish.

As a side note, it is usually me who is in the unenviable position of having the poorer angle and watching the boat inside me slip by, unable to do anything about it. Having the better angle was much more enjoyable and I'll try to learn from it from the future, although I'm a pretty slow learner, and so, won't promise anything.



*A spot of worry in a low stress race. Had I left the tack too late?
It took a while to converge again.*

-longreacher

May 25th, 2016