

Log SoCal300

Things were a bit quiet in Solland, but luckily the SoCal300 was scheduled to open early for practice. Not any old race, but a buddies-up race with not any old yacht club, no with the San Diego Yacht Club, famed for many things, but to me in particular for its association with The America's Cup and for Denis Connor.

Let me tell you about Denis Connor. Legend. Came to sailing late, and pretty much straightaway won the nomination to represent the USA in the Tempest class at the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games where he then won the Bronze. Not exactly built like an athlete, he just skipped the dinghy stuff and next won a couple of Star Worlds and then set his eyes on the America's Cup, where his extraordinary talents as an organizer and as a tactician and helmsman helped him to win it four times, including winning it back after losing it. Nobody has won it more often, and you have to go back to the 1930s to find somebody who has won it nearly as often – three times – and (logical AND) who helmed his own boats. That guy is Harold Stirling Vanderbilt, but Harry bless him was a third generation billionaire. Denis is just a sailor but not a hired hand, no, not even a boatbuilder or a sailmaker like other luminaries of his generation such as Buddy Melges and Lowell North. Simply legend.

So guess how pleased I was to hear from RainbowChaser after the race that she had wangled a Yacht Club cap for the winner of the virtual SoCal300 out of fellow SOLer and organizer Rhino. Very very.

Since the race opened early, I was out practicing early, and sailed the course on DCs downloaded from the router smoothed into long series of 2 minute intervals command, duly noted the positions of the island headlands where one could come to grief, and then returned to Santa Barbara in a straight line up the coast to put bonkhoot head-to-wind back on the start line (so that I could line up my course to the SoCal300 mark well before the start).

Now a funny thing happened as I was practicing; psail sent me a preliminary routing for another race. ANZ Sail Fiji? Turned out this was also a buddies-up of an iconic event and was also starting on Friday night, just later. The domestic brownie points were clearly heading for some serious depletion at the weekend!

OK, so as told before, I have a couple of instances of QtVlm on my hard drive, so I just opened another one and went practicing the exit North out of the Hauraki Gulf as well. At some point I closed both opened Qt's down, and as it took quite a while for bonk to get back from San Diego to the start, I distracted myself with other things for a day or two.

Reopening an instance of Qt on race day, it turned out to be a different one to the one I had used for the SoCal race before, in fact it was the instance I had used the last time I had raced, which had been in? A Class40. Entirely overlooking this, I merrily set about drafting the barrier lines to force my routings follow the course between the Channel Islands to the NOAA buoy, including a line from SoCal300 to the shore.

The result was that 15 minutes before the starting gun, bonk was set on 245.5 CC and c 44 TWA to nicely just leave SoCal300 to starboard. For some reason, perhaps because the winds were light, I decided to just check my VMG spreadsheet. Huh?? 47 TWA. So I reset my course, thinking well I'll have to tack to clear the mark and also "Have I got the wrong polar in the router? Is that tack point I am to aim for right at all?" So, as we started, my head was down in the virtual chartroom loading the correct polar and re-routing. Back on deck, I was surprised to see the usual suspects all sailing much freer than bonk. What was the point in that? I looked at the SOL chart again. What did it say there? Leave To Port! I bore off a bit!! And ran the router again.

Surprisingly my early 'fight for height' did little enough damage. The header we were sailing towards was very very slight most of the way out, and only turned us severely at the very end. Quite a few people really sailed that bit too deep, which inevitably led to some throwing good money after bad and carrying on further than necessary into the header. My tack was well-timed and after executing it I went to bed and left bonk to sail the curve to Fraser Point on the NW corner of Santa Cruz on DCs. When I woke up, bonk was in the lead. I took her by hand to Posa Anchorage and then handed her over to DCs again, opting to stay a bit E of the rhumb to San Nicolas and then gently curve back. The next WX proved that curve back to be a mistake. I corrected but the damage was done.

Fortunately the wind was going to go all over the place before we got to San Nicolas, and two tacks later, rounding San Nicolas bonk was back in touch, fractionally ahead of rumskib and slightly further behind aner59. Nothing much happened on the reach down to NOAA, except that the wind steadily freed us. Bearing off at the mark, A & R & I naturally all stayed slightly hot on a course to our differently planned gybe points.

Now in my short career as a SOLer I have already done a number of Finishes into the coast of California. I have never actually been there, but I guess you could say I have some 'local knowledge'. Time and again it has paid to approach in from seaward, as the wind can get very light as you close. So I was surprised to see rumskib gybe in relatively early. But aner did not and in fact carried on that bit further again after I had gybed bonk. Sailing deeper I drifted down towards aner while I slept. When I awoke, he was once again ahead of me. Dead ahead. Just.

We continued on our separate courses and convergence became divergence as I soaked ever further south, which, thanks in a big way to the last WX, proved to be the winning move. Tightening up gradually to angles giving me close to max BS, I bombed in to the mark late, and rounded comfortably ahead. Commiserations aner, it was a great tussle.

And thank you SDYC for sharing this fantastic race with us.