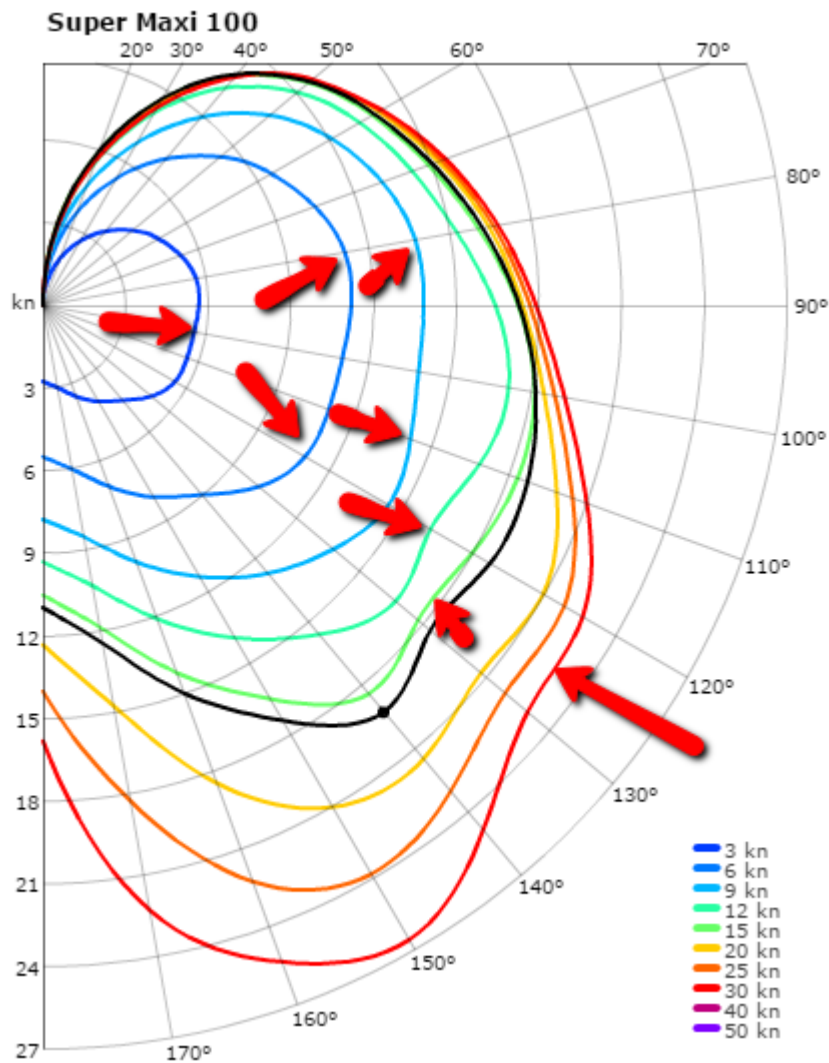


Preparing for this edition of the classic Sydney to Hobart Race was not easy, as the pre-Christmas rush did not leave me much time to spare, as you can imagine... Still, I am improving my pre-race routine, so things happen more efficiently than before.

Getting acquainted with the boat polar diagram is a must, otherwise you will not be able to properly figure out what is going on, no matter if you are using a router or not (by the way, I used QtVLM 5.4.5 during this race). This one proved to be a quite tricky one:



The arrows indicate (not very neatly, I admit) several stalling or near-stalling TWA sectors. Generally, in winds of up to 9 knots, the boat is not the best reacher there is, especially if the TWA is between 80° and 120°. When there is more pressure available (TWS 12 knots and up), speeds in beam reaching angles improve, but broad reaching might become a problem if your TWA is somewhere between 110° and 130°.

On the bright side, the boat looks good in close-hauled sailing and is a powerful “downwinder” in strong breeze.

All in all, you might expect some heading jumps if you would be serious about speed...

Another thing to take into consideration was the dreaded “performance loss”. This is a weak spot of mine, so I had to pay extra attention to the subject.

As someone would say later in the race, gybing in strong breeze could be expensive: the speed loss could be as big as 12% if you went for a one-step gybe. To minimize it, I had to be prepared to do a two or maybe a three-step gybe, so I went to <http://sol.kroppyer.nl/?performance> from time to time to learn the drill. It was helpful, believe me!

Now, the race!

The leg to Tasman Island could be divided in four phases.

Phase 1 was The Drag Race, Part 1

When the gun went off, there was a moderate pre-frontal NE breeze that would back to NNE and N as it would become stronger, up to 25 knots. The answer the leading pack gave to this was to go south as fast as possible before setting up to negotiate the transition through the cold front.

I soon realized that some fine-tuning would be required, so I did quite a bit of hand steering while I could, before finally giving in to Hypnos.

Phase 2 was the Interregnum.

Originally, the plan was to go around the east of low associated with the front. The weather update dumped my illusions, so I set up the necessary DCs to go to west of the low. The timing of the gybing was very important, so I did my best to be as accurate as possible. I cannot quite complain about the result, as I ended up in second, 0.4 NM behind outlaw.

Before the transition gave way to a second drag race, we had to decide where we would be relative to the wind, which would back from SE to E. I found myself higher into the wind, and I was happy with the trade-off it implied: I would have to invest some ground so that it would come back with interest later. The plan was approved by Aeolus, and I managed to take the lead.

The Approach was the last phase. It would require gybing at the right time if I wanted to keep the lead. By that time, we were broad reaching, with outlaw to the windward, so I had a slight advantage.

I gybed west first, hoping that the bigger pressure and slightly better would offset the time I would lose with the two extra gybes. Unfortunately, as I had to round the Tasman Island Mark, I struggled with my mobile phone for a bit – I usually do not dare rounding marks with DCs – and I overshot the gybing point. I do not know if this single error cost the lead (outlaw probably has, or had, the answer), but it certainly did not help my cause.

From Tasman Island to The Iron Pot, I SOTP'd most of the time, barely defending my position against Kipper – again! The familiarity with the boat polar helped, and I was fortunate that the way between Cape Raoul and The Iron Pot was quite straightforward.

For the finishing leg, I had two options: direct sailing towards the line, or a somewhat more

protracted navigation, going higher into the wind before setting the last course. It was enough to guarantee second place – by a thread.

All in all, it was a really great race, with a good share of subtleties and very accomplished opponents. I was quite happy with the overall quality of my decisions, big and small: it was not all about routing, after all.