

## SOL 999 (ORCV Melbourne to Devonport) Race Report

The last race of 2016 was set to start in light airs from the East, with slightly more pressure on the right side and generally (slightly) better angles on the left side of the racing lane after rounding Queenscliff. These conditions would suggest that this would be to a mostly close-reaching race to Tasmania.

This would not be as easy as it might have sounded: a good result would demand accurate judgment of when to go for pressure and when to go for angles. More pressure meant going lower, while better angles would imply going higher into the wind. So, stay too long to the right, and the boat would finish the race in a slow beating; stay too long to the left, and the boat would not have enough speed to remain competitive.

Two factors would add some complexity to the general scenario. The first would be the veering and backing of the wind that was about to take place during the last 12 to 18 hours of race, as that might decide the fortunes of the race.

The second was the boat polar (fig. 1)

In winds of up to 6 knots, the boat speed increases until the TWA reaches 70° to 80°, and then it barely goes up, if at all. As the wind speed increases, the beam reaching speed improves, but not very impressively, until the breeze really freshens.

This explains why going after pressure after Queenscliff was the option of a good chunk of the fleet (including me), as you can see in Fig.2. The losses to the rhumb line pack would be only transitory.

As the west pack gained control of the race, the boats were trying to make their position as strong as possible.

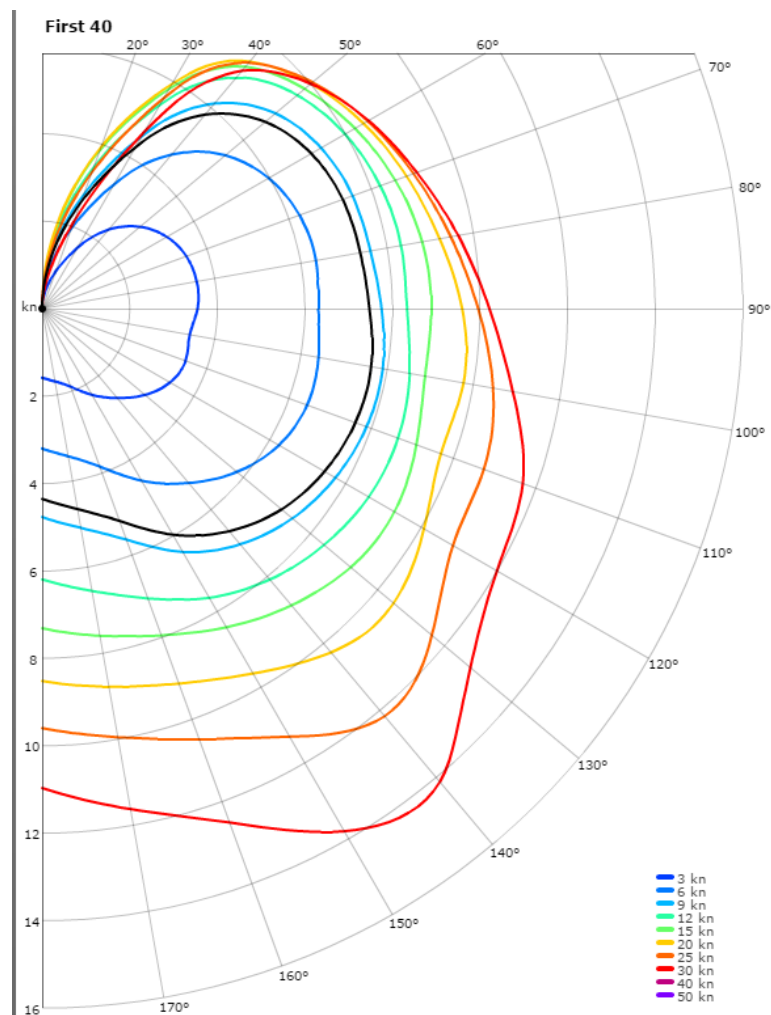


Fig. 1 - The Beneteau First 40 polar

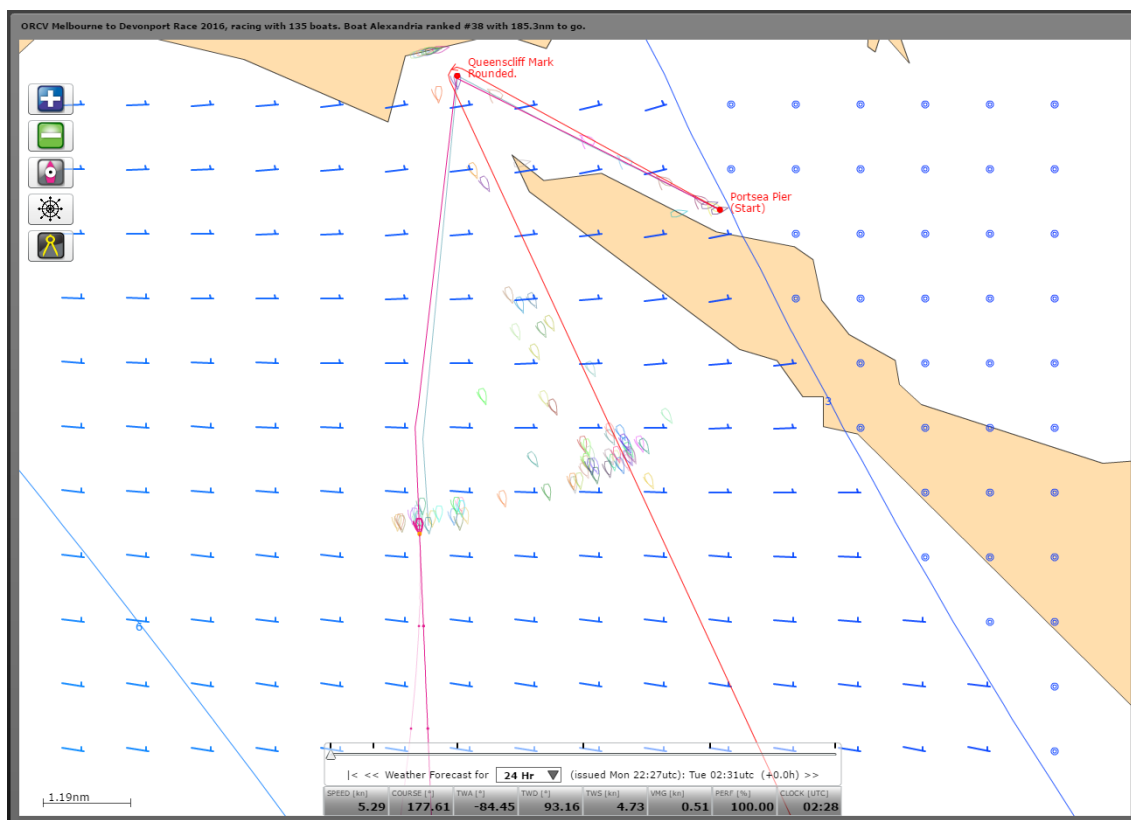


Fig.2 - the spilt off Melbourne

In this respect, I think the critical moment of the race was just after the 1630 UTC weather update. I found myself a little too low in the wind, and had to go east – crossing *Dingo's* and *schlumpi787's* path in the process. I was successful to stay ahead of *Dingo*, but I ended up about 100 metres behind *schlumpi787*. If he had gone east around that time, I think he would have good chances of winning the race, as he probably had the strongest position of the leading boats.

At around 1720 UTC, after transitioning to the left side of the rhumb line, I had *Dingo* very close on my leeward and *longreacher* and *rumskib* on my windward, slightly abaft of my beam. Three of us would be in the podium, and one of us would be the winner.

The dust began to settle at 2010 UTC, as I changed my heading towards the leeward end of the finish line, with *longreacher* still hot on my heels, with *rumskib* slightly farther away, still on the windward. But the battle with *Dingo* would go down to the wire, as the Aussie stood with me to the very end, always to my leeward.

In the ended, I claimed victory by a mere five seconds. *Dingo* finished second, only three seconds ahead of *longreacher*. A strong and consistent *Rumskib* was fourth, while *schlumpi787* deserved better than the already very good fifth place. *Sassy63* was sixth after an early lead. *Kipper1258* and *Billy* again showed that the SOLers from Down Under are very strong by finishing seventh and eight, and the American-flagged *KarmaFish* and *Garagiste* boats completed the top 10.