

## Race to Up Helly Aa 2017

A gentle sail of Northern Scotland, followed by a hectic, sleep deprived tour of the Shetlands.

This seems like about the 4<sup>th</sup> 1000 UTC start in a row, which is a challenge in my time zone, but I set a DC the night before, and hoped for not much change in the 0430 weather update. Things worked out OK, and we got underway well from Aberdeen.

Pretty easy sailing for the first half of the race, especially with the very forgiving polar of the Elan, and a good number of us rounded the Fair Isle mark in close formation. After making the rounding, I prepared myself for the moray of islands and mark roundings that would take up the next 18 hours. After plotting a course, and making some calculations, I looked back to the field, and... Where had *rumskib* gone? It took me a few minutes to realize that he had missed the mark, and was sailing off into the wild North Sea. Too bad.

Well, back my next task, had to keep up with Kipper, bonk and a few others who were still making their way north. I managed to get to the lead just before the Gruney rounding, except... Who's that coming up the channel between Shetland and Yell? Of course it's *rumskib*, who deftly makes the turn in front of me and heads south again.

The next 12 hours were an "up all night, tack and avoid grounding battle. At a couple of points, I had to sail a bit more conservatively, because I just couldn't keep my eyes open. The next morning, we emerged from the eastern side of Yell, and headed for Lerwick Harbour. *Rumskib* had a brief grounding, which allowed me to slip by him and take 2<sup>nd</sup> place by 2 seconds. I felt a little badly about that after his brilliant strategy the day before, but then I remembered that he had knocked me off the podium by 2 sec in the Kerguelen CanCan, so I'll take this as payback.

Thanks to all racers, and especially to the SOL team for putting this race together. This is one of those preeminent races in the SOL season that I love to race in, and to do well in it was especially gratifying.

-longreacher

February 3rd, 2017