

Looks like, finally, bonknhoot is starting to get her mojo back together again.

Historically, the coast of California has proven kind to goo'ol bonkie, with her first ever (and only one for quite some time) P1 being obtained coming in to San Francisco after a rapid passage cross the Pacific in 2004. And, as recently as nine months ago, I got her home first to San Diego in the SoCal 300, winning a very cool San Diego Yacht Club baseball cap in the process.

This ramble through the islands of "Saints and SOLers" (google Saints and Scholars, Tipperary, and BBC Only Connect, for a full comprehension of this whimsical wordplay), like those other two races, featured a finish under shore, and it would seem to be that coming in from sea this inevitably involves finding the best curve to hold on to the bigger breeze offshore whilst not sailing too many extra miles. And, this third time round, once again meant sailing HOT (hand on tiller) to hold on to the slenderest of leads.

That last nervous leg thus had me staying awake into the early hours of the morning for the first time during this race (and indeed in 2017). despite quite a bit of cornering being required. I can't remember when and when not, but I had managed to partly execute those myriad turns with DCs, planning them carefully with Kipper1258's very excellent "DC Checker & Auto Grib Loader" (DCC and AGL, for short). Go to <http://solfans.org/blog/weather/dc-checker-editor-grib-loader-and-more/> to get it. There is a good manual. Follow it carefully to get everything working right. It is very accurate. But, as Kipper says himself, give yourself 15 secs of searoom if you are going to corner on DCs unattended.

There had been three other key moments before that last leg.

The passage out of the start across to Saint Michael (patron saint of yep, mariners, but also the police and various others), which I DC'd, having spent quite a bit of time testing for the best path using QtVlm and DCC. I was away from my devices, but when I returned, bonk had a two or three server hop lead.

The passage round the south of Saint Michael to the north of Saint Rose (patron saint of The Americas). This passage featured a gybe point somewhere south and east of the centre of Michael. I opted to sail straight towards it at a TWA of less than 90, and hence very poor VMC. But then a strange thing happened. The next WX dropped the average wind strengths and factoring in some topological effects (NAM brings other things than surface pressure into play), this resulted in a radical change of weather map. Luck was with bonk with my tight TWAs now placing her to weather of the fleet out in open water in a slightly stronger breeze that was heading us all off, thus extending my lead substantially. It was the middle of the day in Ireland, so I sailed HOT into the header and then through a total reversal of direction as the wind dropped to a fraction of a knot and then returned again. Only thing was Alexandria, after some initial hesitancy, did that second part better, and bonk was back to being only a few server hops ahead.

The corner at the eastern tip of Saint Catherine (patron saint of Palma, Mallorca). I got nervous there, interfered with a DC, left a "-" sign stand and BBQ'd for a loss of two server jumps, reducing my lead to just two or three again.

Straight line, corner, corner, corner and then the downwind passage from Saint Catharine to Saint Didacus (patron saint of the Franciscans), featuring a few timely gybes and finally the constantly course adjusting broad reach in to "B".

Thank you SOL and thank you Alexandria (and several others) for a close, close race all the way.