

After my maiden SOL win in the Autumn version of the Blue Whale Migration I dreamt long and hard about pulling off the double when the Spring race came up. I had no realistic expectations of doing so but decided to put in a dedicated effort, got off to a good start and soon found myself in a big leading group sailing my fast 90 footer up the west coast.

The Cape Blanco, Rose Spit and Middleton Island roundings were an uneventful part of the straightforward run north.

Southwest down the Aleutian Archipelago qtVLM routing favoured a track south of Kodiak Island, which most of us followed with small variations before threading our preferred ways through the islands until rounding north at Mount Westdahl.

The pointy end of the field was, as usual, starting to develop a scattered tail of boats falling off the pace.

Decision time.

The race had started in earnest – northeast into Bristol Bay and east of Nunivak Island or northwest into the Bering Sea itself? The split in the leading group was about 50/50.

I recall vaguely (maybe incorrectly), that qtVLM favoured west early in the routing process but plumped for east, as I did.

As it transpired the west group made competitive progress but struck adverse winds and finished some hours later than the east group.

The east group headed northeast up Bristol Bay

Until that point in the race I don't think that I had missed routing an incoming Wx within about an hour, even the dreaded 1630 Wx which I regularly sleep through. (1630 UTC = 0330 AEDT, my snoring time). Amazingly the 0430 and the 1030 Wx promised incredibly steady winds and 18 and 14 hours on the same northeast heading before tacking. A great opportunity for an uninterrupted sleep.

I awoke about 2130 UTC (0730 EADT) consulted my phone and found to my horror that the whole group had tacked northwest at least a half hour previously. The 1630 Wx had differed to the two previous. I tacked immediately, wondering just how much time my stupid decision to sleep would cost me but, lo and behold, when the 2230 Wx arrived an hour later it proposed an immediate return to the northeast course, the 1630 Wx was a routing situation I like to call "a one hit wonder". As a result of this reversal I was left in a great position further north and east than the group and shortly after was able to head the race and jovi.

*Some sceptics and cynics might suggest that I simply got lucky - the facts are that deep in my subconscious I knew exactly what was going to happen and what I was doing.*

I had a great battle with jovi from then onwards, in the short term a SOTP zig-zag up the SW coast of Alaska for 6 hours when I should have been asleep. Waiting for jovi to make a mistake which he did not do and trying to stay out of the clutches of esp. Dingo, Franci, bonknhoot and Co. who were lurking a few nm back and waiting to pounce.

As we proceeded north past St. Lawrence island jovi sneaked east and ahead of me into the #1 slot and set himself up for the win. I incorrectly continued on my own track. I was able to stay comfortably away from the chasers and claw a little time back from jovi, but he sailed a great race and earned his first SOL victory.

Heartfelt congratulations to jovi.

Billy