

This race over nearly four thousand miles remained intriguing until the end. At first, it seemed to be won or lost in the opening days, depending upon the tactics to round the first Pacific high we encountered just northwest of the start, and then followed by another. The group which stuck closest to the Californian coast, whilst having fewer options, got the better winds and established a lead which was hard to eat into because of the many marks up the coast. The pattern was thus established until we reached the Mount Westdahl rounding, though Outlaw, Rumskib and probably a few others who were not on my watch list tried to break the pattern by bravely heading closer to the perilous coast all the way along the western leg.

At Westdahl though, a dilemma arose that I'd not encountered before. A large high was sitting in the Bering Sea extending northwards and, at the time of our arrival, virtually impregnable if we were to try to head west through it and catch the rotating winds to sling us north. However, the grib showed it moving north in about three hours so that those arriving behind us would have a clear passage with the winds abeam to ride the northerly winds home. We could have sat in the high waiting for it to move north, but my feeling was that we would have been swamped like a small breakaway being eaten by a fast arriving peleton if we'd tried it.

Indeed, Outlaw did move west when he arrived at the mark, and some short time later rumskib also moved west. The main fleet, once it arrived almost exclusively went west. I noted at the time I would take the conservative option, and I headed north east against the breeze. During the long journey north, our lead did indeed evaporate, and a central group took over, but eventually, another flukey high moved down from the north to swallow the momentary leaders, and our little group, squeezed close to the coast, scraped through to pick up favourable winds to the finish.

Billy and I pursued jovi for days on end, yapping at his transom like a couple of frisky dogs, but he held off the challenges admirably, to win clearly, and celebrate with a pizza!

It's probably worth noting that whilst the many marks in this race were necessary so that we follow the 'migrating whales', in fact the racing between Cape Blanco and Mount Westdahl was pretty processional for the most part. The marks result in there being little opportunity for any major alternative courses, so boats behind tend to get stuck behind. But once the marks disappeared at Mount Westdahl, all hell broke loose and the racing became very exciting.

Congrats to jovi and Billy for their skillful tactics, and to all finishers and thanks to the SOL team for a great race.

Dingo 21.03.17