

2017 40' Series Championship Q3&Q4 Brisbane to Keppel

I made my boat choice the day before the race and believed there was enough 10 knots TWS around the course to favour the KER over the Class A, so KER for me.

I didn't really think the SOTO was fast enough either in lighter or heavier conditions.

I forgot to tell SimeMali that!

The race was reasonably straightforward, early race TWS favoured Class 40 only marginally there were a few competitive KER's and SOTO's including SimeMali as we left the Channel. My aim was to stay with the leading bunch of KER's but as we approached Fraser Island, azure, Tyger and buzzybee went inshore, found lighter TWS and dropped back. Mouthansar stayed offshore but fell away a little as we tacked to windward and I was left as leading KER.

24 hours before the finish I was pleased to see that the last leg TWS was looking around and over 10 knots, as Wx followed it emerged that the 10 knot TWS would not come until the last few hours of the race but also TWS would not fall low enough earlier to give the Class 40's any advantage. I thought that boat positions would remain as-is until then which is the way it turned out. SimeMali maintained his 1 nm lead and was looking untouchable, I was able to hang with the Class 40's and SOTO around #10 and was absolutely confident that the KER could get to the lead in the last hours.

My competitive IRL sailing experience was limited to a few years of club sailing in small mixed fields, around the buoys, in my son's J24.

SOLing can't duplicate the frustrations of trying to fill the sails and find some speed when there is no wind and the Windex is tiredly spinning around like a lazy top, nor can it duplicate the excitement of battling a good swell and seas and gusts to 25 knots, keeping a sound footing and seat, watching the tell-tales and sails, working hard on the tiller and main sheet to anticipate and battle weather helm as the gusts hit, dodging, drenching spray flung back from the plunging bow. I always got back home completely buggered.

SOL is not like that real thing – more a thought provoking armchair navigation game with the annoyance of occasional inconvenient wake ups - but the last few hours of this race were really exciting for me.

We were (virtually) sailing a close reach around 58 deg. TWA in just over 10 knots TWS, I was around 2.5 nm behind SimeMali and 1.5 nm behind rafa and the other closely bunched Class 40's. It was a drag race to a short line and my KER was the faster boat.

Very slowly Billy reeled the Class 40's and SOTO's in and I ticked them off. FortAdams, SOTO Frangipani, Go4it, SOTO Franci, Kipper, Dingo, psail, and rafa.

I loved it - even though I was out with my wife and getting dark looks for constantly checking my phone.

As it was, Simemali's SOTO was not so slow and far enough in front, my KER reduced his lead to about 0.6 nm but he had maintained that well-earned 1nm lead for much of the race and it was enough.

Thanks to all the starters for another competitive race and to the SOL Team for their generous commitment. I look forward to the rest of this fantastic 40' Series.

Billy 9/8/2017