

Log Vineyard – 2017

I simply love this magnificent, fabulous, iconic Stamford Yacht Club, SOL-buddied race. And to repeat my words of last year some more, as a very vocal yachting friend of mine from Monkstown Bay on Upper Cork Harbour who goes by the name of “Prof” might say, “and once again we had a tremendous (note the “i”) race last weekend on Long Island Sound in the mighty Vineyard Classic”, adding wistfully, “and who knows, maybe someday I will yet race it in real life!” Hint: I am a handy spinny/genny trimmer IRL (in real life) and know a bit about routing as well.

I have now raced the Vineyard online five times. With hi-res winds, supplied to us by the US’s National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) operated by the University Corporation for Research (UCAR) using their Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) Model, waxing and waning over the length of the day as land cools and heats up, and deflecting and slowing down to cross barriers; with a complex coastline featuring many little straits and shoals where IRL you cannot go; and with a typical race time of a manageable day-and-a-half in a modern-classic light displacement Santa Cruz 52, you simply gotta love it. In my opinion.

Last year, if my memory serves me right, we started on a beat in light unstable winds, and experienced some radical shifts in direction at several forecast updates. This year, the wind was – if still light – much steadier, and blowing across rather than down the course, and the 1630WX just before the start clearly favoured routing towards the Long Island shore and attempting a pass through Plum Gut, by which stage I had managed to build a very slight lead on psail, rumskip and several others.

Being inclined to miss marks when I race online, I gave the Buzzards Bay Entrance Light a wider berth than I might normally, thus halving my small lead, which changed little as we fetched back South. Rounding Block Island, left or right of Plum Island – as on the way out – was the question, with a new WX expected about an hour further down the track. I decided to stay in open water, keeping to the right of it. Disconcertingly, my closest competitors all went for a second pass through the Gut.

The new WX briefly made me change my mind, but then some further analyses convinced me that, despite the shift helping the boats immediately behind me to keep left longer before being freed off hard as they crossed the Sound, my planned route to get across to the Connecticut shore as quickly as possible would still win out. And so it did.

Some island slaloming through the waters off Pine Orchard, which IRL you probably shouldn’t attempt either, followed. Not too many followed my example, which helped me extend my lead a little, only for most of it to be handed back as we approached The Cows. But only most of it.

I love this race. Thank you Stamford Yacht Club for sharing it with us SOLers!!

bonknhoot, September 2017