

This SWR 17/18 leg 10 was to be my first race at sailonline.org. I was able to get some feel of the controls during pre-start sailing. Already the early forecasts kept promising tricky wind conditions for the start with very low wind speed and major wind shift around the starting time. Both materialized as wind did almost 180 degrees turn right after the start and was below 0.5 knots at its lowest. ...And I had to be away for the computer around the start time for a short while.

As the wind would really pick up after passing the shift zone, I decided that it made sense to just push right away towards West and set-up starting DC for TWA with broad reach. Broad reach for a while until the wind shift would make course to get worse enough to warrant using compass instead until the wind angle would stabilize. Going North would have meant worse TWA after the wind shift and South, while slightly better wind speedwise would have really been too much into wrong direction for my taste.

15 minutes after the start time, I returned to the computer to see a surprising fan out of the fleet for nearly 180 degrees, with both North and South going ones making much more progress than my Westernly course. The soon upcoming weather update did little to no change, so no need for significant replanning due to it. Slightly later the fleet had converged to a wave with roughly equal progress and some leading slight ahead who mostly came from South after a gybe. The wave I was in was roughly 0.5nm behind the lead.

I managed to make some newbie steering mistakes which cost me additional 0.5-1nm while trying to aim into clearing the coast with only a minimal margin before turning to NW and to the Sea between Ireland and Wales. I had earlier evaluated and discarded the option to go around Ireland, which later turned out the right decision, the winds there were even worse than forecasted and those circumnavigating fell very much behind. Finally, I was able to figure out how to get the DC checker in AGL to plot the route by adding additional DCs and was able to retire to sleep near rounding the coast after making sure I'll clear all the subsequent islands and make a sensible tack if I end up sleeping in. It was going to be headwind all the way there until near Cape Wrath waypoint.

Well, I didn't sleep in but was up before slightly the next weather update and it seemed a good place to tack earlier than I had initially planned because wind was weakening longer I would keep going. To my surprise the leading group of boats kept going much longer and that didn't result in significant difference later when our paths got closer again after tacks. Then, I thought I found a good route to reach Isle of Man with both wind shift and speed in favor of my more Eastern route but again no significant gain but no loss either. The difference was around 2nm or less at that point.

Another routing decision would need to be made, high winds West to Isle of Man and East having favorable wind shift to the leg after the next tack but unfortunately that shift takes place 1-2h too late to be of much use. Thus, West side it is. At this point, I had DCs set all the way to Hebrides and I didn't need to alter that plan significantly except for minor corrections due to weather updates and a couple of extra tacks but returning soon to the originally planned route. At NW from Isle of Man, right before tacking starboard I managed to reach #4 DTF wise but that was short-term joy as there's a huge landmass of Scotland still to go around and those West of me were clearly better positioned because of the headwind so I knew my real position was around 25-40th. Isle of Man was a huge mistake for those who went around it but I had successfully avoided that trap.

In the subsequent headwind struggle, I tried to take advantage of the small favorable wind angle changes. But other than that, very little happened until we reached the area South of Skye. Another major wind shift was to take place and the post-shift wind would propel us all the way to the finish line very fast compared to the headwind so far seen. After trying my best to navigate the wind shift I retired for the second night and was ready to wake up before the next weather update due to close proximity of Outer Hebrides in order to avoid beaching due to using TWA for steering. Beforehand, I had experimented with alternative routing West of Outer Hebrides using DCs and estimating the route but a direct route was clearly quicker even if winds were much better in the West.

After waking up I was 4-6nm behind the leading fleet. I suspect that better crossing the wind shift zone and picking up the wind sooner than me made for the extra difference since the last morning. Many did much worse than me though, positionwise I gained being now in top 30 when I was able to do reliable counting for positions near the Cape Wrath. Most boats kept close to the Outer Hebrides coast due to better winds approaching from West. For this point onward, the wind was favoring those sailing from behind including me although I also hit the lower winds region a couple of times until finish line but only brief periods of time.

After rounding Cape Wrath, I initially set straight courses but adjusted later to use TWA as it seemed to provide slightly faster route. It was time to plan the route for North Sea. The most direct routes seemed to hit low winds near the coast of Norway. Thus, I choose to go quite much to South to get to better winds and then make a major turn towards the Northern tip of Jylland. The turn was aimed to route me South of a East-West boundary in the forecasted wind allowing me to stay in side of higher winds and also bear away to take maximal advantage of the higher wind speeds.

Open seas with reasonably strong and quite predictable winds meant less strain on sleep, after those previous 5h'ers, I didn't worry too much on the upcoming weather updates. Near the coasts earlier, I just didn't trust DCs to get it right without checking the all wind updates carefully.

As I was to be away for the next weather update, I initially set compass course and only later set DC for TWA 80 once it provided more Southernly heading than my initial compass one. The leading fleet didn't go as South as I did and with hindsight it probably would have been better option also for me. As one of the boats who had kept most of the race among the leading group went even further South than I did, I wasn't too alarmed by my choice and I had made some trial-and-error adjustments but couldn't get a significant differences into the estimate of arrival at to the tip of Jylland. But I never did long enough early segment with greater than TWA 80 I guess for the advantage to really show up.

After making the turn, I realized I will lose to some I was leading earlier meaning finishing outside of top 30. Those taking the straightest route wouldn't be any threat though, regardless of their temporary DTF positions so I could have done much worse tacticwise. At some point TWA predictor gave faster route, so I quickly steered to that for a while. DCs were adjusted for optimized rounding of the tip of Jylland and aim to the North marker of the finish line.

At rounding of Jylland I calculated I'll finish as #32. As my estimated distance to the leading boat since the Cape Wrath had been 6-10nm, I was pleased to find out being only 5nm behind the lead, no doubt because of the low system giving less wind for the leading boats also across North

Sea.

However, there were a couple of boats with better standing than me seemingly lacking steering commands and ploughed through past Jylland without turning. I kept watching as they, one-by-one, turned towards the finish line later except for one that finally beached to an island at the coast of Sweden. So that meant #31. To my big surprise, one of the boats missed the finish line by a very small margin not turning back in time resulting in me making into top 30. Not that bad for the first race I guess. With only 5nm behind after 1000nm seems very good result too.