

From the comfort of an armchair whilst 18 or so intrepid types have been undertaking the most arduous and hair-raising adventure of sailing through giant storms in slow boats for hundreds of days at an end, it seems a little trite to contemplate my strategy. Perhaps it will be better for the moment to totally separate this IRL race, which is evidently much more about courage and survival instinct than it is about race strategy, from our own SOL race which has rather been about, for SOTPers at least, trying to figure the future weather and understand where our slow boat might possibly be best positioned to get home in the shortest time possible.

From the very beginning, as an SOTPer, I decided that it would be no fun for me to hazard a guess every six hours as to where I might best head, umming and ahing, and grib scrolling through six days of a weather forecast. To that end I devised a simple strategy, which actually worked for me very well until I abandoned it.

My strategy was in three parts. The first and final parts were based completely on previous routes I had sailed, albeit in different races and at different times of year, to get from Europe to the roaring forties and back again. So in leg 1, the initial strategy to get from France down to the lower latitudes was to sail a course I had had success with in the past, and that was to sail close to the west coast of Africa until the coast line itself heads east, and at that point sail roughly dead south as fast as possible until I got to about 40-45 S, and then head east. And in leg 2 the third strategy was to sail just east of the Falklands and then get up to Recife roughly northwards as fast as possible. From there I would head a bit east of the Azores and home.

The middle strategy was to get myself from west of South Africa down in the 'forties across to Cape Horn sailing as close as possible to max VMG downwind just keeping a bit of a weather eye out for big high pressure systems trying to at least avoid them and preferably stay on the right side of them. So not much of a strategy there but it was basically just one big straight line along those latitudes.

In a nutshell, my strategy was virtually the opposite of routing, and more closely aligned to well established trading routes and pilot charts than anything calculated on the the weather two or three days, or even ten days ahead.

So how did it work out? Well by the time I got to the 'forties west of Africa I had actually managed to get the lead and surprisingly I managed to keep it to Hobart, and in total for 84 days and 17 hours (according to hmm's sollog logs) until I was confronted with two things. One was a large high ahead of me stretching from high up near the coast of South America down in a south easterly direction towards a point well to the east of the Falklands. The second was a three week road trip involving a music school and two music festivals. Instead of sticking to my plan to sail straight up to Recife, I thought there was a chance to make some easting and sneak through the high into favourable trades which would then take me on up to Recife. How wrong was that bit of optimistic judgement!! I well and truly lost the lead and had to eat humble pie by having to head back west away from my destination and back towards a position which would better let me get back up to Recife. The added distraction of the very enjoyable festivals definitely put me in 'follow the person in front' mode for a few weeks! However holding the lead for that amount of time might be some kind of SOL record and was certainly fun. Might also be the record for leading the race for the longest time without actually wining it! :)

From Recife onwards I went back to my original strategy of heading away from the rhumb line and sailing up to the Azores, trying to avoid the high even if sailing farther. I gained back quite a few places and was in the end very happy to finish at 8th and in the top ten.

I'm not sure I have the mental endurance to stick with such a long race again, but to do it once, and to do it in the company of so many great SOL sailors, and even more, so many unbelievably brave IRL adventurers made for a race I won't quickly forget.

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