

New Hebrides Slalom 2019.

This was a race I was not sufficiently prepared for. Wolff simultaneously sailed the Round New Zealand, Leg 2, and we were in a decisive phase nearing the finish.

Under normal circumstances, I use a good deal of time looking at the wind in 6 and 12 and in 24 hours. Where should I send Wolff and how might I best exploit the wind and the polar? Ten minutes before the start, I had a look at everything or rather ... I set a course for We Island. The distance was 96 Nm thus providing a little time for the New Zealand race. Once Wolff and New Zealand was under control, I returned to concentrate on the New Hebrides.

On approaching We Island, Wolff was buried deep in the fleet - the wrist-slap for not tending to the tiller. However, I now had time to study the wind and the polar properly. It was 148 Nm to the next mark at Tanna Island. I placed a waypoint off the southern tip of the island and routed towards it. Would QtVml use the wind and polar optimally? Nope. It wouldn't. I put in an XTE reference and used it to keep Wolff on track and that paid off. At Tanna Island, Wolff had improved her position considerably, but the leading pack were still hard to discern over the horizon: Bonknhoot, Skovser, Aner59, Kipper1258, Beliberda, WRmirekd were chasing a scent trail.

From Tanna Island, we needed to be hard on the wind to reach the next mark at Efate Island. When beating into the wind, Wolff is normally held at max. VMG, however, on legs where the angles may become slanted, I often use a mixture of max. VMG and a good VMC. This soon amortized itself and Wolff proceeded up the ranks to 7th place. It was time to focus even harder. Would I be able to decimate the distance to the leading boats? The question presenting itself was whether to go max. VMG or choose a decidedly better VMC. I chose the latter. After all, I wasn't exactly in a podium position. Favouring VMC was a good decision with one little hitch: I had failed to notice a slight change in the direction of the wind before Efate Island. Wolff needed two extra tacks to round it, and I lost some of what little gain I had built up.

Even before Efate Island, I had made a few routings to prepare for the next leg. Between Efate Island and the next mark, someone had dropped a supplementary island into the archipelago, and it was seriously in the way. There were no two ways around the fact that there were just that. East or West. Several routings suggested holding the island to starboard, but a last minute routing said to send the beast east. Wolff complied. Ij, Kipper1258 and a couple of other boats chose the westerly option. It was almost too exciting to project how that would pan out when we met again. We never did. For once, West was not best but a rather costly proposition

Bonknhoot, Skovser, and Aner59 now had a small but challenging lead. Wolff had WRmirekd and Beliberda within the determined throw of a winch handle. The infight was for fourth place. With jaw clenched and teeth gritting, Wolff managed to take it.

En route to Port Alry, the natives had arranged a beach party. Always the adventurous spirit, Aner59 had to partake of the hospitality, and now Wolff was 3rd. From there, it was just a matter of hitting the finish line with a minimal waste of time and distance.

Through hard work, Wolff finished at the lowest end of the podium waving up to and congratulating Bonknhoot and Skovser.

Wolff, Feb. 2019.