

Nantucket to Edgartown 2019

... or How to win a race without believing it.

The sprint race to Edgartown was a three hour stint in eight legs of which the middle part meandered through a maze of islands.

At the start, I was surprised to see that my J130 had crossed the line in first position. I had opened up the race only five minutes ahead of the start and knew no better than a beeline for the first mark.

In the days prior to this, my Qtvlm was finally up and running in the latest version through the tireless and selfless efforts of Bimmer. Where I had failed he installed and as a young Anakin Skywalker on his podracer, "*It's working. It's WORKING!*", I was now ready to dodge the asteroids strewn out between Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

I never opened it.

To a sprint race, cutting corners closely is as important as it is for a high school senior prepping for GMAT. If you go wide, they'll have your hide. So, I rounded Mark 1 with one pixel to spare and set off for the approach to the zig-zag course through the islands.

My wife had announced house guests an hour before the start leaving me little time to shop, chop, cook and entertain, which explains my late arrival before the start.

I managed to whip up a Greek salad, burgers and a fried portobello for the vegetarian. Dessert was fresh strawberries with Greek yoghurt and fresh honey from the farmers' market. This was prepared, consumed and enjoyed between marks 1 and 2.

Wifey signed my release and I was ready for the ziggedy-zag. Lawd have mercy!

Approaching, I ascertained that with only a bit of luck one might succeed in criss-crossing between the islands without going too deep or too high to the wind. The downwind parts were a question of having the next course ready to punch in at the corner. The upwind parts were a little trickier in that a long jump past the corner might put you past max. upwind VMG for the next corner.

The solution was to round to max. VMG and then ease off the sheets once the new heading was established. I.e. instead of rounding to say TWA -42.5, which would have been the correct course, I rounded to TWA -39 and then eased off to -41.3 because my last jump before the tack overshot the corner.

Only once did this not work: The last upwind tack between the islands was steeper than the previous, and I did something I very rarely do. When my boat stopped before the corner, I counted to ten and punched in the new course too early. The look on my face must have been that of a man without teeth clenching his jaws.

I rounded without a BBQ but still too wide. The next quarter of a mile would have to be TWA -31 with a significant loss of boat speed or else require two tacks. This is the kind of calculation I do not know how to make – perfection loss and all, so I opted for the first and pinched hard into the wind while anxiously eyeing the 360 degrees to see what everyone else did. Phew! The same. Only better.

My position at this point had vacillated between number one and nine and I was fully prepared to pride myself of a fifth place at the finish line. We now had half an hour to the next and final rounding and I had time to see whom I was up against. Holy Mackerel!

Robert1 led the pack. Jawz was biting into my position, Bonknhoot was there and being his usual successful self. The father of all race threats, Winston, gentle Piero, was right on my heels and meaning business and worst of all the new shining star in the SOL universe, ij was right there. It was little relief that WRmirekd did not compete and that Bimmer unfortunately missed a corner. Still, there were hotshots everywhere I looked.

My heart sank as I realized that fifth was an ambitious proposition.

Bjarne Riis, the Danish Tour de France champion, once answered the question *“What is the most difficult part about winning?”* His reply was: *“The most difficult part about winning is daring to win!”*

I think every reader will have his own examples to support this truth. In tennis, Danes speak of ‘rubber arm’. In Sailonline, this may translate to ‘rudder arm’: Too many tiny course corrections and wavering between two or more plans. In an inshore race, however, there’s only one plan that I could wrap my head around. Round those corners! There are no other viable options.

One last island to round, closer than I would dare to shave, and we were on the home stretch. Two miles hard to weather and a single tack would do it. Robert1 opted for two, which was a plan I had discarded because the wind was 0.1 knot stronger towards the west and the leg after the final tack would have 2 degrees of better wind angle. Once again, I was glad to see that I voted with the majority while Robert1 lost what looked like a certain victory with his brave maneuver.

Going west was costing positions. I was down to eight and slowly reconciling myself with the idea that although I’d done well, I hadn’t done best.

Timing of the last (at-)tack was critical. My layline was marked out and corrected a few times while I sank into retrospection of all the other times I have thought I was doing well and lost.

Max. VMG was still TWA 39. I went for 38 three jumps before the turn and tacked to 38 then eased out one degree to the near end of the finish line. Actually, I tacked a fraction before my layline to cover Jawz or follow him closely. He seemed to be ahead.

So, here’s where Mr. Eastwood comes in. Was I fifth or only sixth? *“Well, to tell you the truth, in all this excitement, I kinda lost track myself.”* But did this punk feel lucky? Nope. Not with all the races I have not won.

Sure enough, I came in second after Jawz. That in itself was a victory. Then I opened the race leaderboard and realized that although I was marked second, I had come in five seconds ahead of Jawz. Ij, always a strong finisher, came in 4 seconds later in third place and casually remarked that he had BBQ'ed *en route*. Thus, he most graciously rubbed in his current SOL dominance.

Finally, after 15 minutes, the board updated with Mouthansar in first place. Meanwhile, the chat had died as if someone had pulled the plug. Our guests had left, and my wife had turned in early. Not even a strawberry was left for the champagne. There was no champagne. It was just me and the cat celebrating that I had had the courage to win without believing I could.

This being one of my very rare race reports, I'd like to end it with a quote I hold on to as a motto. It's from Calvin Coolidge, the 30th US president, and it encompasses the SOL experience very well:

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."

Thank you for reading and thank you for racing SOL.

Mouthansar/Lars

PS. 'Mouthansar' is not pronounced 'Mouth answer'! My misbegotten nick was inspired by a good friend who perfected his parody of an Afghan accent using this name as his alter ego. It sounded like 'Mootanzah'.