

Greetings from Third

Pantaneus Shetland Race Legs 1 and 2

Leg 1

Coming first leaves little room to best yourself.

I am telling you fellows: To stomach coming third braces a man. To do your level best and still find ample room for improvement – that's how good abs are built.

The two races from Bergen, Norway, to the Shetland Islands and back looked straightforward: 185.6 Nautical miles. Race 1 go left, Race 2 go right. That's how easy racing is. Really. Embellishments and further finesse may be added as you progress.

Several days in advance of heading west in Leg 1, I decided that a more northerly course could be rewarding.

In the final hour before the start, my router confirmed that I was indeed on to something. The router wanted to start out West by Northwest, tack twice about two fifths of the way and then head for the finish.

So, 'press the button and go to bed' seemed to be the order of the day, but it was only noon. I spent the afternoon tweaking my course slightly further north based on my preference for an upwind position relative to the competition. The tacks loomed on the horizon and I wanted the distance between them to be as short as possible.

I later realized that the upwind advantage could barely be capitalized because the First 47.7 polar is very flat above TWA 45.

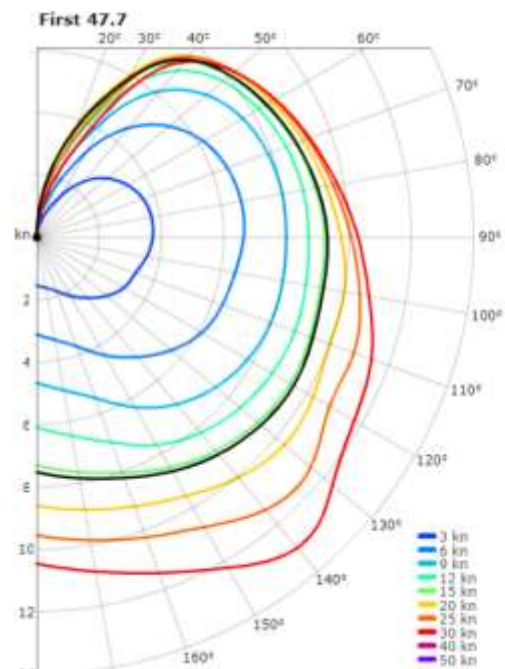
Eventually, after the tacks, it did pay off, and I was placed squarely in second position behind Rafa.

Behind me and downwind, WRmirekd was nibbling at me but only by hundredths of a mile. Where he found his speed will remain a well-guarded Polish enigma, but I felt reasonably comfortable albeit alert for much of the night.

The sprint to the finish was memorable if not for the sprint itself then for the circumstances under which it had to be effected.

The finish would be late morning and coincide with a meeting of the Study Board, of which I am a member, at my university.

Had it only been a straight run, I could have programmed it, but no. The finish in Lerwick was tucked inside a bay behind Bressay, and the final course changes would require concentration in order to hang on to my second place.

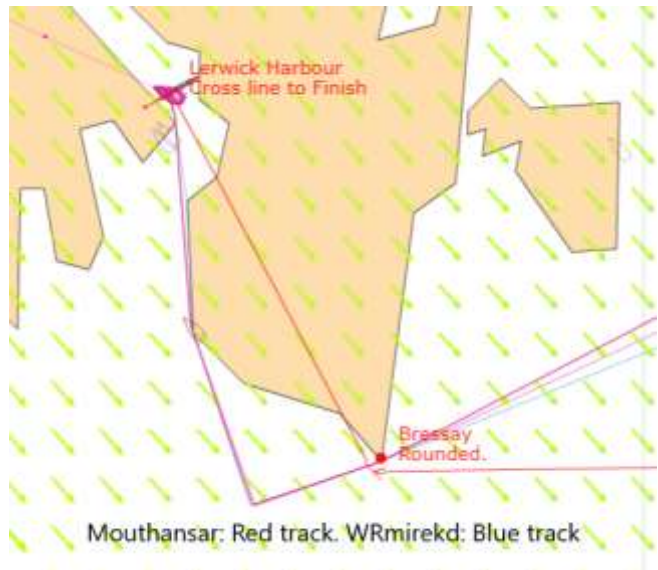


Our study board meetings are scheduled to last two hours and fifteen minutes starting at 10:15. The chairman always makes sure that meetings go the full length of time – if necessary by sidetracking the discussion. The Bressay turn would come at 11:32 our time, an hour before the end of the meeting.

Stealing glances at the race hidden behind the meeting agenda and other documents on my laptop monitor, I knew I was in trouble as we approached Bressay, but, surprisingly, also the penultimate point on the agenda.

That was when my fellow study board member announced that she had not been able to find the time to prepare an evaluation that was required of her for that point. I could have hugged her.

Her abstention left the chairman completely nonplussed. Without her statement there would be no discussion and thus no discussion to sidetrack.

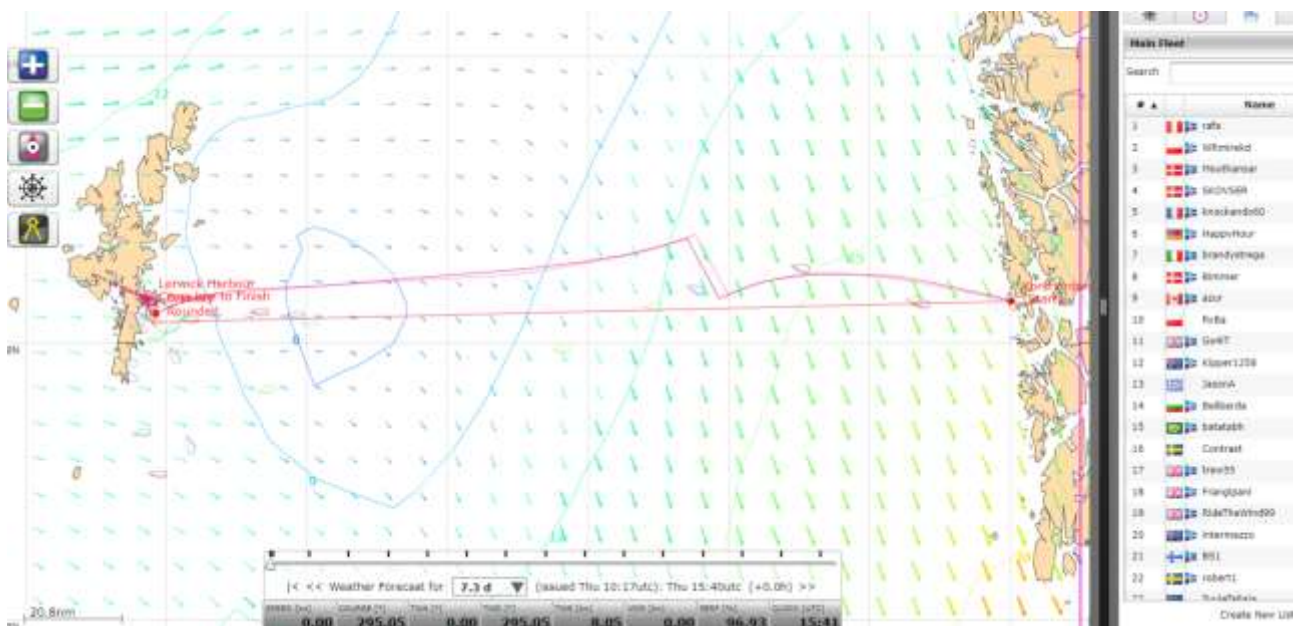


The chairman decided to move on to 'any other business' only to find that no one had anything to add. I turned my attention to my own business.

It was historical for such a meeting to end early, but it was concluded about a third of the way up from Bressay to Lerwick.

Whether it was my distraction or WRmirekd's prowess that cost me second place I do not know. I lost second place by four seconds and a fellow Dane, Skovser, came in a close fourth. Rafa was the undisputed winner.

Below is a summary of the entire length of the race and the finishing order:



Leg 2

As a general rule in the North Atlantic, going westwards is upwind while an eastwards journey will provide a sleigh-ride. Sure enough, Leg 2, the return to Bergen would play out in northwesterly winds coming out of the Arctic. Incidentally, the real race took place in temperatures from 10 to 12 degrees centigrade. That's 50 – 55 F for you Americans. It would have been cold for anyone. Now you know how the Vikings were hardened.

Speaking of Vikings, I never realized how accessible the Shetland Islands were for these pirates. 24 to 36 hours in their longships with speeds comparable to our First 47.7's is not much different from charter holidays today.

The race started two days after the finish of Leg 1 and I knew that Skovser would be hell-bent to beat me in this one regardless of our overall positions. However, looking at the weather with intermittent lulls and changes in wind direction, I found myself plan and clue-less. The routings I called up left me with no ideas as to where I could tweak to my advantage.

Figuring something would come up, I took off on a prayer and 200 DC's after rounding Bressay neatly.

Rafa and WRmirekd joined me, but that was not all. Oh no. Sir Winston_4 not only turned up on the starting line. He turned out for the race. All hope of a podium place was lost. With these three gentlemen shouldering up and Skovser as a wingman, I would have my hands full. Other notables such as DIKKEHENK, knockando60, HappyHour and Batatabh added to the challenge (sorry I didn't mention your boat – as I said, I had my hands full.)

A few hours into the race, Winston went north rather than east on a route not even hinted at by my router. I could not figure out why, and I was hoping against hope that he had eliminated himself from the race.

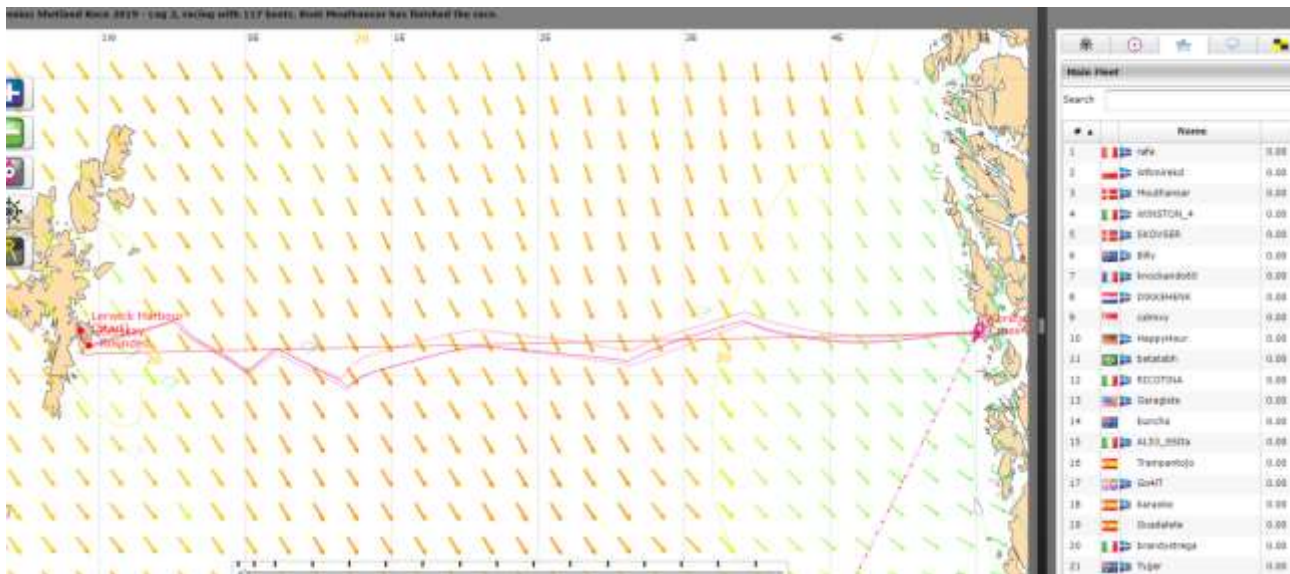
The tweaks I were able to make were mainly centered on the WX's. I would try to anticipate the new weather based on the observation that low pressure systems usually travel eastwards slightly faster than expected. A few minutes before the WX I would delete all my DC's and max out the VMC on the tack I expected to be right. Thus, I would either turn first or gain a little latitude on the competition if the tack remained the same.

This being the full extent of my wisdom, I was somewhat surprised to wake up the next day in second place with the now familiar sight of Rafa's swim platform ahead of me.

I then realized that WRmirekd had adopted the same strategy as the one I had employed in Leg 1. He had placed himself nicely upwind from me and was gaining. Lo and behold, Winston had done the same only with much more gusto and consequence. His wild aberration from the layline was paying off big time.

My focus now reverted to keeping Skovser behind me, but he too had seen the Northern Lights.

The flat polar came to my assistance. Their speed gains in easing out the sheets more than I could were only sufficient for WRmirekd to pass me. Skovser did not catch up and Winston had ended up trekking too far north remaining, however, a fearsome threat until the dying minutes of the race when he came in thirty seconds behind me in fourth place. Skovser followed in a respectable fifth position.



The race covered no fewer than six longitudes.

At 60 N, they are spaced by 30 Nm's where, in the Mediterranean, there are 50 miles between them.

Besides being an upwind and a downwind race on the same course, the main difference for me, in the two races, was that in Race 1, I was hoping to place second while, in Race 2, I feared I'd be fourth.

I thought about naming this report 'Third Degree Burns' or maybe 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind', but I have decided against it and chosen a comradelier 'Greetings from Third'.

Thank you for reading and thank you for racing SOL.

Mouthansar/Lars