

After twenty days at sea, cruising from Athens to Istanbul and back with friends, I checked in for a flight back to Spain on Tuesday evening July 17. It is difficult to find time for SOL when you are afloat or perambulating about IRL, but I was hopeful that I might be back on my own boat, Damacle, lying in the Marina Las Salinas, seaside of Murcia's Mar Menor, in good time to prepare for the Tour Down Under TDU).

However, these hopes were almost dashed by Vueling Air, as one of their incoming flight's crew managed to get so sick that the captain cancelled the flight back, so that by 2 a.m. I found myself accommodated in a very fine Athens hotel for a good night's sleep and a decent breakfast in the morning. Arriving fourteen hours later in Barcelona than planned via this detour, chaos theory (butterfly effect) then took hold, as the next train and the next train and the next bus to Murcia were all 'full'.

In the end, I found a bus from Barcelona Nord to take me south on a nighttime journey. Completing the journey to the marina by taxi from Murcia Bus Station (50km which cost more than the 1800km from Athens to Barcelona), I was back on board Damacle by 6 a.m. to be welcomed by my wife who had arrived (as planned) the night before, and to then immediately fall asleep.

With only ten hours to the start of the TDU when I awoke, I was briefly in two minds, whether to start at all. Susan and I having been apart for nigh on six weeks, affording SOL my full attention was hardly going to be applauded. There was also a passage to Gibraltar to be made, which, as I write, remains the case, as we have been weather-bound ever since.

Obviously, I decided I'd start. One can always retire. Good choice as it turned out. As said, the IRL weather kept us in port. Also, I hadn't realized the TDU was a SYC-CH race. And finally, of course, I won it. So, how did that happen?

Well, let me start the explanation by remarking on the disappointingly low turn-out: less than 90 boats, I suppose reflecting vacation time in Europe, but still. Amongst the missing were a number of very hard-to-beat SOLers, so that two or three WXs after the gun, as we were beating north up Spencer Gulf, it was already starting to look like the race might turn out to be a dogfight between Kipper1258 and I, with Kipper marginally ahead of me. However, working his way up the other shore of the gulf, rafa was looking very good, and the latest WX was routing him to round the buoy at the head of the gulf ahead of us easterners.

It turned out otherwise. Half way up the gulf, Kipper and I crossed over, leaving the stronger breeze behind us to pick up the strong lift under the western shore, and, by dint of an extra short tack for a further angle advantage I managed to get to the buoy first, but with Kipper still in close attendance. Alas for Kipper, somewhere in between Wedge and Troubridge Island, he uncharacteristically came to grief, leaving rafa as my next nearest challenger, but far enough astern to only be able to threaten me if I BBQ'd. I didn't.

My second P1 in the SYC-CH, which keeps me in the hunt, but only thereabouts. Let's see if I can make the start for 'hmm's Delivery' on August 15, when I should be in or approaching Cascais IRL, and hoping for a bigger turn-out.

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