

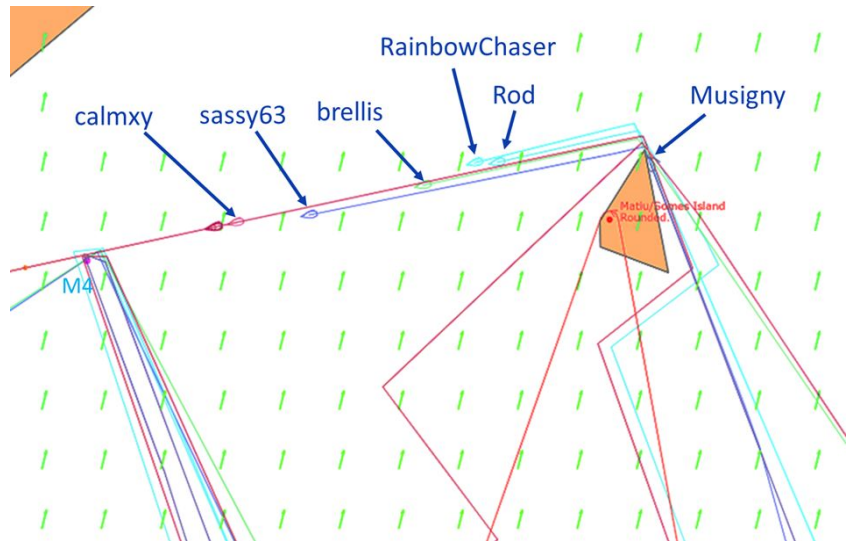
When I entered this race shortly after its availability (at around 6pm UTC, 5 September), there were 15+ knot winds coming from the South. The first thing I did was to immediately attempt to race to the finish to see how quickly it could be done. I reckon that it would have taken just 100-120 minutes to complete (comparable in length to a PR), which matches the description of the race that "it could all be over before you've started, if you blink!" I will never really know the exact time to finish it, because I blinked, missed Fitzroy Bay by a hair and BBQ'd thereafter. Definitely something you want to avoid in an actual race, SOL or otherwise.

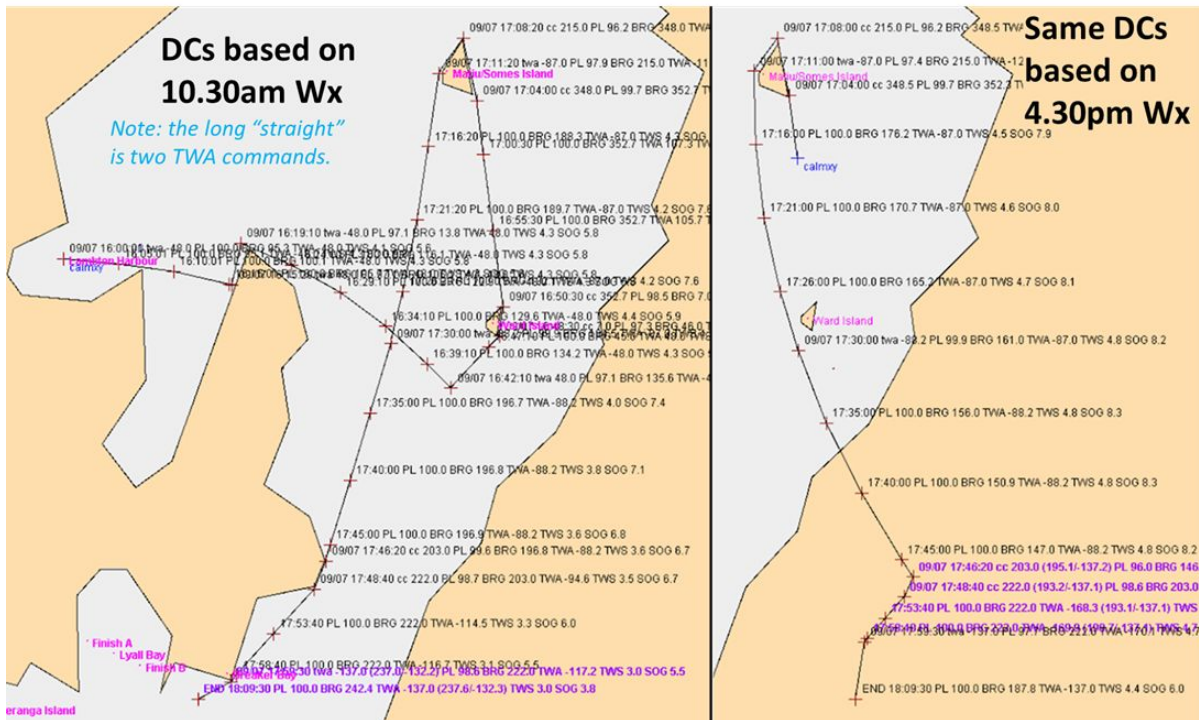
The winds were still strong at the time of the Practice Race. This one had plenty of north-south movements, the exception being the stretch from Somes to M4. Given the wind was still coming from the south, it was a test of going upwind and downwind, as well as trying to minimize performance loss.

One thing to note is that normally, it's not optimal to tack or gybe repeatedly in quick succession due to performance loss effects.

However, if your boat has gone below ~93% performance **as a result of the commands needed to round closely placed marks** (happened several times due to the close distance between headlands/marks), then the lack of further performance loss means that you can do so freely to keep in the best winds. Indeed, the only time my boat reached 100% performance in this race was just before M5.

This, together with the fact that this run was BBQ-free, allowed me to achieve my second win in a Practice Race. At one point, sassy63 mentioned in chat: "calmxy - are you motorised today heyy? too fast..." Well, in the actual race, the reverse would be true, as sassy63 would finish in front of me.



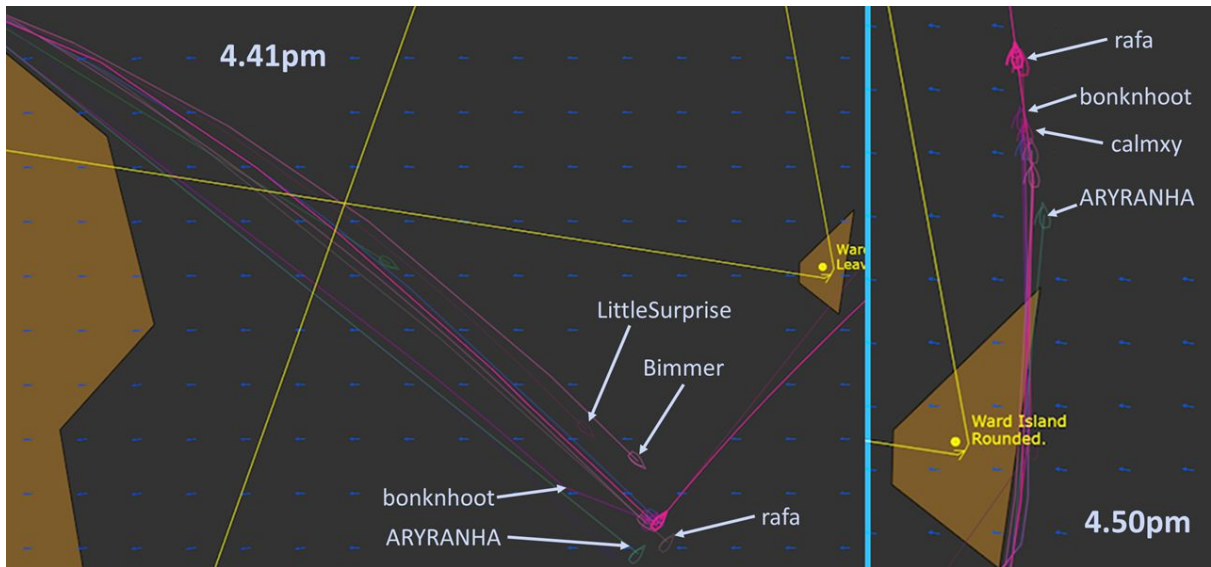


Like in the Visingso runt, I set DCs to predict how long the race would last. Of course, this would be the day that the windhole comes to visit Wellington. As bonknhoot said in the chat: "Where's all the wind gone??" This would change race strategy; instead of working around performance loss, this would get us to work around changing wind direction. The expected timings for this race (as of race start) were: 48 min to Ward Island, 68 to Somes and 119 to Breaker Bay. Compare that to 100-120 min if one started right when the race opened.

Of course, it's understood that, especially with the fickle and shifty (light) winds, all commands after 16.30utc (or whenever the new Wx came in) will probably need to be revised. This is why I didn't attempt to set DCs any further. And sure enough, the changes were huge; my TWA commands to reach Breaker Bay would bring me to BBQ on the opposite coast. The COG equivalent from Somes Island (193°) became slightly slower overall and (towards the end of the 193° COG command) also sailed too much into the tailwind; now it wouldn't be possible to optimally sail the shortest route to Breaker Bay.

Despite the wind being stronger to the north, DC testing showed that it was faster to head south first due to wind shift. It wouldn't have been possible anyway to get from Start to Ward Island with a single pair of tacks, because one would BBQ in Wellington before the theoretical tack point.

To get to Ward Island, one needed to round the Roseneath headland first. While most of us went TWA 48-53° first and tacked just before BBQing there, a few boats headed there with a TWA 40° command. Unfortunately for them, TWA 42° at low wind speeds meant they were sailing too much into the headwind (at least ~9 knots of wind was necessary to make it work); the resulting gap was quite noticeable.

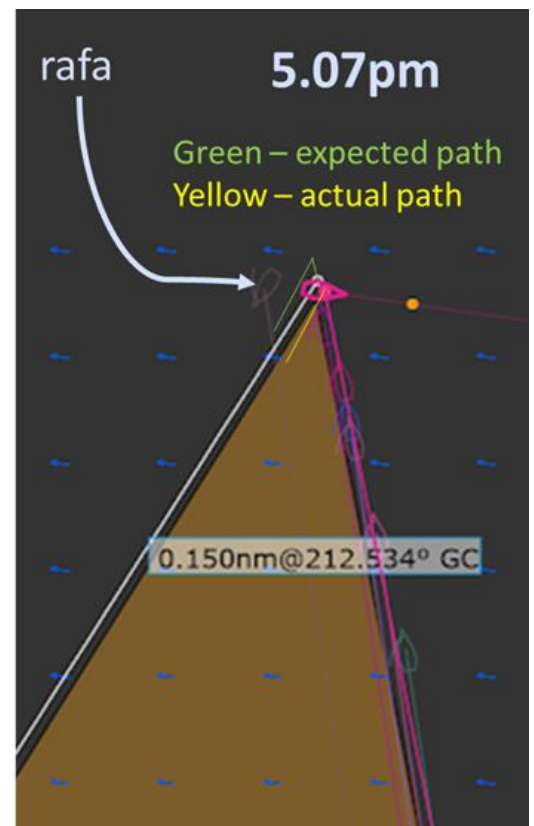


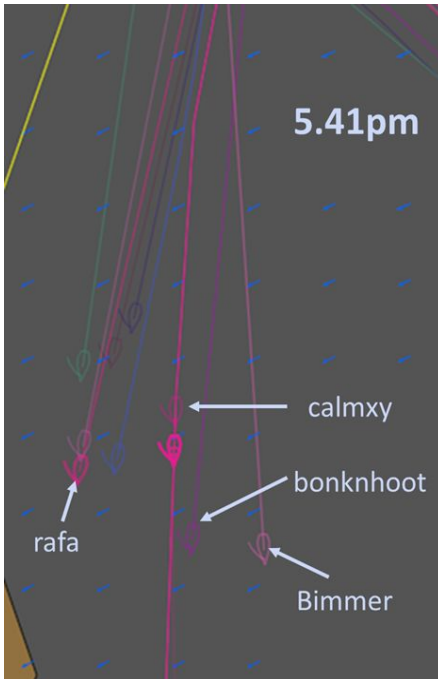
bonknhoot, batatabh and Aryranha followed the coastline along Massey Rd (approx. TWA 60°), which took them further away from reaching Ward. I initially dismissed this as an error on their part. The extra boat speed must have been worthwhile for them, since they got to Ward at around the same time as they would have otherwise; both bonknoot and rafa (who sailed the TWA 53° path with me) were ahead. I was ranked #5 then and felt that I had a good chance to finish in the top 10. The new Wx came in about two-thirds of the way to Somes.

A COG command for 215° was set so that I would be able to follow the coastline more closely. I tried the “count to 10 and fire the command” to round the tip with minimal overshoot in my attempt to keep close to rafa. But it seems like it was a second too soon: next thing I find, my boat is BBQ’d right on the tip. I’m not sure how this happened, given that I have rounded this particular corner twice (in that first run and the Practice Race) without problem. I guess my luck just happened to be bad as the server decided that this was a BBQ instead of the successful rounding that I was expecting. By the time I rejoined, I had fallen to around rank #25.

I heard that in the [Nantucket race](#), ij supposedly maintained their podium position despite a BBQ en-route. However, for me, lacking that kind of dominance in SOL, meant that I would finish outside the top 10 as a result of this BBQ. Still, I carried on, knowing there’s always that tiny chance that others make enough mistakes in the windhole that I could somehow overtake enough boats to return to the top 10.

In fact, if I had avoided further loss of time with respect to rafa (the race leader), I should have finished around 12th. But I ended up with a finish in 17th, 8 minutes behind rafa. If I hadn’t BBQ’d there, I would probably remain around 5th and have followed rafa all the way to the finish (I was around one server update behind just before the BBQ, thus making it *just* about possible to do).

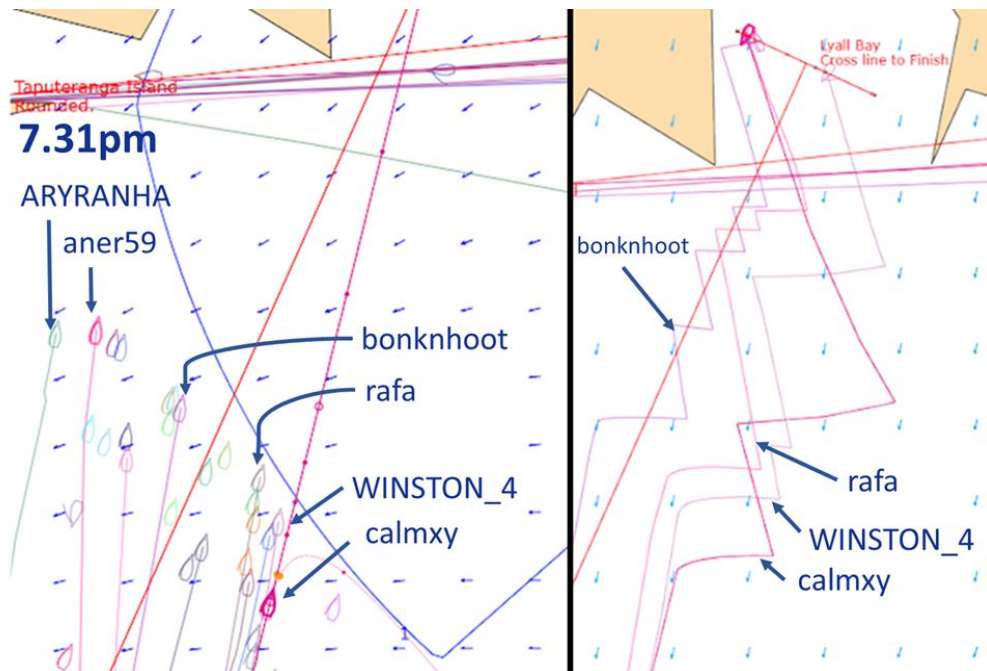




Heading to Breaker Bay, I noticed that bonknhoot and Bimmer had taken a different route from the others; perhaps to avoid the end stretch where you sail too much into the tailwind, they head further east. I decided that at the expense of possibly overtaking them, I would follow bonknhoot as this could be several seconds faster than if I followed the horde. This one paid off, as I moved up to rank #17 at the time I rounded Breaker Bay. It's unfortunate though that bonknhoot made the required gybe a little late, thus losing any advantage that could have been gained from taking the alternative route.

Heading from Breaker Bay to Taputeranga Island was pretty straightforward; given the limited room for manoeuvre, the only decision was when to change from the COG command to TWA so that the island could be rounded more efficiently.

The angle at which one exited also allowed for a setup towards Fitzroy Bay; if done correctly, it could offer more options such as gybing after Sirens Rocks (headland) without additional gybes and performance loss, as what rafa did. My boat was showing that it would just about touch land. Perhaps as a result of the earlier BBQ, I feared that it was going to happen again and made the gybe earlier than desired. As of reaching Fitzroy mark, I dropped back to rank #19.



The last part was perhaps the most challenging part, for the centre of the windhole decided to cross us right as we were approaching the finish line. As expected, there was significant variation in how the leading boats tackled this. A few boats literally made a u-turn at Fitzroy, but I went along the other edge of the group (along with Winston_4). Given that rafa and bonknhoot used different strategies here (although they both aimed for the left end of the Finish line), this should have afforded some flexibility. I'm actually not entirely sure what happened here, except that after a few gybes on DCs, I managed to cross the finish, 8 minutes after rafa. But well done to all, and let's race on to Onetangi and the penguins!