

The Covid-19 run - Lisbon to Cape Town 2020

By Jawz

Hi Folks – I knew that if I had a top finish I would be asked for a race report. I am not one to over analyse my races, nor do I grab screenshots in the hope I finish well, so I decided to mix it up a little with the spread of Covid-19 here in South Africa. I hope you find it interesting. - George

March 8 – Here in South Africa it is reported that there are 3 positive cases of Covid-19 today. All of these were travellers coming back to South Africa from trips abroad and there are no local transmission cases. No worries, we will start the race and watch the news of how it spreads in Europe and the far east. My plan for this RTW race is as follows;

- Because of the local challenge of load shedding and the issue of rolling blackouts across the country the possibility of no power for up to 4 hours at a time would create a special challenge for us South African solers. Right. My solution will be to download qtvlm, create a tab for Kroppys sailing site, export a route for the next 12 hours to Brainaid's toolbox and get that imported into my DC set. Now neither any lack of power nor my travelling to and from work would be affected by me not being able to refine my routes during any wx changes.

March 9 – 7 cases of Covid-19 today and they are still all travellers bringing it home with them. Much talk starting to happen about 147 South Africans to be brought back from Wuhan, China.

- I decided today that I would sail the historical route from Europe to the Cape Of Good Hope. This was to aim for the bulge of South America, wind patterns determining how close. I could only get a 7 day forecast from the Brainaid grib so I set Ilha de Fernando de Noronha as my endpoint

March 10 – No further cases announced. Good. Maybe it won't hit us so hard.

- I can't remember when it happened but a major chunk of the fleet decided to hug the west coast of Africa and I thought this was a crazy decision. Yes the routing might indicate this might be the fastest route but the weather is a fickle mistress and I decided to stick with my plan. After all the law of averages says that the western route is best. But it is disconcerting when the likes of Rafa, Kipper and Scarrabochia choose this path. Had I made a blunder?

March 11- 13 cases announced today. Hey! I read somewhere that the number of positive cases doubles every 2 days! Surely it couldn't escalate here like that I thought. I read that a hotel in the Orange Free State was selected as a quarantine venue for our 147 expats. When the locals got wind of it they started complaining. Ignorance is bliss. If they are isolated there is no possibility of infection!

March 12- 16 cases announced

March 15- 51 cases announced. The first local transmissions, not yet confirmed by government labs, was announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa . He also addresses the nation and announces a range of efforts to mitigate the crisis

- I saw in the SOL chat someone talks about Saildocs and able to get a 15 day grib. I remembered that in 2016 I managed to get grips delivered and sent a mail off to get this. I copy an old script and adjust it for the new map coordinates.

16 March- 62 cases announced. The first confirmed case from Limpopo province was announced.

- The western fleet sails past Ilha de Fernando de Noronha and the routing software says that it is going to be close
- Saildocs send me a grib and I manage to get a route almost to Cape Town. This allows me to set a target that falls within the Brainaid grib 7 day reach and plan around this

17 March- 85 cases announced. The first confirmed cases of local transmission were announced by government labs, 4 in Gauteng, 3 in KwaZulu-Natal, and 1 in the Western Cape.

- For some weird reason any further Saildocs grips don't want to work in qtvlm and I turn to Chat for help. Dingo, SimeMali and Sebensa come to my aid and I discover that I had been typing up the grib code incorrectly.

March 18, 116 cases announced. The first confirmed case of local transmission in Mpumalanga was announced by government labs.

March 19- The confirmed number of cases climbed to 150. Later that evening, Dr Mkhize suggested that two thirds of the South African population could contract the virus. This prediction falls in line with Europe's estimates on population infection.

March 20- The confirmed number of cases rose to 202 and the first two recoveries[failed verification] were also announced, bringing the number of ongoing confirmed cases to 200. The Free State province recorded seven cases, becoming the sixth of South Africa's nine provinces to be infected. Of the seven cases, five were from abroad - namely Israel, France, and Texas - they congregated for a church gathering attended by 200. O. R. Tambo International Airport is keeping foreigners isolated and sending them back to their countries of origin.

- Its Friday and I noticed this morning that my throat was scratchy and I had a slight runny nose.
- I am hanging in the lead bunch here in the west and it looks like a top 5 finish might be possible

March 21- The confirmed number of cases was announced to be 240 with the Eastern Cape reporting its first case, making it the seventh of the nine provinces to report a case. Saturday morning and my throat was definitely sore. I had a post nasal drip and this was causing the throat to inflame. I spent the whole day worrying over the fact that maybe I should self isolate. But to drop my students mid course is not an ideal situation.

March 22- Sunday, 274 cases announced. President Cyril Ramaphosa is meeting today with business leaders and discussing how to best alleviate the impact on our already struggling economy.

- At 8:15 I send the boss lady a series of Whatsapps explaining that its best I stay away tomorrow from work and self-isolate for as long as it takes to get over whatever this head cold is.
- At some stage tonight our western fleet will take over the lead and with luck I will be sitting well for a definite top 5 finish.

March 23-Monday. It was announced today that there are 402 cases In SA with 207 of those here in Gauteng where I live. President Cyril Ramaphosa is due to address the nation later tonight and to be honest I do not think we are terribly far from a complete shutdown here in Johannesburg. Update South Africa goes into lockdown for 21 days! Only essential movement allowed etc etc.

I basically pulled an allnighter last night. 12 noon and I am lying 3rd with a tiger on my tail, Dikkehenk 😊. A new race starts today, we are 1200nm out of Cape Town and the fleet has settled down with the western flotilla having taken over the lead. In my pack its Mullionman, Leelu22, myself (Jawz)and DIKKEHENK riding vanguard and squabbling over the podium places. By the way, Mullionman out the UK has sailed a peach of a race so far. Overnight he made a ballsy move, gybed south, and extended his lead by some 20nm or so! Great stuff! The new race is from now, how best to handle the High Pressure system up ahead, and catch the whirlwind that coming in to Cape Town.

March 24- Tuesday. 554 cases today. Following the curve! This morning I popped in to the shops to buy the last few essentials before the lockdown starts on Thursday.

- That whirlwind of low pressure isn't playing the game and seems to have moved away a bit. Oh well, run through the pipe/tunnel that has formed again I guess.
- At the 1617 weather I noticed that Bonknhoot had gybed early. My routing tests indicate that he might finish only 45minutes behind me! Another serious tiger on my tail, One Dutchman giving me hell alongside and another behind waiting for me to slip up! Hell, the top sailors are good and you can never relax!

March 25- 709 cases and we have 2 severe cases in ICU.

- I spent a long night catnapping in the family room. I just did not have the courage to set a bunch of dc's and sleep through. With only 2 days to go I felt I had to make sure of a good position. I guess I worried too much about bonknhoot and co behind me and tried covering any moves the following pack was making to the detriment of my position to DIKKEHENK and now I have a worse situation to deal with
- Through the day I sat at the tiller and tried to make sure of a good position wind-wise versus DIKKEHENK and a back-up plan was to follow Leelu22. It seems my better wind and angle was working in my favour
- Its now 2245 and Im 5.5 hours away from the line. A straight line to the finish and I'm 3rd. I decide to set the course for the line and sleep till 3:30am and watch Jawz cross the line

March 26, Thursday- 3rd place

A podium finish for me is a rare thing. A podium finish in an Ocean race has never happened. I have sailed on SOL since 2009 and this result goes to the top of my “Most Enjoyable Races On Sailonline List”



At midnight tonight we go into full lockdown. In the grand scheme of things Sailonline has been a distraction and will be for the next 21 days. I implore my Sailonline friends to take this infectious virus seriously, a lot of us are older folk and it appears to hit the older adults hardest. We are all being affected by this virus and I hope and pray that my Sol friends come through this pandemic okay. Stay safe folks!

Here is a chart on hoe the Covid-19 infection spread here in South Africa. If first world countries like Italy and America are struggling to cope Africa is in serious trouble indeed. We just do not have the facilities and a huge chunk of our population live in low-cost housing and shanty towns. I fear for Africa! No deaths yet fortunately.

