

Team RMYS – Combined Race Report

Newport-to-Bermuda Race report from the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron Team

With competitive racing still not an option here in Victoria (Australia) due to ‘the virus’, frustrated sailors have been turning to virtual sailing on platforms such as Sail Online (SOL) to get their sailing fix.

For the Newport-to-Bermuda (N2B) race we brought 9 competitors from the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (RMYS) to compete in the race for the first time.



Here's who they are and what they had to say about the race.

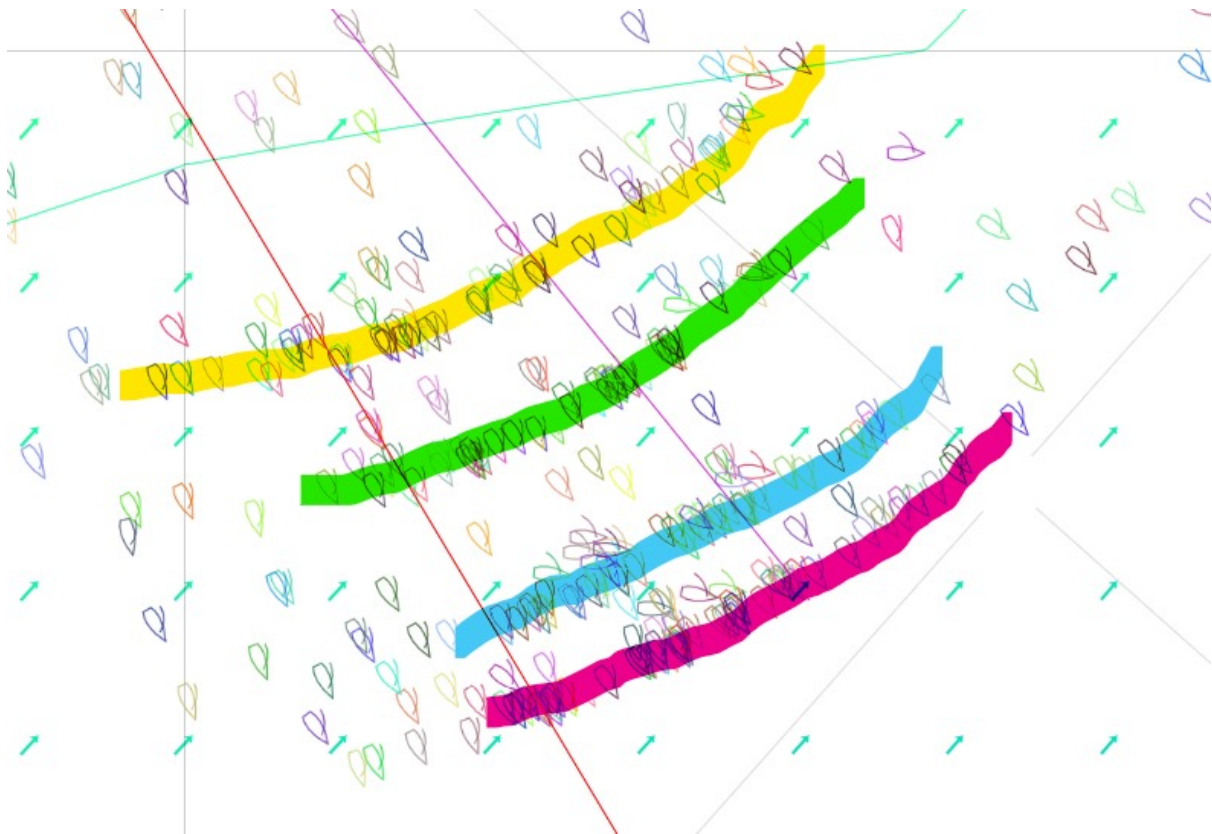
Alex Simopoulos (finished #87 overall on FarrQ2) – New to SOL and relatively new to sailing, Alex chose the biggest and fastest boat he could afford and at a sticker price of \$0 for a brand new (virtual) boat that was of course the ‘Xp55’. He starts his report with:

“After a pretty explosive start at top speed, I smacked into Rhode Island and lay aground for 2.5-3 hrs.”

After BBQ'ing for a couple of hours Alex came in mid-fleet in his first SOL race. Well done Alex. His full report is a long ride but a lot of fun. It's included in full at the end of this team report. I think he's addicted!

Pert Carr (#94 on Indra49)

"This is my fourth SOL race and I am enjoying them immensely, if being infuriated by developments overnight. Chose a boat at random to scratch race with (GREATSKUA), caught up and passed him at one stage only to discover next morning I was in a hole and he was miles ahead. In the Newport - Bermuda race I went straight down the rhumb line and finished 94th, perhaps because I was able to cross the line in the middle of the day! Haven't used any fancy software yet, just the polar diagram. Fascinating to see after the first 12 hours the four boat classes spread out like bands on a chromatography plate! I chose an Italia 14.98 and it proved to be a worthy competitor, even passing a few of the XP55's. On to the next race!"



Phil Grossi (#157 on Volare_Tu) – Phil's Italian heritage clearly gave him no choice in choosing the 'Italia 14.98'.

"As a newbie to Virtual racing, I (Volare_Tu) could not understand why one needs to be awake at 3am for the start of a Virtual race, I am based in Australia). I got off to an amazing start in the Newport to Bermuda race, thanks to the guidance of my two mentors Hoppy and DTayls using navigation software which offers suggestions as to best routings. Whilst it was exciting to be ahead of our group, I was constantly having to look back to determine my next course changes. We chose the most Easterly course and ended many miles from the rhumb line and eventually re joined the rhumb line after what seemed like many days, only to find ourselves behind those that went in a straight line along the rhumb line. It was an exciting journey and have yet to stop anywhere along the coast for a Barbecue.

There is a lot to learn to be with the leaders but always more exciting to find your own route."

The rest of the RMYS team went one-design with the Sun Fast 3300.

David Taylor (#231 on dtayls) – An inshore and offshore sailor. Helped bring the Melbourne-to-Osaka race to SOL ... an epic non-stop double-handed yacht race travelling from south to north across the equator and through the doldrums.

"The wind direction wasn't going to be perfect for the 3300 but early predictions suggested the eastern option was viable. So, preferring the path less travelled that's where I headed. There was also a low threatening to develop in the path of the rhumb-liners. It continued to develop but failed to engulf the leaders of the rhumb-line pack, much to my chagrin. From there it was a drag race to the finish while keeping a keen eye on those close to me.

To me SOL is a great platform for learning how to plan for and navigate weather patterns whether you are a racer or a cruiser. And of course the same skills are useful on a short round-the-cans race inshore where you are not so much looking at weather maps as approaching cloud patterns and wind on the water."

Stephen Hopkins (#237 on Hoppy)

"As the race started 3am my time, I had to plan my start routing several hours before the pre-race forecast. My routing software sent me out well east, cutting close to Martha's Vineyard. Woke at 5am, 2 hours into the race and was surprised to find that the fleet was close to the rhumb line. I downloaded the grid and the routing sent me back towards the rhumb line, but I decided to ignore that and continued with my original far east route. For the whole race I found myself pretty much side by side with Dtayls, who introduced me to SOL. I spent many hours looking at alternative routes and even ECMWF forecasts to see if there was a gamble worth taking. In the end I had to settle with finishing behind him, and I am very happy with my result in the Sun fast 3300 division."

Sabina Rosser (#256 on sabbi) – Sabina is a great sailor both inshore and offshore. One thing you can't miss when you first meet Sabina is that's she's very direct and doesn't mince her words. She starts her report with:

"I'm not sure if it was good or bad to be introduced to Sailonline. Good because it's been a great thing to do whilst isolating, recovering from injuries and hey, can't sail anyway, but bad because it's become soooooooooooooo addictive. I have to plan my day around wind changes, corners, islands etc and refuse to go outside the house if it's the end of the race."

We might have another addict although that might change when she's allowed to play golf again.

Sabina is also old-school as you will find out in the full report below. She sails by the seat of her pants (SOTP) and puts many of those routing to shame.

Greg Patten (#303 on Corners) – An experienced sailor IRL, yachting instructor and coach, this is Greg's third SOL race.

"I went to the wrong side of the course (west of the rhumb line) based on what I saw from the ECMWF forecast, not realising until half way through the race that SOL uses GFS! (Evidently the long term GFS was considerably more accurate in predicting the location of the "holes" on the race course.) On the bright side have I now discovered the joys of OpenCPN and XyGrib as well as Predictwind Offshore and the amazing per race information published by brainaid so will hopefully be in a slightly stronger position for my next outing! The next project is to try and get the NMEA proxy working."

Alistair Hart (#330 on alhart) – It's only his second SOL race but he has a wealth of sailing experience both inshore and offshore as well as being a great race officer.

"Some excitement for this Australian, my Family were early settlers of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, so this race brings me "home" if only virtually."

But, he claims his navigator keeps nodding off and failing to wake up to report on deck for his watch.

Check out Alistair's full report below.

Cameron Reed (#331 on WRT) – Cam is a great competitor and a great promoter of sailing. We are still in partial lockdown here in Melbourne so we're still not allowed to race, but we are allowed to go out training so long as we observe appropriate government social distancing guidelines. That means he can't go out fully-crewed so for the past few weeks he has been running two partially-crewed training sessions every Saturday.

"Our team had a possible best start (waiting for the bottle) I estimate barely leaving 5 seconds to the fleet then chose a dynamic easterly course that payed dividends for the first 12-15 hours, after looking at the weather we (WRT) decided to remain above the rhumb line anticipating a shift that may help in a few hours or days. Unfortunately this shift did not pay and from 20-25 miles in front we slipped to the back as the fleet. My competitors had apparently read the weather better and they gradually approached and overtook us with a hotter angle and better boat speed (pretty sure I can blame the crew) . Thanks for the race and I quietly enjoyed it. Cant wait to do one on the water and will call on you lot next time I am doing strategy for (my most strategically annoying) King Island race."

I note from the race logs that another boat (SailFast) was complaining that some boat called WRT was trying to sail through below and that that wouldn't work in real life. Let's just say, Cam knows that feeling 😊

Here in Australia we have been really lucky with only 103 deaths to date from Covid-19. We won't be competitively racing here in Melbourne for at least another 4 weeks. In the mean time, our hearts and best wishes from all of us here at RMYS go out to every sailor, their families and friends in the U.S., Bermuda, and around the world who are finding it so incredibly difficult right now.

Stay safe and look after the people around you,
David Taylor (dtayls)

Race Report from Alex Simopoulos

....Second time ive played this game. The functionality is great and aside from having to deal with the physical hardships, waves, currents, that pesky human team element, and cost, the game has all the rest of the functionality you would expect of ocean racing IRL (oops, I forgot...no sail changes or gear damage either).

After a pretty explosive start at top speed, I smacked into Rhode Island and lay aground for 2.5-3 hrs. I realised the devil is in the detail and that the scroll button does wonders for resolution, which in turn reveals the ever present hidden danger (for many sailors) ---- unexpected land impeding ones progress!! Fortunately for me in this case, hitting land was more like hitting a guard rail as it kept me from going 3 hrs in a crazy direction.

I then sat glued to the screen, used the simple keyboard controls went around the correct side of the buoy, and spent Sat morning conversing by email and phone with my fellow RMYS participants, who were all in the agreed SunFast 3300 class (I went the X55, just to see what it looked like, and then realised I could not change, so stuck with X55. I also thought given it's the faster boat, at least ill have a good chance at getting line honours over my fellow RMYS friends).

I set out to the east of the rhumb line (thought it was "rum" line, meaning the shortest path to the next still), following David and Stephen who I knew had employed their significant technical skills in reading tea leaves (my computer screen seemed to be full of them and they kept on changing orientation and colour – what sort of evil is this ???) and muttering unpronounceable incantations (QTVML???). I then asked both to enlighten me, a mere novice in this type of sorcery, as to their ways. A few emails and phone calls later, I was completely lost in the world of grib files (they used worms in the old days, what is a grib? And why would they need filing? are they that rough?), plotters (sounds devious) and VMC (very merry Xmas?), SOG (son of a gun?), TWA (airline?), html5 clients (what do they buy?), flash players (the mind boggles, won't go there and good news they're getting rid of them I guess)...Stephen kindly offered to plot a course for me, as long as I could provide him with the boat polars (so im thinking, they have trained bears to do this thing?).

OK, so it's a csv file, I emailed it and presto...Stephen sends me a suggested chart based on how the tea leaves were to fall, over the duration and distance of the race, based on predictions made at that particular point in time.

OK, cool. I have the route. So now how do I get the boat to travel along a curved line??, with twitches and swoops and squiggles in the curve every now and then??...oh bugger it – its too hard. Im 384th overall. The only people in my class behind me were those that forgot to start or taking a detour to Palm Beach and im going to be embarrassed. So I said, right, all the RMYS folks are in a different, smaller boat, so ill now pick a line half way between them and the rhumb line and go for COG, because TWA based navigation was too tricky. I also noted some of the RMYS team (alhart and WRT) were west of the rhumb line, like many of the leading boats. But it was too late for me to go west. I spent the next two days praying and hoping for tea leaves (I was sick of blue and green tea at this stage, I wanted red tea) that would fall between 110 and 140 deg to the transect between my boat and the finish line. Failing that, I would carefully inch my boat to the rhumb line, and hopefully make up a few places using SOTP sailing and SA.

Well with such a sound strategy, as you would expect, I was inching my way up the ladder, sitting at around 180th odd two days into the race. I had made 200 places...but as I was reminded, I was in a faster boat than many I was passing. Well, DTayls then let me in on the "dev" version of the platform which showed TWA and COG routes simultaneously, giving me something else to think

about and play with. OK, so now im going to get my ruler and protractor out, and together with junk mail envelopes id accumulated over time, I started doing calculations and setting courses. I scrolled through the wind predictions, back and forth, entered delayed commands, changed them, then got confused, deleted them, changed them again. Out with the protractor (oops its upside down), changed from pen to pencil, I found an old semi transparent ruler – oh now there's too much information – OK, Ive been in these type of situations before - my extensive life experience and training has taught me the best thing to do – close your eyes, pick a spot and if you don't like it, do it again until you get something you like.

It was now Monday morning, Id woken up at 4:50 ish, anticipating a wind change and caught it in time. I saw I was now sitting at around 180th and sort of parallel but 50 nm east of the rhumb line. And much to my delight, Im in the company of some mighty fine souls like CheCatzoFai an Italia 14.8 – im thinking great minds. Anyway, back to business. I set a course to roughly stay in line with the rhumb line whilst getting the most speed during the high wind. When the wind went back down to 9 kt, I then set course for the buoy and let the thing take its course. By Tuesday mid day I was sitting at 105th. Wow, big surprise. I then took extra care not to stuff it up... but I had to run an errand and I was going to have to leave the screen and rely on delayed commands to get me around the last buoy and then into the wind toward the finish line...oh damn, ive run out of junk mail envelopes!!

Oh wait, we still have Christmas card envelopes, so out they come, scribble like mad, fractions, lines, numbers I think I have it, no I don't, enter command after command - I saw some of those in front had just kept on sailing past headed to Africa – shit don't want that to happen, id be the laughing stock of the club, what to do?, what to do?...Ok, now im really going to go to town on the maths, scroll up to max (0.1 nm = 1" resolution) on the screen, use whiteboard marker on the mac, damn, the thing keeps on moving, oh im going to have to "sync" with the moves and anticipate the next "shift", enter the course details and press set boat course. But its tricky, one slip up at the end, and all this hard work has gone to waste. Damn the race organisers for putting in that dog leg at the finish. And now the stakes were getting higher. Id made the top 100!! Wow. Cant stuff it up now.

Wait, this is meant to be fun. Why am I so stressed and anxious? Why so much effort? Why care so much? ...oh wow, I then spot DILLIGAF the german flagged entry lagging behind in 300 place and think, no don't go there...so in true addicted gamer fashion, I reschedule the errand (I had to go to Somers to pick up a bike for my son). Any way, I put in the commands, and then sat and watched to be sure to be sure. I passed 4 boats in the last leg. I made 10 places in the last hour, and finished 87th. . Whoopmpa!!! Respect!!!

I also picked up the bike. As it happens, the seller mentioned to me was a regular crew member on Sword of Orion. He recalled the time when the skipper went overboard in the King Island race, and was hanging on only by the main sheet. It was blowing 70kt across the deck. And in those days, "we had no tethers or life jackets". Nothing. They pulled him back onboard. He also mentioned he just missed a gig in the S2H in 98... Sorry to end with such a sombre reminder after all this light heartedness. But perhaps a good message for all is that this is a dangerous sport and things happen in a split second, whether in 5 kt or 50 kt of wind...so everyone should take some time everytime they go out to go over what could go wrong and how they will address it. Recounting RL stories like this is not only a tribute to those whose lives were lost, but also a good lesson for all.

Alex Simopoulos

Race Report from Sabina Rosser

I'm not sure if it was good or bad to be introduced to Sailonline. Good because it's been a great thing to do whilst isolating, recovering from injuries and hey, can't sail anyway, but bad because it's become soooooooooooooo addictive. I have to plan my day around wind changes, corners, islands etc and refuse to go outside the house if it's the end of the race.

You see, I know how to turn the computer on and off and get to the sailonline page and do a few other things but really, I'm a computer retard and when I chat with my fellow RMYS buddies or read the emails between us all, they are speaking another language. They send me this shit I've managed to copy and paste below, (see I'm not a total computer retard)

Install this Solfans Auto Grib Loader

Once you unzip the file, click on autoGribLoader_2_5_7p2.jar

NMEA server to provide positional and other important data to routing software. Includes AIS class A messages for SOL boats

data server and start NMEA and use port 5010

In QTVLM go into preferences and set the GPSD IP address to the IP address of your PC and enter port 5010

install a Java runtime environment to run the solfan app

VTOL Q thingy

download it and then import the wind and other files into it

AGage's WxInspector

Note that getting to the dev version simply involves adding "?version=dev" to the end of the URL (without the quotes, of course)

Then you can go to Misc->Settings->Steering and change the 'Show predictor(s)' option to 'both'

AGL & Brainaids only have the SF3300

I mean to say, give me a break - WTF does all this mean??????????? I mean AGL is a gas supply company and is Brainaids something to take after having a Brainfade? I can't keep up with this lingo so revert to the old fashioned way, probably a legacy from learning to navigate with a sextant back in the 80's and using paper charts so checked the weather ahead, looked at the angles, wind speed, who am I racing against and close my eyes and hope for the best.

Anyway, with my methods I think I've done ok and am thoroughly enjoying each and every race. See you on the startline for Shetland Islands race.

Race Report from Alistair Hart

Race two for this newbie and still discovering how it all works.

Some excitement for this Australian, my Family were early settlers of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, so this race brings me "home" if only virtually.

For many at the moment, lockdown sees you in front of computers set up at home 24/7. As such SailOnline is a great (and I hope, welcome) distraction from mental issues around lockdown and working from home. For me, I'm one of the fortunate ones still going to work daily and when not physically attending to my duties, work has me busy enough to not be looking at distractions - and then no computer set up at home, so night time there is also not the time or place either to be jumping into the "navigators chair".

I say all this as Race 1 (for me) - Auckland to Fiji - I got to Fiji OK, on a pretty good course, but it wasn't until a few days after I "hit the rocks" on the south coast of the finish island that I got back online and worked my way back around to the finish line...

Race 2 for me Newport to Bermuda - A similar result, a lovely rhumb line to the first turn, but then the navigator was asleep at the mouse and I kept the old course taking me well south of the new rhumb line. When I got back in the chair, hopefully looking to pick up some improved VMG with better polars, I set a new course for the Kitchen Shoals rounding mark.... Again, just shaved it on the correct side, but "woke up" to find I'd yet again overshot the rounding mark (and the finish) by some 25 miles - Heading back now for a hopeful finish in about three hours (as I write this) - Just in time before the RO closes off the race (I hope)...

Lessons learnt? Don't let your navigator "sleep" for a few days at a time, if I'm going to race, do it properly.... And good to enjoy this activity with a Group. The mob from Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron mostly picked the same boat (Sunfast 3300) and have been chatting and sharing our endeavours (by email and FaceBook) as we go.

Thanks to the organisers. Whilst I'm far from a podium finish (probably for some time to come I would suggest), I'm enjoying the ride...

Alistair Hart