
Newport Bermuda Race 2020: Race Report

by ij
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A race from Newport to Bermuda, the first multi-class event SOL is running since 40ft series in 2018. There are four boats to pick from, each competing in their own class. The race is run as a virtual version of a cancelled IRL race with race organizers putting impressive effort on the event including two video sessions to explain SOL virtual racing mechanics to newcomers (mostly IRL race sailors).

Irrespective of there really being 4 independent races, one for each boat type, there's certain thrill in the possibility of being the first boat to make to the finish line. In an attempt to realize that, only two of the candidates seem viable to reach finish line before the others. Italia 14.98 with good broad reaching capability against Xp55 that has clear inferior on the downwind regiment but excels when it comes to TWAs below 90 and in generally lower TWS conditions. This performance difference creates a nice cross-class challenge and is important in this race because of the messy high and only limited access to winds Italia would prefer but still some forecasted.

I go with Xp55 in a moment where all the sailors on my "Select" boat list consisting the toughest opponents in SOLsphere so far had gone with Italia. Right after making my pick, I find some other Xp55s appear on the "Select" list including **rafa** and **WRmirekd**.

Initial outlook told that there will be three main segments. Right after the start, the conditions will be near perfect for Xp55 and they will pull ahead until slowing down to blue. The slowdown may allow others to catch up some during the wind gradient. After clearing the blue region, in the middle part some downwind may develop favoring heavily Italias if they can make through the blue but the region is very unstable. And then towards the end, the wind again turns and settles a bit to be favorable for Xp55. Initial routing clearly prefers push through approach. Also worth to note, too west routes are to be avoided with Xp55 because it likely requires sailing off the height when nearing Bermuda, something this polar is not well suited for.

After some progress, there's significant change in weather in the middle and my router finds a bait route through the stronger winds that are forecast to develop east side. Many Xps seem to divert at that point, however, I'm very far from being convinced by the proposed route and noted this on the chat at 06/19 22:46:22:

"That detour looks just as horrible in stability, only that the most unstable bit is more wx updates away."

The difference between detour and direct routes according to my router is only 2 hours, which is no surprise given the advantages of Xp55. The detour does not seem worth the effort given the current weather state. That is, the direct route is in “bad” condition, whereas the east alternative is “optimistic”. With only 2 hours difference if “bad” gets even slightly better, it will easily beat the “optimistic” routing. Thus, I keep on pushing on with the direct route. With very minor course adjustments each time, I’m in the front row with less boats to compete with as many went east.

In preparation for potential weather disaster, I keep my boat slightly west of **rafa** and **rumskib** but still within the same wind areas. We will end up sailing through a number of wind shifts and near zero regions so all the usual SOL trickery with aligning boat with weather grid come into play. The tailwinds earlier forecasted does not materialize. With this polar however, our boats will be on the winning side in all those conditions.

Those who sailed east fail to reach the good winds as their side gets more complex and the forecasted stronger winds do not materialize making the center group the strongest contender for the top places. Since we follow the most direct route as close as sensibly possible, no other Xp on either side can really match us and we will make to the other side of each transition first, catching better winds faster and accelerating to increase the gap. Some Xps manage to approach our line using favorable angle (with **robert** temporarily making even into the lead during one of the wind shifts) but then cannot keep up because of the angle towards the next mark.

Somehow I feel slightly disappointed with the weather we ended up sailing with compared with the initial outlook. Initially, the cross-class competition potential looked promising but due to diminishing tail wind opportunities Italias did not really have much opportunities midrace to demonstrate their advantages and Xps easily held their ground.

It turns out my westward safety was unnecessary and puts me into a small disadvantage compared with **rafa** for the remaining long, almost straight approach to Kitchen Shoals Beacon. **Rumskib** makes a too early turn during the last wind shift likely based on DCs set according to the old weather which drops him from a likely podium place.

While preparing the entry to the straight part, I had already prepared a route I’m happy with. I note almost immediately, however, that **rafa** has made a small correction east ward (this is always a small problem if you cannot conceal your intentions, somebody else could learn something ;-)). I knew from the router isochromes that the eastward route gives initially better progress so I head to try that one out in the router, with the small difference we have with **rafa**, everything counts. It is a success saving off a few minutes from time to Kitchen Shoals. Oddly enough, that turn from **rafa** turns out a fluke and he sails a route similar to my initial plan winning me at least 0.1nm (according to the forecasted weather). Also, it positions my boat lower into the wind in hopes of better taking advantage of the polar with low wind speeds (if they appear near the mark).

...Now I only need slightly less wind than currently forecasted to make best out of my position lower in wind to take advantage of polar max boat speeds around TWA=83 (with 9 kn winds) to close the rest of the gap. Unfortunately, I have no luck with weather and the wind turns such that I need to sail angles smaller than the magic 83, whereas **rafa** approaching from higher position can restore his lead to around 0.3nm winning that 0.1nm back.

I do not expect **rafa** to make a mistake anymore at this point but I sail the remaining marks as tightly as possible regardless. With that, I'm able to slightly reduce our gap but that will not be enough so **rafa** homes the win. I manage to cross the finish line after 99 seconds. The third place on podium goes to **robert** who had fallen clearly behind due to angle disadvantage.

Thanks to the race organizers, it was great to see many new sailors in our virtual realm. And congratulations to all top finishers in each class.

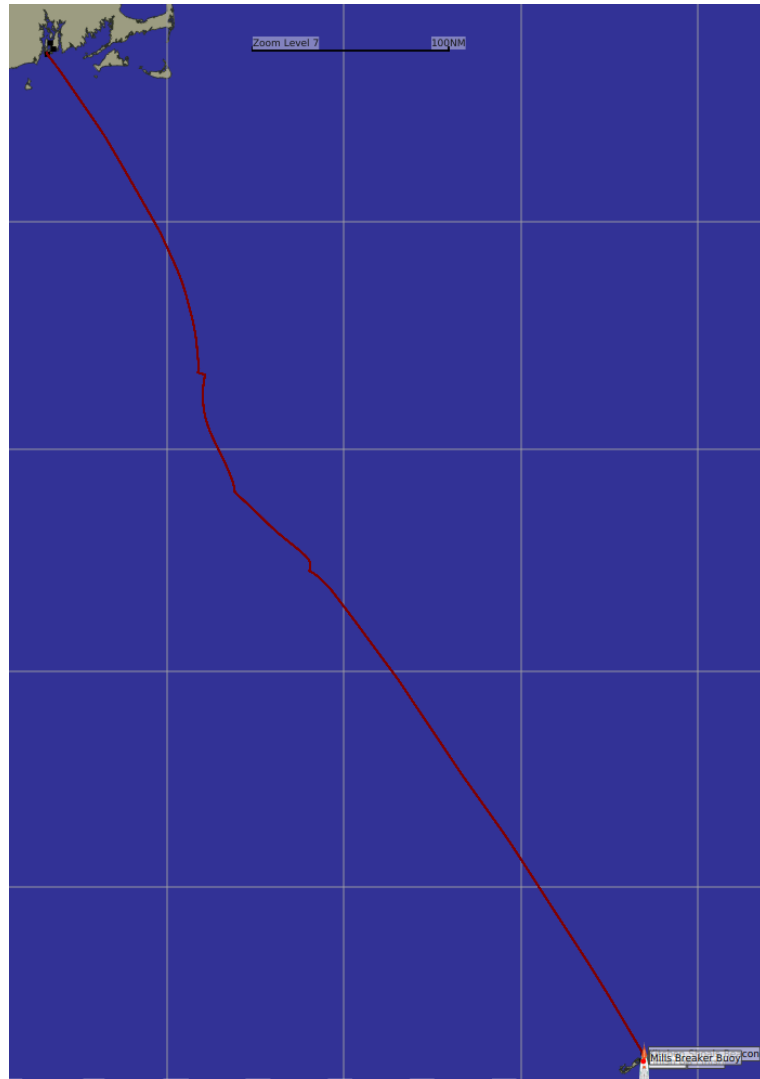


Figure 1: Overall route