

Pacific Cup 2020

This was my first SOL long-distance race since taking part in a practice run across the Atlantic (starting a couple days late in the Perce - St. Malo Race) and then sailing Newport-Bermuda as a media boat. Considering I hadn't done any significant advance weather homework, I thought I had a brilliant strategy of shadowing the top-ranked competitors early to benefit from their routing and see what I could learn. Unfortunately, I ended up head to wind for an hour or two during the big right shift soon after leaving San Francisco Bay, giving me a head start on the inevitable bleeding of miles against the well-prepared and super-experienced leaders who, needless to say, I could never gain on in the slightest.

My other major mistake was staying too close to the rhumbline in the northwesterlies during the first couple of days rather than sliding farther south early on at higher speed.

By now I was probably 7-10 miles behind the lead pack, but as we shifted into more Vmg sailing, I was able to slow their gains and be more competitive with nearby boats. By the time we'd done a couple of jibes, I could see that the leaders were often sailing higher than the ideal Vmg, effectively reaching towards the next shift, and I began to emulate that, sailing a few degrees higher than I would have otherwise based on the polar chart. But it was tricky, sailing around the high, because sailing too fast on starboard took you into lighter airs, while sailing too fast on port forced you into progressively wider angles. A puzzle for one of the leaders to explain perhaps.

I gained a few places in the last 600 miles by covering (from behind) the south side of the lead group. I started keeping a log so I could compare the TWD numbers I was jibing on and began to get a rhythm of the oscillations. I gained a few more on the final approach by sailing on port jibe to a "final-shift" position east of Molokai where I jibed to starboard on a "fat" layline, benefitting from what appeared to be a geographic northeasterly shift along the islands. Yes, I made gains, mainly because I was tracking aner59 who was a couple hours ahead of me, but I over-played my hand, waiting probably 30 minutes too long to jibe.

All that being said, I was very lucky to have finished as well as I did in such a talented fleet. Thanks to Tyger/Rob for getting me involved in the first place; bonknhoot/Jan for all I learned from him during the Newport Bermuda Race build-up, and to Rhino/Bruce for offering general encouragement and chat input on sailing "Wallys," as well as offering an opinion on the mystery of whether to favor pressure vs angle in the SC52. You and so many others are the glue making this a fun, diverse, welcoming and competitive race community, all willing to help us newer folks figure out the next piece of the puzzle.

Zephyr/John B.