

Auckland to Punta del Este 2020

An unusual ocean race, featuring two sections through seriously restricted waters, which stood bonk to good stead. The first such section was a sail out of Auckland through the Hauraki Gulf to the open sea. With the wind astern, a few carefully timed 'complex' gybes had bonk in the lead when a first strategic decision – north or south of Great Mercury Island – presented itself. In fairness, not everybody was sailing equally hard for an early lead; realizing that it would matter little. Case in point: Mullionman, who nearly crashed into the western shores of Coromandel, before correcting to follow the fleet in consequence several hours adrift, to reduce that deficit to not much more than fifteen minutes by the time we reached Punta del Este.

Anyway, back at the front of the fleet, bonk made the wrong decision and dipped south, but not as far south as the GC course to Tierra del Fuego. The router had been saying head directly west using earlier WXs, but the new solution was to put in some south and then curve west.

First Lesson: don't go to bed until you have an idea what others (late for bed) are doing.

Second Lesson: doubt!

Thus, a short but costly detour later, bonk rejoined the northern fleet about a half hour adrift of the likes of StIngF1, limesinferior and DIKKEHENK. Day after day of generally east south east high-speed sailing followed with little to no change in the relative positions, but with the southerners clear ahead of the northerners. Every now and then, mind you, bonk would throw away a minute by hand-entering an aberrant course change, putting a TWA into the CC box, or the other way around.

Third Lesson: if you habitually sail by DC series, hand-steering demands extra due care and attention.

As we neared the 'land of fire', two things happened. The northerners started to show in the lead and a passage through the Straits of Magellan rather than Round the Horne (starring Kenneths Horne and Williams) was looking evermore unavoidable, as a large hole from the cape northward was splitting the Atlantic airflow into a northerly stream inshore and a southerly stream offshore.

Not exactly what your ocean SOLer yearns for, but much feverish routing was now unavoidable, in order to decide where best to enter the maze of 'canals' betwixt the myriad islands between Tierra del Fuego and the South American mainland, with leading northerners all opting for an entry furthest north – into the main strait. I had not sailed as far north as the leaders and decided to try a slightly trickier passage through the Canal Barbara to join the main channel further south. Buoyed by the presence of aner59, Kipper1258 and elbetico, I was hopeful.

The truth, however, was, that my detailed plan was actually a route though the Canal Magdalena, and it was literally only just in time that I realized that that was very much going to be a long way round. I can't say for sure, whether my particular last-minute solution was the best on the day, but it certainly wasn't bad, as passing Cabo Virgines, bonk had recovered from c P30 to P13.

It was now a sprint to the finish, with the eastern end of the line clearly favoured. But I obviously hadn't fully assimilated the first lesson.

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So, I kept a bit east of the rhumb line on a slightly slower, deeper TWA, as the router suggested, and lost aner59 and elbetico, and maybe batatabh and others (can't be sure) but gained on FR_vostro who kept rather too close to the coast. Great race, though!

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