

# Maryland to Alaska 2020

## race report

When nearly half the fleet reach P1 at some moment during the race, when every new WX brings enthusiasm or depression (or even both at the same time), and when after 2 weeks racing there is still no clue which of many groups have advantage, what to say but: WOW, what a race!

Now, I agree with those who claim this was not we usually call an Ocean Race, but a name "Pick Your Own Course Through Bays And Straits Where Mercator's Projection Distortion Is Huge And Winds Are Odd And Unpredictable, And You Couldn't Get It More Wrong" is maybe too long. But it's certainly fun and I welcome bonk's suggestion for a High Latitude Series, and I also always enjoy other long Coastal Races like the 'Carib Rum Run' and the 'Sail Around Turkey'.

Second, all credit to SRC for choosing the 90ft Monohull for this race, because her polar allows you to not get completely stuck in blue, while at the same time rewards a search for greater TWS. Thus, all the possibilities are open, from 'shortest but slow' to 'longer but faster', and all the combinations in between, and that made the race exciting and uncertain all the way.

For two and a half weeks this race occupied a good part of my free hours (and some of my working ones). At the beginning it didn't look too bad. Sailing along the US East Coast to the first mark was all about stay north-ish. And through the Gulf of St. Lawrence into the Labrador Sea and further to Baffin Bay, the fleet stayed mainly compact. Some brave souls lead by limesinferior tried their luck through Hudson Strait, SKOVSER decided to stay close to Baffin Island, at some stage Italian duo RICOTINA and Sax747 decided to turn west, and Zorba & Co. headed for the coast of Greenland, whilst Šime with sailmates Rafa and Dingo felt pretty confident in the middle of Baffin Bay on the way to Lancaster Sound...

But then... the chaos decided to take a main role. The wind was suddenly died in front our group, and picked up near the Baffin Island coast, and Zorba & Co. were on speed track alongside Greenland. Soon, the rankings started to change rapidly and a mass of battles were fought all over the North. Sorry but I didn't notice them all. No harm to mention, at such a high latitudes, the distortion of Mercator's projection is huge: as the length of 1deg of longitude) =  $60\text{nm} \times \cos(\text{latitude})$ ; so at 60N it's 30nm, and at 75 N only 15nm. The wide zoom-out map can be misleading, and use of the GC Ruler is imperative.

For days and days, with every new WX qtVIm suggested a new route, sometimes a completely different one to the one Šime was on – the favorable winds ahead I was heading would disappear, or even worse, would still be there but shielded by an unpassable blue wall.

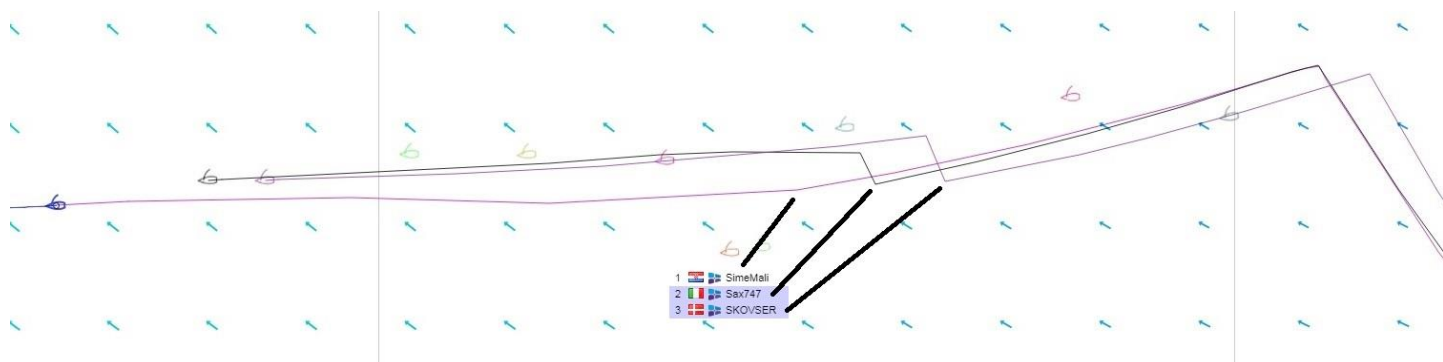
To make things even more complicated, when one 22:30 UTC (00:30 CET) WX arrived on the brainaid site, I downloaded the new grib, made qtVIm routing... see what's missing? Right! I forgot to load the new grib into qtVIm! And as the SOL software gradually blends the new grib with the old, the error of predicted vs. achieved ETA wasn't too big. At first. After 2h, annoying. After 3h, significant. After 4h (around 04:30 CET), panic. Somehow, I did finally realize something was terribly wrong, and looked at the grib start date/time. The sequel you can imagine. And I'm ashamed to confess, I did that not once but twice.

Despite it all, at the entrance to the Prince of Wales Strait, Šime was lying just behind SKOVSER, RICO and Sax, and thanks to the 90ft Mono polar then overtook Sax by taking a longer but faster route. The next two days (and nights, especially nights!) were a struggle through the strait in weak and unfavorable winds, with one eye on Dingo, and another on those further North... with nothing to do but sail as less slow as possible. And of course I experienced my second wrong grib night, when Sax almost caught me and bonk, rafa and Bimmer closed rapidly.

At the PoW Strait exit, the wind improved, giving our group advantage over Northerners. To my surprise, only Šime and Sax decided to go southish for stronger wind, while the rest of our group have continued on a GC course. Again, the 90ft Mono did rewarded higher TWS, and 10nm disadvantage to SKOVSER turned into some 7nm advantage.

At the final run, Sax unfortunately set (what I guess) an opposite DC course set, and lost P2. Pity!

Here I'd like to compare a 'blind qtVIm route following' vs. a 'think a bit about it' example. Namely, with 04:30 WX grib qtVIm suggested route contained two close gybes. BS was so high and gybes were so close to each other that I'm not sure that one can get full PL recovery before second. I decided not to gybe, handling a bit higher TWA than max VMG suggested. Sax and SKOVSER both gybed. Before gybe, they were some 5 and 7NM behind Šime, respectively. After 2 gybes, it turned to 7 and 9NM. Cost-benefit assess for yourself.

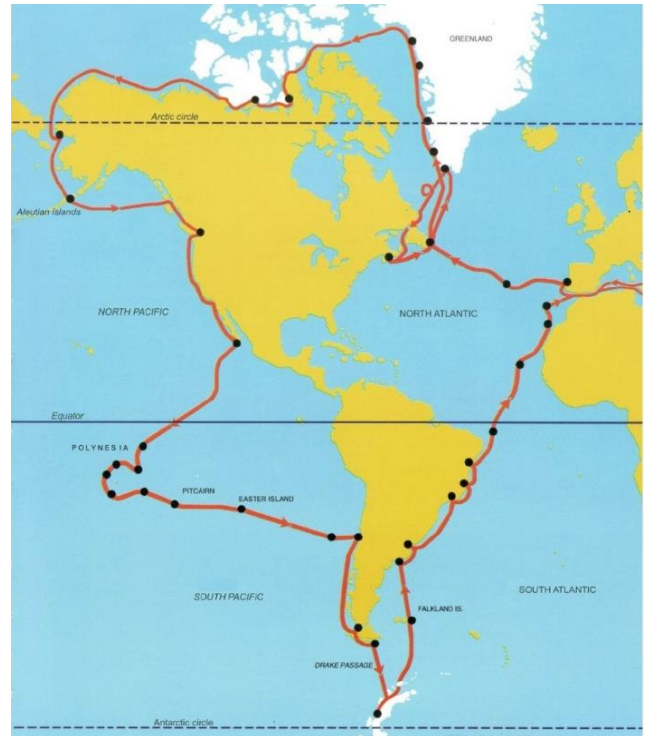


To conclude, I'd like to congratulate and thank every skipper for making this race exciting and fun – all those who shared their knowledge and those who have learned something new. And you know: even after years of SOLing, there are still things to learn. Preferable from other's experience than from one's (painful) own.

Some may find it weird that "a game" (SOL isn't a game but simulation, strictly speaking), through the mighty power of imagination, can turn a simple, slow moving boat shape on a white background into a deck in whistling wind and sea spray, slamming through 6m waves; and on another occasion so quiet a sea that you want to send your lightest (or least loved) member of you crew up the mast to search for wind... Don't try explain anything of that to Muggles; just invite them to join a SOL race. The Addiction will become self-explanatory; maybe we'll get a SOL-named medical term in the future – solictic.

Of course, SOL couldn't be possible without the devoted work of volunteers, who sacrifice their time for the benefit of us all. As always, but every time worth saying again, a big thanks to all members of SOL Team.

Trivia: In 1995, a 65 ft ketch “Hrvatska Čigra” (Croatian Tern) with a crew of five made her voyage through Northwest Passage in 66 days, with no outside assistance, to become only the fourth motor sailboat by then which completed the passage in a single season. It was part of her voyage around both Americas (something like RedDotXXL, a proposal for SOL series? (see route below), touching Arctic and Antarctic.



There's a book about expedition, in English translation, by skipper Mladen Šutej (to avoid any confusion, we share a first name, but I'm not him). Unfortunately! If you like books about sailing, written with a touch of humor, and with some beautiful photos, I can highly recommend to you take a look.