

Punta del Este to Cascais 2020

I only finished 37th, but surprisingly this race went more right than wrong, so there is less to say than usual, expect of course: explain yourself, bonk!

Well, you see, although this was race #10 of the OCCH, it was also #4 and the last race of the RTW Series, where, through a combination of luck and judgment, mostly luck, I had built up a handy c 20 point lead ahead of Mullionman and Jawz, with SKOVSER a further c 10 points adrift of those two nearest pursuers. It was clear then what I had to do – keep in touch with Mullionman and Jawz, and keep an eye on SKOVSER as well.

Having had Qt route the race as far as 15 days of weather could take me a serious number of times before the start, I had been forced to accept the worrisome conclusion that the way to go this year was looking like via West Africa. Worrisome because once through the Doldrums somewhere south east of the Cape Verdes (an unlikely-to-be-fast channel through the goo of itself), it would be an upwind battle into the NE Trades most of the rest of the way. Given how poor the Orange 125 performs on the wind, how could that be faster?

I was therefore glad to see that, as the start drew closer and I kept feeding the beast WX updates, she was starting to favour a more normal route crossing the Doldrums up the 37th or 38th meridian. Given that closer in under the Uruguay coast, the wind, as nearly always, was patchy, I was nevertheless happy to set off with a fair bit of easting in my course to get me further out onto the ocean and into the wind. Mullionman and Jawz did the same but kept a little less east, whilst SKOVSER and also Kipper1258 and if I'm not mistaken DIKKEHENK went a little more east. Less easting was giving Mull and Jawz better VMCs, but only marginally, and my route was keeping the West Africa option open, even if I wasn't keen on it.

As the make-your-mind-up WX approached, a seriously-much-more-westerly route came into play. The wind off the eastern tip of Brazil (the bit the Pope said could be Portuguese, the rest they bought off the Spanish) freshened considerably. Mull and Jawz went for it and I followed, but not immediately. I hesitated. He who hesitates is lost, and yes, I was more than those c 20 places adrift of them. But, I thought, well I won't catch them, but if I just keep the speed up, I'll surely close to within those maximum 20 places.

In the meantime, SKOVSER, who had held so far east that changing his mind was no longer an option, kept heading for Africa. But holding west and then across to the Azores as the WXs were now advising was now significantly quicker. And, having crossed the (Northern only) Atlantic IRL several times, this made sense to me. Get up to where the isobars under the centre of a depression travelling from North America are compressed: then ride that westerly gale to whatever port on the Iberian seaboard takes your fancy – e.g. either Vigo or Cascais, or Oporto at a pinch (there's a decent marina there on the southern bank of the Douro and you can get a ferry across and then the operational vintage tram to the historic centre – well worth a visit).

We were going to Cascais of course; also nice, but rather over-touristed these days. Anyway, a couple of WXs later, suddenly the West Africa way was winning it again. I think it switched back to favour the Brazilian route one more time, to which I was now fully committed, but then the West African option became quicker... and quicker, and quicker.

So, what was going on? Well, a secondary (baby?) depression was starting to form and detach itself from the main system and was being pushed southward by its parent, it in turn pushing the Azores High into the Doldrums, and wiping the Trades almost entirely off the map, replacing them with a

strong south westerly flow from the Canaries all the way to Portugal. A sleigh ride instead of a pounding, and forecast to fill in just as the leading Africa-farers would reach Canarian latitudes. This situation was also familiar to me, as I had encountered exactly this weather situation on a delivery from Lagos to Las Palmas four years ago. With an owner plus two friends with heart issues on board, on that occasion, I just headed for the beach (Sahara) and then followed the coast under engine till I was square off Fuerteventura and could reach across to Gran Canaria.

Back on SOL, this time there was nothing to be done. But quite a few of the boats around me thought differently, and sheeted in to head east straight through a huge ridge with light variable wind hoping to catch that south westerly draft when (whenever?) they'd emerge from the goo. That was helpful, as I plugged on North, encouraged by the likes of limesinferior and my two Croatian friends, SimeMali and Leelu22, who were also plugging on, in reasonably decent wind and at good speed but low VMCs and thus steadily losing ground.

After several days of this, the wind finally moved ahead and backed into the north. We tacked and were now finally sailing directly for Cascais, but with several patchy patches still to be negotiated. But the rankings started to improve and somehow Jawz and Mullionman had fallen behind me. It was now all about SKOVSER, who, as is his wont, was picking off places. But so was I, as all those who had early or late tried to go up or across the middle came ~~unstuck~~ (glued in the goo).

When SKOVSER crossed in 7th, I had another day to go to make sure of 38th or better. I did, by finishing 5th of the Westerners, as far behind limesinferior and Chaos, as I had been when I had decided to go west all those many days ago, and just behind Leelu22 and Kaganisso, with a bunch of strong SOLers snapping at my heels. Phew!

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