

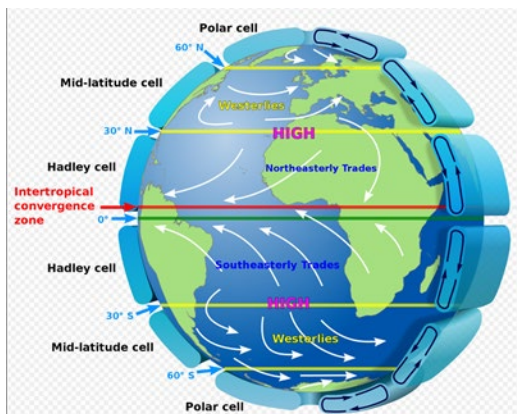
Panama to Honolulu – Report from SlideRule

The “Ditch” to Diamond Head

In SOL and IRL racing there is always a convergence or luck and skill. As I’ve learned SOL over the last year, I try to put SlideRule in a place where winning is a possibility, but never certain or even likely with so many expert competitors. I’m very surprised to be writing another race report now and not 10 or 20 races from now. I slept through the actual finish at 3:38 AM EST in the morning for me, but I think that the margin to Aner, Bonk, Sax, and a group of leaders was about 5 hours and 120 nautical miles mostly because of a single key decision that let Slide “get away”. As in prior races Thomas of HastySlug (6th place) and I did off watch boatsitting for each other which is important a when there is an opportunity to “escape” the fleet in new wind or to stay in contention. We also exchange detailed thoughts and notes on our plans on watch changes which improves the decision making for both of us by making us articulate our strategies!

Part One “Trade Winds and Doldrums (ITCZ)

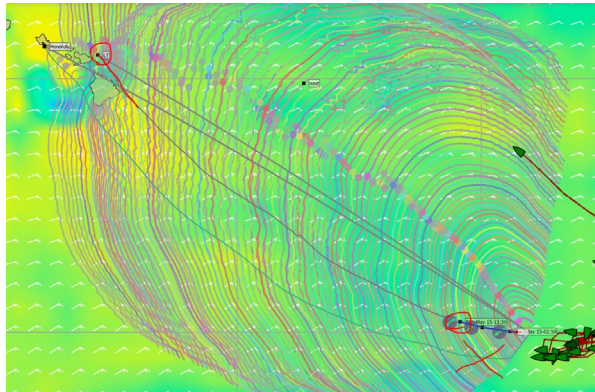
Starting in the ITCZ, who’s idea was this? > This race was a lesson in global meteorology on where there is no wind. The race started in the ITCZ, the intertropical convergence zone which is the Doldrums, or if you prefer the Horse Latitudes, this is that place where the horses die on the ship and we eat them out of desperation to survive while we’re becalmed for days. The ITCZ is starting to move north in May with the thermal equator and we started this race right on the edge of the Hadley cells that mark the edges of the respective northern and southern equatorial trade winds. A tow from a passing tanker coming out of the canal would have been a good idea. The first decision was to go south into the south easterly trades (back to Lima) or north (back to Cabo) into the north easterly trade winds. The northerly boats got the early lead, but that route always looked like there was no exit in the long run.



I believed my router (for a change) and went south to the South easterly equatorial trade wind, but tried to maintain a wind lane and stay on the north edge of the contenders so that I could gybe and lead north when we crossed the doldrums. This worked and I had a small marginal lead over Bonk and the gang of usual suspects. I actually have a boat list called “The Usual Suspects” (you know who you are!) I also have a “Sneaky” list (Zorba, Dingo, etc.), because they often have brilliant, risky ideas that work! It’s a compliment....really!

Cover or Differentiate > Exiting the doldrums into the north easterly trade winds SlideRule had a very small lead over a group of boats. My initial strategy was to cover, which is to stay ahead or closely

parallel to the closest competitors. I admired Go4it's move to the northwest on the hottest angle for the Gunboat, but the router always showed that route eventually ending up way too far north of Hawaii with a long gybe back down. If I had been marginally behind, I thought about the same strategy, but that made no sense for SlideRule with a modest, sustainable lead. However, I did really dislike gybing south perpendicular to rhumb line, and was waiting for the first practical solution back to the north. My router showed me a route just north of the islands that finished close to the perfect more southern commitment. That was good enough for me to "split" with the contending fleet.

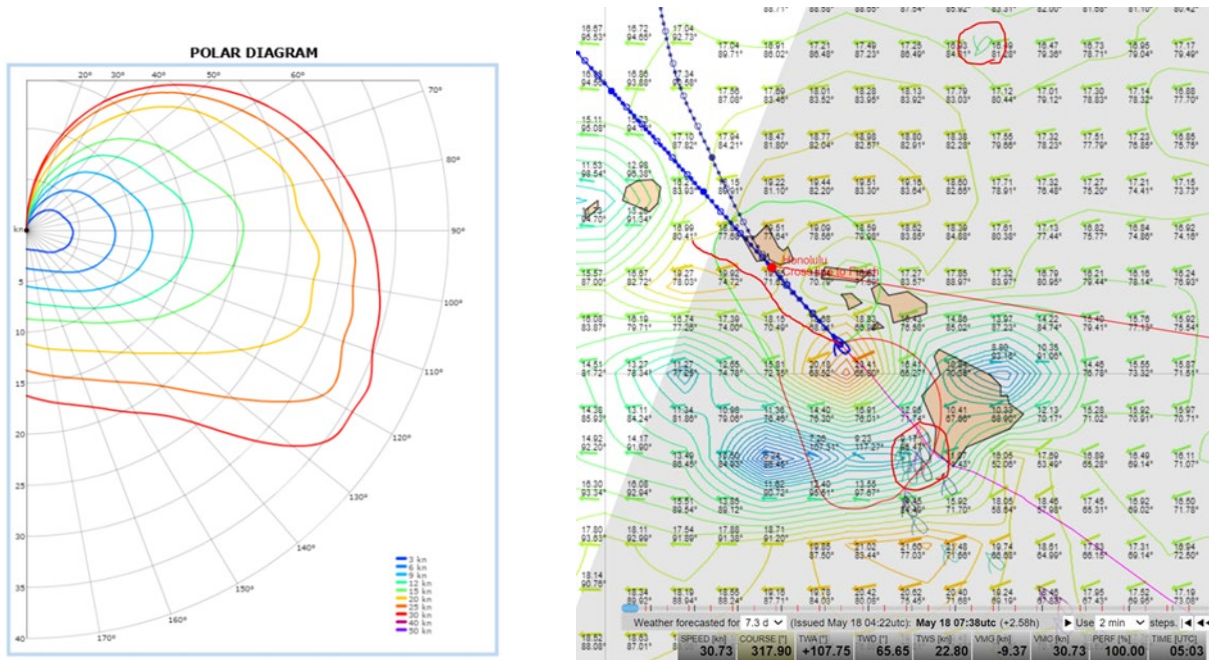


The Key Moment of contrarianism and disagreement with "THE ROUTER" > The key moment was when SlideRule did not go all the way south on the last gybe with the fleet to set up the router's optimum approach to Hawaii. Thomas of HastySlug asked me the tough question "why did I decide to go against the "safe decision" of following the router", particularly when leading the race or at least the main contending fleet. It's true that I'm a pragmatic contrarian, but not a true "wait and hope" personality. I am one of those people who intentionally won't follow the GPS directions in my car when I think I know where I'm going.

The Future ain't what it used to be > The thinking was that following the router all the way south to the optimum approach is exactly the same as going all the way to the "layline" in a real sailboat race. For the layline to work out or perfect approach to work, absolutely NOTHING had to change on your final very long approach. If we were lifted (wind aft) then a future gybe would be advantaged over the early gybe. If we were headed (wind forward) then we would have gone too far south because we could head off for the mark. In my routing, the earlier gybe and approach was nearly "tied" with the full investment in the southern "layline" approach. It turned out that the wind backed slightly (moved forward on the beam) and SlideRule picked up another 4 hours on the lead contenders.

Lesson Learned > The router is a tool for optimizing the course for dynamic time based problem, but it does not consider the diminishing probability of the forecast. It treats the beginning and end of the forecast with the same weight in it's solution. If more distant forecast events are driving the current course and decisions, you should consider how much you want to trust or invest in those future predictions. I think the key is understanding what the router is doing and using it without over relying on it. The use of routers also creates competitive convergence (fancy words for everyone does the same thing). It makes the "expert" part of the fleet very predictable. I use the router to optimize, but I am always looking for an edge or leverage, particularly when a large part of the contenders are almost "tied".

“This Boat doesn’t want to go there” > The choice of boat really complicated the race. In many ways the boat was mismatched to the course. This race was fated to be largely downwind and the Gunboat wants to reach and it wants more wind to get it to the parts of it’s polar that really excel.



Why is there any wind in the lee of this very tall island? > For the second race in a row I got my gas mask out, and the big island of Hawaii allowed me to sail right along the shore with a window of offshore shore breeze comprised of Volcanic Out Gassing where there really should be nothing but blue goo. The breeze seems to rotate on and off along the shore with day and night. In my last report, Lima to Honolulu, I hypothesized that maybe the heavy gases coming out of the two volcanoes subside down the lee slope when they’re pushed out of the craters by the trade wind. This time after getting through the lee, I left a barrier of blue goo in my wake which expanded the finish lead slightly. There are also some nice venturi accelerations and bends before and between the islands. Gunboat SlideRule hit 31.3 kts in one of these approaching the finish.

Submitted by Slide Rule (Scott)

May 26, 2021

I will be taking most of the next month off from SOL for real sailing on the REAL Slide Rule.

We will be doing the “Figawi Race” this coming weekend and then immediately following that, we will be headed to Annapolis for the Annapolis to Newport Race (A2N).

The A2N is on Yellowbrick, an online tracking app, for those that are interested. There are good, competitive fleets in both races! Slide Rule is in ORC Division 3 in the Annapolis to Newport Race starting on June 4th. GO GO SLIDE!