

Vasco da Gama Ocean Race 2021

Hello fellow SOLers

After quite some time arranging the buddy up of SOL and Point Yacht Club (The first SA yacht club to host an official SOL buddy up race) for the Vasco virtual race there were quite a few teething problems. Neither PYC nor myself have done this before and it was learn as we go along process. COVID19 dealt us a nasty blow in 2020 with the race cancelled and this year we had to quickly come up with a contingency plan after the initial course from Maputo to Durban was scuttled still due to COVID19. a Lengthy quarantine period would have made it impossible for most of the crews to do the race... So... Buffalo River Yacht Club in East London came to the party and the decision was made to do the Durban to East London run instead. Sometime later and quite a bit of effort, many emails etc etc etc later and we had accomplished a SOL / PYC buddy up for the race.

The pressure was on from the word go to attract as many SA SOLers as possible as the bar was set very high after the SOL C2R virtual race... was a rather daunting task but I believe that the solid SA turnout is the pass mark I was looking for. Well done to all who registered for this iconic race. I hope that many of you will stay in the SOL fold and continue to do races on the platform.

This year being the 50TH anniversary of one of SA's premier ocean races, the Vasco da Gama Ocean Race. The due date for the race start was 09:00UTC on the 16TH of May but the wind gods had other plans... The Race Committee has reserved a flexible start window in the eventuality of bad weather that can turn this race into a very dangerous undertaking indeed... and so it turned out to be. We had a first delay with the race due to start at 15:00UTC on the 16TH with a final weather call to be made at 10:00UTC where after a further delay was announced – Start pushed back to 04:00UTC on the 17TH of May. The ocean state offshore was still very big with 5m+ swell and steep waves – the result of an opposing 4,2kn north to south running current opposing a 35kn SW wind.

We at SOL on the other hand had none of those issues and apart from a few SOLers who did not follow the course and missed the Offshore fairway mark (IRL fleet also had to round this mark) our fleet was off and away. Other than in the IRL race we do not have the benefit of the current and as such the majority of the fleet chose the closer inshore route for the duration of the race. Shifty wind made this very tactical and for once I spent more time on SOL than I have in a very long time. It also did not take long for the usual suspects to assert their dominance over the rest of us and congrats go out to NagaJolokia, nacrr and WRmirekd for the well-earned podium positions... Bravo! A Huge thank you to all of you that sailed the virtual race and I hope you took the time to have a look at the Google Earth feed that showcases the rich natural splendour of the Wild Coast with all its rugged beauty and wildlife. I hope you all enjoyed a very tactical race brought upon by a rather shifty wx period. Hopefully next year we can improve on the attendance when we do the Maputo to Durban edition.

It was a bitter sweet virtual Vasco for me as I was due to crew on one of the racing yachts but we had to withdraw due to mechanical issues a while back. I dearly wanted to be on that start line come any weather and it was with a pang of regret that I watched the SOL start and the fleet fly off... It was with a bigger pang of regret that I watched the IRL fleet set off early the next morning... There is an old saying... "There is always next year" but it was still a bitter pill to swallow. Perhaps next year there will be a few more SA SOLers (including myself) on the start line. A Special thanks to Jim (boat Bully) for doing the virtual race and finishing in a very respectable #35! First up. I shall have to buy you a cold one neighbour... To the other first time SA SOLers that I do not personally know thank you very much for giving it a go.

Lastly thanks to all the regular SOLers for registering and making SOL what it is... a virtual sailing family and the next best thing to actually being on the water!

Till next time.

Vince Nel (WetWing)

May 2021