

NEWPORT BERMUDA RACE 2022 – DOUBLE-HANDED DIVISION

I got to the start with only 10 minutes to spare having miscalculated the UTC start time. Luckily sailing down the rhumb line to the first mark rounding was a no brainer. I fired up my router, downloaded the weather file and quickly studied the suggested fastest route and predicted weather. I use my own SailFast router which IRL has been used by many Bermuda and Marblehead to Halifax racers since 2005. (www.sailfastLLC.com)

The optimum route actually sailed put us about 40 nm E of the rhumb line for the first 3rd of the race, 20 nm E in the middle, then back out to 37 nm for a while, and near the finish a swing 10 nm below the rhumb line. New routing was evaluated every time there was a new weather forecast. For the most part sailing above the rhumb line was always indicated but the exact track varied as the forecast was updated. Generally, the wind was 15-20 knots from the NW for most of the race. We sailed on starboard tack the entire race except for a gybe to port approaching Bermuda.

Soon after the start we were in 6th place. On Saturday morning we were 4th. Saturday evening the leader board read: JJ1, Kevlar, Go4iT, SailFast, AL53 and Rod. Kevlar was one of a few boats that sailed close to the rhumb line for the entire race. The rhumb line boats were often in the lead. Sunday afternoon SailFast slipped to 6th and Kevlar was in first place with a 20 nm lead according to the leaderboard. It was tempting to slide down to the rhumb line where there was a bit stronger wind. The navigator advised against it.

Late Sunday we were 4th and 15 nm behind. Early Monday we were 3rd behind Rod and Kevlar and just 2 nm behind the leader. Our gains on the fleet were due to better routing and the helmsman tweaking for the best VMG. A few hours later we inched into 1st place with Taffarazi and Go4iT 2nd and 3rd.

Monday afternoon the wind dropped to 9-10 knots and clocked to NNW, putting the wind directly astern. In response the boats above the rhumb line headed South at maximum VMG and crossed over the rhumb line. Boats that continued sailing the rhumb line were going directly downwind and 2-3 knots slower, putting them out of the competition. We gybed when 20 nm from Kitchen Shoals Beacon and sailed the fastest TWA to the mark and on to the finish. The last 30 nm of the race we were neck and neck with Go4iT. It often wasn't clear who had the best position or lead. The helmsman was under pressure not to make any mistakes. We made our final gybe and crossed the line with something less than a nm lead. Pass around a Dark and Stormy please !

SailFast/July 2022