

Auckland to San Francisco 2023 (RTW)

Report and thoughts – Renegade

July 2023

Pre-race checks and base plan:

I didn't really do much checking but at least one or two days ahead I put in a DC for the start to avoid another late start. In the previous leg Renegade departed about 3 hours 40 minutes late, and I was not going to let that happen this leg.

In my review of the course and wind patterns it seemed sailing east would be difficult with the prevailing winds and it could result in a lot of tacking and gybing in the north which I wanted to avoid. I also noticed the large patch of stable winds west of Mexico extending to Hawaii and wanted to sail about the middle longitude between them. It seemed to me the Hawaii side was too far west and would result in lots of tacking to get back east, and to me the winds looked unstable in the long-range forecasts. Closer to Mexico had too steep of a wind angle and would require sailing a 300+ (300-360 degrees) heading and that meant negative VMG. In the middle there was the right amount of wind angle allowing for a NE course at a tight VMG heading with no tacking until you got to about the San Diego latitude and then could head ENE to San Francisco.

I did notice very favorable winds to go east for about a day right after departing Auckland which would put Renegade right about in the middle I wanted to sail. I planned to take this option because I noticed the early east heading plus NNE route up the center would reduce the amount of east remaining to cover in the north. It seemed to me the early east would magnify and by the time we got north much less east sailing would be needed. For me it was a no brainer. So, my rather simple plan was to sail east early and late and sail the middle for a steady VMG climb north.

My only concern with this route was long range forecasts showed potential development of two hurricanes that would disrupt the stable winds. Luckily, the early storm did not materialize, the second one did but Renegade was north of it by that time.

The race:

Renegade departed on time, thanks to an updated DC set, and then headed east as planned. In the morning I noticed one comment in chat that the fleet was already splitting, and most had decided to go directly north even given the optimal winds to go east early. I wondered what I had missed in my plan. It appeared I was the first boat to turn east, but I was not the only one. Within a day a small group of really great Soler's had joined the east side. Rico, Med, Mull, Tarass to name a few. I had not escaped.

But SUDDENLY, Renegade was on fire!

Aiigh, where is the fire extinguisher, abandon ship or not I thought as I arrived on deck. Oops, false alarm.

Tarass spotted it and alerted in the chat. At the turn north the small group with me was behind me, slightly, but the latter to head east group to the NW seemed to me a bit ahead. Perhaps it was the extra north they had on us. In any case Renegade was doing well, small lead on boats in the immediate vicinity. I wondered if it would evaporate over the coming weeks. Would this just be St Elmo's fire, was the crew messing with me when I was below deck... Time would tell.

For the next two weeks the boats that headed straight north had the lead. I could only assume they had seen sirens in Hawaii, that I believe would turn out to be hula dance classes on the beach. So, events in the east were probably not noticed much, but what happened was a tightening of the group with Renegade SE of Med and Mull who were NW, Tarass and Rico in hot pursuit and close. Transition of the doldrums, almost a non-event, loads of chatter coming out of the fleet to the NW, exuberance I suspect as they got closer to the sirens. In the east a dance ensued. Renegade SE, Med/Mull NW, then Renegade NW, Med/Mull SE, next day Mull/Med NW,

Renegade SE, etc... I noticed sometimes the boat polar allows you to speed ahead in a passing lane, other times it's not possible as the speeds are almost the same, but it was during the dance I noticed this is a weird polar. Likely just the slight tilting of the very flat polar heading into the winds opens or closes a passing lane. In any case I was happy in my current position, the passing lane was closed, and I hoped the bit more east I had would be good, but Med/Mull were still ahead.

SUDDENLY, Renegade was on fire again! Tarass reiterated it in the chat. Renegade was P1. Yikes, the hot seat.

The east boats suddenly flew up the rankings and passed the boats in the NW while I was down in my bunk. Pendulum shift! The chat went dead, radio silence. The sirens, or hula dancers, must have been very captivating as the boats passed Hawaii, their crews were completely stunned. Oh, the horror! I tried not to think about what might be happening to the NW and had to keep going because the final weekend was upon us already. I was mostly offline again, but over the weekend I did notice a blue bubble approaching with no chance for Renegade to avoid it. Mull/Med had avoided it longer and took over the lead again. Renegade fell to P3 in the bubble but hoped to come out the other side sooner and regain the lost positions. It was not to be, Mull had seized the moment, Med too, and neither looked back. The turn to the east was overnight, again, and my DC's fired as planned but turned out to be a bit later than Mull/Med and their lead grew. Winds increased going east and the rich got richer situation was on us. I hoped for a bit of an angle boost, but it did not overcome the wind speed differential. We were flying again and there was no passing and distances grew between the boats ahead and behind. What a race and finish.

Congratulations again to Mull and Med, outstanding sailing, and to Rico, and Tarass who were threatening constantly and Go4it and Slide who had closed in as well. It was a fun one.

The post finish chat kicked up again as crews emerged from the siren's trance they had fallen under near Hawaii. Probably were just hula classes on the beach after all.

Commenting in chat after the finish, Pit and the Professor both said the north route past Hawaii was valid IF the Pacific High setup farther West or South. AH, so that is what I missed in my rather simplistic reading of the course. Just luck of the winds that allowed the east to come first, but for some reason I never doubted the east, it just felt like the way to go this time.

See you next leg!

Renegade