

Caribbean Eight 2024

SOL race 1770

On a whim I decided to race in the Caribbean Eight starting at 00:00UT on Tuesday February 13. It is just 260 miles in steady trade wind conditions on a fast boat that should not require too much attention.

From the start at Fort de France off the west coast of Martinique I put the boat on an unattended straight line coast, presumably like the majority of the fleet. An hour and a half into the race I checked that the first DC worked as desired. The wind was from the East at 15 to 16 knots. In order to avoid the weaker winds near Dominica I left the boat on a course across the Martinique Passage that curved slightly to the East. After the 04:30UT weather update my router suggested to go straight to the next mark, but I left the DCs as I had previously prepared and only adjusted the time for the rounding of Pointe des Châteaux at the East end of Gouadeloupe.

I arrived at Gouadeloupe a few minutes after 9 in 10th place. The course around Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre, the two islands that make up Gouadeloupe, was a sequence of straight segments from one headland to the next. The only exception was a few miles of VMG running and a gybe on the approach of Pointe de la Grande Vigie, the northern tip of Grande-Terre.

The 10:30 weather forecast update brought no surprise for the course around Martinique. However, for once the qtVlm router suggested to leave Dominica to port on the way back to Martinique, despite the pronounced zone of weak winds to leeward of the island. The rhumb line course is actually a mile longer than the course to the East of Dominica. Despite the fact that the suggested course did not require to tack to windward I decided to stick to the plan and pass to windward of Dominica.

I had completed the circumnavigation of Gouadeloupe round 15:30UT, still in 10th place (don't remember exactly). Because the wind near the south coast of Basse-Terre was stronger (12 to 12½ knots) than further south (11 knots at the Îles des Saintes) I tacked to starboard early. The downside of this decision was that the layline was somewhat longer and therefore more difficult to judge. And there was not much time between the 16:30UT update and the second tack back to port.

When I got home from work I had time to assess the situation, and it looked good. The last tack south was properly timed and I could start to ease the sheets and still catch Dominica. Rafa and Smo were battling for the lead and I had gained some places. More gains were possible, because quite a few boats were on the slower course to the West of Dominica.

After I had dinner (and a short siesta) I came back to the computer just in time to discard an imminent rogue DC (15° instead of 150°). Other than that not much was happening. The boat was set on a straight course to the peninsula with the last mark after the 22:30UT weather update. I set my alarm clock and went to sleep. The rounding at a quarter to two went smooth and I found myself in third place behind rafa and CriticalHippo, because Smo was less fortunate and had run aground.

The last 3 miles were sailed on an optimal VMC in the direction perpendicular to the long finish line. Everyone knows how to do this, so there are no more gains possible.

