

Up Helly Aa 2025 Race Report by KaSToR

Departure from Aberdeen this Thursday January 30 to head towards the Shetland Islands, without forgetting to go around the Moray Firth buoy. Few options for this first day of navigation, along the coast towards the north. The difficulty at the end of the evening is to find the best position before reaching the open sea. I therefore decide to continue sailing along, leaving the port of Fraserburgh and the Kinnard head light on the port side before tacking. Another difficulty in the evening, how far to continue north, before diving back towards Moray firth, skimming Bughead harbour. When I wake up, I find myself at the lead of the fleet, but having taken a safety margin for the night, I am too far north, I will be caught in the morning by my direct opponent, Patrick.

Having a long day of work ahead of me, I am routing in the morning for the day. At the end of the morning, I see that we are really side by side to tack at Muray Firth. Then follows a rise towards the north, with a passage along the coast in front of the town of Wick I manage to adjust the passage, but at the exit, I make the mistake of making an unnecessary replacement edge. The race seems lost and it is now second place that I must try to preserve.

The night is a slow climb to the limit of the best VMG to Fair Isle which we must shave. I still have to prepare my route in the morning, this time having a big day of wild boar hunting deep in Brittany woods. I'm taking my digital tablet with me, but I don't have much hope given the journey that awaits us. At midday, I manage to get around Papa Stour without having lost any ground Pointe after pointe, I manage to adjust my course and defend my place, while being obliged to take safety distance from the coasts I seriously take control of my boat when I return home, just before the Fetlar buoy. I'm happy, I'll be able to defend my second place, so happy that at the next milestone, I miserably make a BBQ. Damned ! the helly race lives up to its name.

Given what we still have to cover, we will have to be more careful, and the hopes of catching up with Patrick will fade a little further. The rest is a series of best VMG tacks, to head south into a strong wind. The approach to the line at Lerwick harbor is via a passage so narrow that it forces me to pass under the VMG. I managed to cross the line in second position behind Patrick who left no chance to his competitors. Congratulations to him, a truly beautiful race well mastered.

The race was so difficult and technical that I admit I didn't have time to look at what was happening behind me, but the fight seemed to be raging. In any case, I hope that this race will be on the program next year. Really helly this race.

