

NATUNA SEA RACE 2026

I began this race with no expectations beyond one simple goal: to enjoy a 2,000 nautical mile journey through the breathtaking waters of Asia. A voyage like this is something I could only dream of in real life, but Sailonline made it possible. When the opportunity came, I grabbed it with both hands.

Before the start, I phoned my good real-life friend Patrick, known on Sailonline as Patrick70119. I wanted his view on the opening conditions and the likely shape of the race. Patrick was the one who introduced me to Sailonline last year when I was searching for a way to keep sailing during the off-season. From the very first race, I was hooked.

The early plan was ambitious: push east as hard as possible, aiming to reach Palawan quickly and position for the wind shift that would open the door north toward the first mark. As the fleet stretched out behind the start line, it became clear that many skippers were thinking the same way. This was no longer about having a plan. It was about executing it better than everyone else.

Rather than blindly trusting the QtVlm router, I focused on the subtleties. Slightly stronger pressure here. A marginally better angle there. Using the ruler tool, I plotted a line that kept Elysium living in just a touch more breeze than the default routing suggested. Patrick had warned me: following the router might give you a decent result, but it would very seldomly win you a race.

When the long-awaited shift finally arrived, I was about 50 nautical miles off Palawan's west coast. I tacked north and watched the numbers update. Slowly at first, then unmistakably, Elysium began to climb. Then came the moment that every Sailonline skipper remembers.

I was in first place. For the first time ever.

There was no time to celebrate. Leading a race is exhilarating. Holding a lead is exhausting.

At the top of Palawan, the reality of the battle became clear. Sax747, YANN, WRmirekd, and Panpyc were all right there. Sax747 was only 0.04 nautical miles behind. At that distance, a single poor decision would be enough to lose everything.

The next leg toward Balabac and Serasan became a test of nerve. As I headed south, the breeze softened around me while the chasing pack enjoyed stronger wind behind. The gap began to feel fragile. Every update brought tension. Every small gain felt temporary.

Most of the fleet committed to an easterly route through the islands. I resisted the temptation to follow. The extra miles did not justify the gain. I stayed west, trusting my own read of the course. After clearing the islands, I held south a little longer before bending west toward Balabac, focusing on one thing only: stay in the best pressure.

At Balabac, the race shifted again. The stronger wind lay far to the west of the direct line to Serasan. Commitment was required. By now, WRmirekd had moved into second, and Sax747 sat close behind in third. WRmirekd was only about 0.3 nautical miles back. Close enough to strike at any moment.

The leg to Serasan was tactical and mentally demanding. The best path appeared to be a bold move west for pressure, followed by a slow turn south toward the mark. I knew my rivals would try to outguess me. That was precisely why I chose not to engage in match racing. Instead, I focused entirely on sailing the best race I could. In the first half, I prioritized pressure. In the second half, I shifted toward minimizing distance and refining angles.

We rounded Serasan at around 22:15 UTC, midnight for me in South Africa. Tired, eyes heavy, but still glued to the screen. And then I saw it.

The lead had grown. Around 0.8 nautical miles.

The strategy had worked again.

There were still more than 500 nautical miles to go, and fatigue was now a real opponent. Sleep came in fragments. Every check-in felt critical. The final leg demanded careful positioning, especially knowing that the second half would be dominated by fickle, light wind. The entire race could still unravel if I misdisplayed the setup.

As the finish at Dong Yen drew closer, the wind began to oscillate. I made the call to edge further east, trusting that the shifts would carry me in rather than leave me stranded. It was a decision made on instinct, experience, and more than a little hope.

Then, finally, the moment arrived.

At 21:06 UTC, Elysium crossed the finish line and claimed her first ever victory.

Relief. Pride. Exhaustion. Gratitude. All at once.

Huge congratulations to WRmirekd, who applied relentless pressure and closed the gap impressively, and to everyone who took on this demanding and rewarding race.

And a heartfelt thank you to Patrick, my friend, my sounding board, and the person who helped guide me through both this race and my journey into Sailonline.