

Shearwater - Rio de la Plata to Irish Sea 2026

CriticalHippo

I didn't take any notes or screenshots during this race, so look for wsguerin's report for a more detailed view of the race. The race started with all the boats staying fairly close together as we followed the coast of Brazil. 16-day gribbs pointed towards a route crossing over to the coast of Africa and hugging that to stay in favorable winds. I don't like a land-hugging route in a race like this; it requires too much attention and a bad wind shift leaves you stuck. So from the beginning I was looking for a route through the central or west Atlantic.

As we passed Cabo Branco, a dozen or so boats headed west, using the strong winds just north of Brazil to head into the west Atlantic. I took a path more directly to the north accompanied by one or two others, and the bulk of the fleet headed towards Africa as the router suggested.

Within a few days the north and slightly east route I was headed for disappeared, and I was forced to turn due west to find a way around the doldrums. At this point I posted in the chat "It has been said of CriticalHippo that he sought a bold path through the central Atlantic...and became hopelessly lost". I was sure I was going to finish well outside the top 20.

I sailed with negative VMC for 2 or 3 days until a path to the north opened up. I jumped at it and found myself accompanied by Flamingo, who had separated from the far west group. The rest of that group was roughly parallel to us but maybe a couple hundred miles further west. Flamingo was about 5 minutes ahead of me but I was able to close the gap and pass him over the next couple days.

Finally, we broke into the westerlies and caught a storm headed east. The far west group had gotten close to us but I must have made a move (I don't remember exactly what) to separate myself from Flamingo who ended up leading that group while I achieved a significant lead. The rest of the race was just riding that storm to Ireland, and then taking somewhat calmer winds into the finish. I won by over an hour and a half. The next 10 boats (all from the west group) finished in a span of about 5 hours. After a 13-hour gap 3 more boats came in another 5-hour span, then almost 2 days behind me the bulk of the fleet (the eastern group I assume) started coming in.

