

I shant soon forget Ushant

– Weekend's race recap

After 35 for so days at sea, it was a relief to arrive in Ushant and turn off the weather update alarm clock.

While it's difficult to recall the early part of the race, I went into this one with low expectations and intentions of sailing seat-of-the-pants (unassisted). But seeing the complexity of weather patterns in the South Pacific after a couple of days, it became clear that a little assistance would help avoid perilous track choices.

I kept to a fairly high latitude while the southern speedsters bounced along the southern race boundary, but everyone would converge at Cape Horn. As expected, the route selection from there to the equator would pretty much cast the die for the final half of the race.

Limesinferior had a commanding lead in the south Pacific and into the Atlantic. Galmoli took the lead for quite some time. Eventually strong wind fields depleted into Atlantic speed bumps and the front fleet caught them. Being out on an eastern limb, I held out against hope that winds would favour my track and that's exactly what happened.

Some (like me) pushed eastward toward Africa while others remained closer to South America. As the north Atlantic came into view, Dingo and Group A chanced a longer but higher-pressure route taking them far to the west before catching a red rocket back east to France.

My eastern-track partner Chipspitter and I traded #1 and #2 spots for a day or so as we swung up and around the Cape Verdes Islands – guessing that was about 10 days from the finish. Chips took the lead and held it for the remainder of the race. There was little possibility of catching Chipspitter despite jinking around looking for surprise openings – he was away and gone for most of the final third of the course.

Having the lead pack at our heels was quite an incentive to stay current with the weather. I don't think I missed being on "live" for every update during the final two weeks. That's a lot easier said than done, by the way, but did help avoid any nasty surprises in the weather and provided opportunities to move early if a significant change was coming.

Timing is everything in this endeavour, and several times a lucky coincidence – being in the right place at the right time – made all the difference. Manoeuvring to catch the start of a big wind shift, or being pulled along by a fast-moving wind field, could just as easily have been "missing the bus" or falling into blue-goo doldrums.

Second place is welcome improvement for a skipper who is, in reality, more accustomed to 50th place in most races. Congratulations to Chipspitter in front of me, and StingFI in third, and the rest of the top 10. And much admiration for Kipper, Dingo and the crews who took a chance on the long way around – it could quite easily have proven the wisest route. Just not this time out in particular.

Now, I will drift back to the rear of the peleton where I usually am.