

San Diego Islands Race 2021 – report by calmxy

As you may have known lately, I have been reducing my participation in SOL races. It's fun to sail every now and then, but I could really feel the pressure in late 2020 that I just had to stay awake and finish the annual series that is the SuperSOL. It feels better when I can just race what I'm comfortable with instead of being up through consecutive nights to avoid a BBQ. This wasn't a race that I had originally planned to actively participate in, but when I was wide awake at 4am Singapore time (8pm UTC), I knew I had to try this, especially when it wasn't expected for the race to run into the next night in Singapore.

Races with lots of windholes, such as the recent Naples Triangle race, can prove to be incredibly challenging to compete in especially when faced with multiple Wx updates that may change what the optimal strategy would be. On the other hand, a race with a strong, steady breeze like this one can also prove to be challenging in its own way; while planning a general route may be easier, the margin between competitors also tends to be smaller. I prefer the latter kind of challenge. Consider that one SOLer sailed only the rhumb lines throughout this race and took only 30 mins longer than I did to finish!

At each of the marks, there were a few SOLers who either overshot or turned too early and hence missed rounding the mark correctly.

Fermin to Catalina: A command of approx. TWA +46° (later changed to COG 236°) nicely covered this stretch as the winds gradually increased when heading offshore. There was some variation of southward curve that worked well here, though starting with TWA +42° or following the rhumb line exactly lost too much initial boat speed.

Catalina to San Clemente N: Average TWA was +105° for this stretch. Given the TP52's polar hop centered around TWA 110° at 15-17 knots of wind, hopping between +102° and +116° was a viable option. However, perhaps because of the performance loss and slight extra distance covered, the rhumb line proved to be nearly as fast.

San Clemente N to San Clemente S: As the rhumb line of this stretch was outside the range of the polar hop, it was a fairly obvious choice to sail the rhumb line, although I noted post-race that rumskip made a slight curve closer to San Clemente. Interestingly enough, one of the SOLers sailed right along that coastline despite that island being a military base with restricted waters (and hence the offshore marks).

San Clemente S to San Diego: Right up to San Clemente S, the gap between boats was generally very small. There was a larger gap between the IRL boats, but that was more due to the different classes of boats. Judging from the winds, it was a pretty obvious move to head south first before gybing towards the finish (plus only one instance of gybing performance loss!). How far to head south first? That was the tricky part; it's not so straightforward to simply set one more command of max downwind TWA and use the DC predictor to see when is the earliest to make that gybe that will reach the finish.

As it turned out, after straightening out some of the curvy bits of the TWA predictor, I made the gybe just before WRmirekd, but later than most of the SOLers and IRL boats. For the IRL boats, perhaps the currents were such that this worked in their favour. For us SOLers where the current has no net effect on the boat, not so much, since they were leaving the stronger winds sooner and would hence slow down.

At around 8am UTC, I noticed that WRmirekd's boat was literally on my tail, then his tracks crossed mine and he gained a lead of up to 0.1nm over me. At the time, it seemed like there was nothing that I could do and I would have to settle for second. But I realized that the better wind angle came at the cost of less winds thereafter; that and perhaps a subtle change from the 8.45am Wx gave me just enough angle and pressure to snatch back that win in the last nm of the race, bringing me to what is my longest win distance-wise in SOL!

Thanks for the wonderful race, WRmirekd and everyone else!

calmxy /March 2021