

Oasis Triumphs in Exciting Ben Mohr Rock Race

Sunday, January 6, 2019

by Greg Taylor, Fleet Captain Racing

After hearing warnings another wind storm may be heading our way, I was wondering what the morning of the Ben Mohr Race would bring. I needn't have worried as it turned out to be a perfect winter sailing day. The kind of day one turns their mind back to when slogging through another rainy day.

Eight boats braved the warnings and joined in on a spectacular day of sailing. It's not often a boat can leave our dock, go out through Captain's Passage and return to the harbour, only having to make one gybe or tack, and that was to go around the mark: Ben Mohr Rock.

The breeze at the start was out of the southwest and a bit flukey. Most of the boats were at the Club end of the starting line, with Firefly at the outside pin. A change in wind direction led to some discussion between the skipper of Firefly and what must have been a relative of the ghostly crewman who visited Slocum on his circumnavigation. In any event, Firefly couldn't hold a course to cross the line and had to reverse its line to circle back and begin the race.

The rest of the fleet took off down the harbour, trimming for hard on the wind to a very close reach as the breeze shifted. Firefly soon caught up with the leaders. Gusts hit the fleet. Sailing behind the fleet, as usual, Skeena Cloud could see the tall sticks on Shingebiss and Sorcery X heel well over as a patch of dark water overwhelmed them. I envied them their crew, as being single handed on the Skeena Cloud makes it difficult to both hold a course, and reach for, and release, the mainsheet in a gust. Briefly pinching into the wind solves the problem, reducing weather helm and maintaining Skeena Cloud's preferred 'slot' of 15-18 degrees of heel, while not losing much speed. Of course,

having the advantage of seeing where the boats ahead encountered the gusts is a huge advantage.

Circling back to the start. Here is another tip from a relative beginner. Skeena Cloud is always, on purpose, one of the last boats to cross the line. Hanging back just behind the quicker, bigger, and much more experienced boats gives them a chance to sort themselves out. Within two or three minutes of the start they are pretty well set up. It's then just a matter of either falling in behind or starting clear of them. Because they are likely to be starting on a starboard tack closer to the clubhouse, you don't want to be either on a port tack (you have no rights and have to stay out of their way), or too close to the outside pin. Beginning your approach to the line too far to the outside pin (more than midway), and too far behind the line, means you run the danger of not making the line. No matter how hard you try, your boat won't sail directly upwind so you can make the outside mark, and not have to do what Firefly did. I know, as I have tried, and not succeeded, more than once—several times actually. You stall and curse in frustration as the rest of the fleet roars away.



Once the fleet cleared Second Sister we eased the sheets, the breeze became less erratic, and we were all doing 5 to 7 knots (we had a bit of tide) towards the mark. Skeena Cloud has learned at this time in the race to look for Radiant Heat and Firefly. Radiant Heat knows these waters well and often uses this hard won wisdom to pick the best line. Firefly, having an edgy, talented, and young skipper tends to be more aggressive. Her aggressiveness is often, but not always, awarded. Watching the choices these two boats make is a powerful learning tool. This takes nothing away from the other boats. It's just that many of them are too far in front to be helpful. I only wish I could be close enough to Sorcery X and Shingebiss! In this case, Skeena Cloud followed Radiant Heat. Taking a higher line through the Pass gave her a straight shot to the mark even though the breeze began shifting to the south. Tightening our sheets we made the mark. Those taking a lower line through the Pass had to take the 'great circle route' to the mark.

Rounding the mark, we were again hard on the wind in the now southerly breeze of about 8 knots. It was fun slicing through the tide slop in the Pass. Of course, looking hard, I could not find the large log that appeared immediately in front of my bow, when I was not looking, on the outward leg. Watching the sun light up Battle Axe in Triconmali Channel was a picture worthy moment. I just have to figure out how to trim, steer, and take pictures at the same time. Thank goodness Mia is more talented than me.

Once past Welbury Spar we eased the sheets again to make Second Sister. After such a great race, I saw the tip of Second Wind's mast stall behind Second Sister. I had watched Firefly keep her speed up on a broad reach across the mouth of the harbour, before turning for home and launching her spinnaker. A brilliant tactic, if the breeze had cooperated. I watched

Firefly and then the other boats, some with their kites up, gybe back and forth the harbour, fighting an obvious fitful, directionless, and dropping breeze.

Skeena Cloud, smartly sailed boat that she is, took all this evidence in, knowing in her heart that it would be best to just leave well enough alone, and tried to hoist her spinnaker. The first try being a disaster, what better thing to do than try again? The rest of her race was a bit of a gong show.

The balance of the fleet, after gybing back and forth across the harbour near the finish line, finished the race under white sails after the wind shifted. Battle Axe, and haven't we all been there, suffered the dropping erratic breeze and arrived late, missing the first rush of post-race talk, but well in time to enjoy a beverage and snacks with us all on Oasis.



Congratulations to Oasis for winning both line honours and on corrected time. Well done. *(Photos by Mia and Douglas. Check out Flickr for more photos of the race.)*

The next race should be equally fun. It's our first 'K' race. These races are 'pursuit' races. Boats begin the race one at a time in accordance with their rating. If you do not have a rating, contact Douglas, who will provide you with one. We should all be sailing within sight of one another, and hopefully end the race close together so we can enjoy some social time.