

Wednesday Night, July 31st

Poor Skeena Cloud, she entered the last Wednesday night race in July (the August series begins next week) expecting more of the same. That she would be given free rein to plod around the course, allowed to have her head at will. Instead, a new skipper was in the saddle, having none of it. But first, back to the beginning.

Six boats gathered for the skipper's meeting: Caliente, Imp, Evangeline, Ogopogo, Kay D, and Skeena Cloud. With the parameters of a light breeze of 5 or 6 knots and the desire to complete the race within two hours, a course of Ganges Shoals(P), Wellbury Spar (P), Ganges Shoal (S), Finish was chosen.

Karisma was unable to race last night, and Shingebiss is cruising, so Skeena Cloud suddenly had a very experienced racing skipper (Heather) and a well-trained crew-member (Mia), both used to going fast. The owner became ballast.

Skeena Cloud quickly found out what is what on the start line when our skipper had the crew timing how long it took to sail between the two starting flags so she could time the approach to the second. If that wasn't enough shock, instead of hanging back at the start, we were mixing it up. At one point the ballast looked back and quietly noted to the Skipper, "you know we are on port". "Of course", was the curt response. Okay, no more questions.

We rounded the inside flag onto a beam reach before hardening up to cross the line within a second or two of the starting time. Trimming the sails like a maestro, Skeena Cloud was told it was no longer acceptable to act like a dude ranch horse; she needed to reach deep into her heritage and find the one or two genes she shared with Secretariat.

We were soon racing upwind with Imp, Evangeline, and Kay D. At one point we were actually side by side with Imp, which was a unique experience. We tacked away from the Chain Islands, following Kay D, before quickly tacking back, thinking there was a bit better pressure, tide relief, and maybe a lift. Imp had moved ahead. We could see her getting the expected lift and followed her. Kay D expertly tacked on to port, away from the Chain Islands. We were on starboard. I looked back into the eyes of our skipper and thought, "Martin, do not expect any quarter will be provided".

Martin tacked back to enjoy the same lift Imp and Skeena Cloud were enjoying. We all maintained the same course until we saw the leading Imp begin to sag to leeward just west of the First Sister, caught either in a knock or current.

Skeena Cloud tacked off the Chain Islands and towards Ganges Shoal. Our skipper carefully distributed our weight on the leeward side of the boat. Moving Mia up near the shrouds. She provided me careful, insightful instructions on how to position myself, "get your ass up along further on that rail".

The fleet was now crossing the harbour. All knew an additional tack was required to take them to Ganges Shoal. The tactical challenge was what side of the barge anchored on the SW side of the harbour to take. If you took its bow, you might require an additional tack to make the mark. Taking its stern was longer but gave a faster trim (avoid possibly pinching) to the mark. Kay D and Skeena Cloud took the stern. The balance of the fleet took the bow.

And here was our only big mistake, after passing the barge's stern we were racing fast upwind, but at a higher course than the rest of the fleet. The vector and distance widening. Mia and the ballast timidly looked back to the Skipper and quietly asked, "why are we heading in this direction?" The skipper looked at us as if we were mad and answered, "to make the mark". "But" we quietly noted, "we already passed the mark, it's back over there".

It was then Heather really proved her chops as an experienced skipper, rapidly going through the series of hallowed steps displayed by any number of famous captains: swear many, many times with increasing emphasis, flog the crew, and then and there, decide we were going to redouble our efforts.

And with her leadership, we did. We found ourselves solidly in last place with the other boats racing away. As Mia noted later, our mistake began to pay off as we could trim both the sails and our weight for maximum speed to Wellbury Spar. It looked from well astern that other than Ogoogo, who was far in the lead, already having rounded Wellbury Spar, the flood current would force the other boats to either tack or pinch to make the mark.

With the crews head down or behind sails, we could not follow the other boats well. But every time Mia and I looked up we were closer, until we were only 200 meters behind the second last boat, Evangeline, at the mark.

Meanwhile, the leading boats were passing us going downwind. Caliente had a challenge with an hour glassed spinnaker. She was followed closely by Imp and Kay D.

Our rounding was a thing of orchestrated beauty. Skeena Cloud didn't know she had it in her. We hoisted the spinnaker and unfurled it without incident and quickly trimmed it for speed. The skipper, used to a symmetrical spinnaker, quickly grasped how to get the most out of an asymmetric. We gybed down the harbour passing Evangeline before gybing back across the harbour towards Rock Point, then gybing back again to Goat Island, before a final gybe, and a hot reach to the finish line. Our gybes were a ballet even if one of the dancers looked ungainly in his tutu.

Joking aside, it was a thrill to work with such an experienced team, who brought the best out of Skeena Cloud, turning her – at least for a brief time – from a plow horse to a thoroughbred. Mia was steady and experienced. Her kind nature almost hiding a steely determination to do well. Heather has a quiet leadership style designed to both teach and bring the best out of people, while not being afraid to push a little when required.

And together they were friendly and fun to race with. I can't thank you enough. And Skeena Cloud, once she gets over the shock of winning, will do so as well.

As usual, a few treats, beverages, and stories were enjoyed on the picnic table after the race.

Wed Night #5 July - 7/31/2019

Start: Start 1, Finishes: Place

Rank	Boat	SailNo	NHC3	Start	Finish	Elapsed	Corrected	BCR	Points
1	Skeena Cloud	121	0.837	17:00	18:37:57	01:37:57	01:21:59	0.837	100
2	Kay D		0.887	17:00	18:33:04	01:33:04	01:22:33	0.881	83
3	Ogopogo	2	1.07	17:00	18:18:37	01:18:37	01:24:07	1.043	67
4	IMP	2107	0.974	17:00	18:32:55	01:32:55	01:30:30	0.882	50
5	CALIENTE	CAN45	1.054	17:00	18:30:15	01:30:15	01:35:07	0.908	33
6	Evangeline		0.95	17:00	18:49:50	01:49:50	01:44:21	0.746	17