

## Challenge the Currents K and Portland-Moresby Race Reports

November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Written by Greg Taylor and Tony Brogan

We (Heather, April, and I) have been working to increase the diversity of SISC's racing cohort. An objective, it appears, our incoming Commodore has enthusiastically embraced! As have, from the look of the nicely timed rainbow, have the sailing Gods.



And those same sailing Gods rewarded us with one of the finest racing days most of us can remember. It was warm – by November standards – and most importantly windy; very windy for our home waters. We had stiff 12- 20+ kts much of the day: southeast in the morning coming around into the southwest in the afternoon and finally, at the end of the day, from the north. With the opposing current it was also lumpy. It is not often that I have seawater breaking onto my foredeck. But more on that later.

We ran two races Sunday: Portland - Moresby and the Challenge the Currents K (for Keeners) race. Why two? It is because Portland – Moresby is a 23.6 nm race. Some were concerned us slower boats would be left too far behind, meaning less fun, and arriving home after dark. The faster boats, on the other hand, relish the opportunity to stretch their legs on a challenging course. So, as so rarely happens, we were able to accommodate everyone by running the two races on the same day. Tony will report on the Portland – Moresby Race. What follows is the K Race Report.

We had three boats signed up for the K Race: Phoenix (with it's all-woman crew, plus one wannabe), Evangeline, and Skeena Cloud (both single-handed). We had a nice surprise when Sparky turned up for the Skipper's Meeting. The Race took us on two loops within Captain's Pass: SISC – Batt Rock – U62 – to Horda Shoals – traced out most of the first loop. Channel Islands – Deep Ridge Buoy – U60 – and back to SISC finished the first and completed the second.

Everyone began the race with a reefed main. Both Phoenix and Skeena Cloud also had a reefed genoa. Evangeline used his 110 jib. We were ready! But the wind wasn't. A hole developed around the pin end of the start line and Phoenix and Skeena Cloud's starting strategies evaporated with the breeze. Evangeline further to the outside got a clean start in a brisk breeze. So, Skeena Cloud staggered over the start line for a couple hundred meters before finding the breeze. A breeze that was to stay with us the rest of the day. We had to watch for the powerful gusts rolling down the harbour towards us, forcing Skeena Cloud to either luff up, or if the puff was strong, drop the traveller.

I could hear Phoenix's excellent tactician – Heather Sloat – calmly guiding the crew through maneuvers in the challenging conditions. As someone who has worked with many dozens of different skippers in the fishing industry, I have seen all types: the screamers, the bullies, the blamers, and ones who never come out of the wheelhouse. But the best, while they take command, don't yell out orders; they allocate responsibilities, teach people how to be successful, and when things get difficult, provide calm guidance. And they hold people accountable, going over what right, and what went wrong. Heather is one of these skippers. I could hear her organizing her crew. And they responded by performing almost flawlessly. Or so they told me. And I believe it.

Meanwhile, Evangeline was in a groove. Ben was single-handing, and put on a show. Although he said that things aboard the boat may have gone a little less smooth than how they looked. He probably felt like me right after the race, tired but exhilarated. But the day more like like he had gone ten rounds in the ring. But he was in a groove. He was able to point higher and more steady than Skeena Cloud, allowing him, it appeared, to round Batt Rock, without having to throw in an extra tack. And then he was off to U62 on a very close reach.

Aboard Skeena Cloud, I had set up the spinnaker bag forward, the forecast suggesting the wind was to drop in the afternoon. I set it up as I always do, clipping the bag onto the toe rail, but got a lesson in never be casual about such things. Leaving the harbour the wind increased, and so did the chop. Although Skeena Cloud is best sailed with a maximum 20 degree list, and I do what I can to keep it within this, waves were still coming aboard, washing across the bow and down the lee rail.

Looking forward after a big gust and lurch through a wave, I could see the bag was on the outside of the stanchions with the spinnaker spilling out. Engaging the auto pilot, which I never entirely trust in such weather, I crawled forward on my belly to the bow, dragged the sodden spinnaker back aboard, lashed it down, and crawled back to the cockpit. It was a lesson in how sloppiness can kill you.

I had everything, mostly, in control until rounding Batt Rock and coming onto a very close reach. I was then totally out of control, fighting the wheel, rounding up, while trying to shorten sail. That done, it was a riotous ride to U62 before turning downwind for the short run to Horda Shoals, before coming onto the wind once more.

Looking back I could see Phoenix beginning to gain ground on me. And up front Evangeline had just beat over to the SS shore and had tacked toward the Channel Islands. The now SW wind allowed him to head directly to the Islands instead of tacking back and forth. I followed but with my 135 reefed to about a 90 could not sail as tight to the wind.

But being behind the leader also has its advantages. I could see that Ben tacked at least four times to get through the narrow chute on the west side of the Channel Islands. I planned to do it in two and make up some distance.

(This is a point to recall that Ben was single-handing a 34' C&C in what was then likely 20 kts of wind, navigating through a narrow passage, with a course change to a new mark once through.)

Looking back Phoenix was continuing to eat up the distance between us. She, like me, appeared to have reefed her headsail some more.

To make it through the gap in one tack was a lesson in trusting my instruments. I kept on wanting to tack but impatiently waited on it to come to 95 degrees before doing so. It worked. With the current, I ended up skimming past the north side of the Islands, over to the SS shore before tacking again. But it was a close thing. The SW wind pushing against the current has stacked the sea into a couple of hundred meters of short, steep waves, slowing me down to 3.5 kts, leaving me vulnerable to considerable leeway. But once clear of the seas, my speed kept back up to over 5.5+ kts, and I was able to clear the island, and by dropping the traveller, was able to hold a course to Deep Ridge Buoy.

At this point, improbably, was the first of the returning Portland-Moresby boats. Turbodactyl, the tri skippered by John and crewed by Eric, split the Channel Islands on a broad reach. And in the distance I could see white sails.

Once around Deep Ridge Buoy, it was downwind, the breeze having shifted back south, to U62. I was down to 4 knots in the only stiff current of the day. Everything is relative. In many of our races I would be delighted with 4 kts. Now, it felt like I was stopped.

Once around U60 it was a downwind sail to home. Even though the breeze had dropped enough to shake out the reefs in both mainsail and genoa, I was nervous about setting the spinnaker. I therefore poled out the genoa and sailed wing on wing with a preventer on the main. It was slow, but direct, and soon the wind freshened again and went back SW and I was able to broad reach, the genoa still poled out, into the harbour.

And how about the distance gained on Evangeline by only doing two tacks to his four? Once Evangeline turned for home, reaching and gybing, he was soon out of sight. Phoenix, who was catching up, was caught longer in the softer breeze, and dropped back.

Once into the harbour the breeze slowly worked its way into the north until, within a couple of hundred of meters of the finish, I had to take down the whisker pole, and tack upwind across the line. Phoenix, later coming into the harbour, had more upwind work facing them.

On the way into the harbour, I saw Turbodactyl motoring in, and while taking down my sails, saw Oasis, still sailing hard, heeled well over, tacking across the finish line. And well within the harbour, I could see Radiant Heat under spinnaker. We also Kevin Vine sailing out, trying out his new main sail. We missed you Kevin!!

It was a glorious day to be on the water and was followed by a lively get together on Oasis.

## **Over to Tony**

For weeks we have fretted over the fact that one of our longest races was scheduled for the near dead of winter so naturally some of us were worried about being caught out in bad weather a long way from home on a race longer than the average day out for a summer cruise. Would the wind blow enough to get home before dark (16.30) or blow us off the water.

It turned out that 5 boats affirmed including a cat and the 3 "Big" boats plus Radiant Heat. As it turned out Sorcery was not there but Oasis, Shingebiss, The cat, Turbodactyl, and Radiant Heat were.

John and I were at the boat about 8 and did not rig the genoa for use as the Westerly was already steady at 10-14 with gust to 20 and I never even considered rigging the Spinnaker this day. Keeping the deck clean in a strong breeze is a good idea. (*He tells me no – ed*)

We had time to tour the docks on foot and remind the others that Celia Reef was a mark of the course as written in the club manual . Unfortunately as Turbodactyl was not at the club but sailing in to the start from another port we did not remind Eric or skipper John..

Once on the water, we were happy that we had reefed the main at the dock and did not raise the jib while we perused the start line and scurried back and forth at 5-7 knots . As the winds have been consistently light all year this is a new experience as suddenly the start line looked a lot shorter, the moored boats closer and there was little room to maneuver with time for decision making. Thank goodness FCR (*aided by Tony – ed*) had moved the start line out away last month and widened it 50% more too. And thank goodness there were not 12 boats moving a hull speed all looking for the fast start.

The rain had passed, almost , and 10 minutes before the start we witnessed the first of several beautiful rainbows, hanging over Ganges, illuminated by the morning sun working to breakthrough the thinning clouds.

A few minutes before the start we raised the jib and joined the other three boats angling for the start line. Oasis went round to the starboard side near the docks , Radiant heat followed a good space back. Turbodactyl took a more direct line and Shingebiss stayed out of the fray a little further back. While Radiant Heat tried to slow the approach, Oasis crossed the cat to her lee, therefore having luffing rights, leaving good room at the line for Radiant Heat as we hardened up in the strong Westerly some 8 seconds after the start with both the other two, over on the dot with little time to spare. Then Oasis and the cat hardened up, fighting for the

clear air, and suddenly the gap closed for RH and forced us up too, into the moored boats just off the South end of our docks. "Tony , you see the boat ahead" John gently enquirer, as if I wanted to tangle with a stationary boat!!

So we ended up moving inside the moored boat. I wonder if the resident was aboard at 09.00 or even witnessed the drama just off her gunwales by a half length?

Soon all of us were moving quickly down the harbour with the wind backing to the South every few minutes causing us to head out toward the Chain and Sisters Islands and then to tack out on a quick change to the other shore before being headed again and tacking back out into the channel. We passed 2nd sisters in less than 20 minutes.

Turbodactl showed good speed even against the wind , Oasis was doing well, Radiant Heat was being left a little further back and Shingbiss was figuring out the tacks and closing the gap created by their slower start.

Now the wind was more SE than SW and it was a hard beat out into the channel against the last of the flood due to change about 10.00.

Turbodactyl disappeared at great speed into the haze of Captains Passage. Oasis tacked out too but not as far coming back to us as we tacked toward the Channel Islands and now abeam of Batt Rock in less than an hour. As Oasis tacked back she had not gained distance and we were more, hopeful that even with the 20-25 knot gusts knocking us down we were holding our own. In this kind of wind the 30' Radiant heat is like sailing a dingy bouncing all over the place. Shortly it grew worse as the Ebb current showed itself in lumpy, short, 4 foot seas produced by the opposing winds. The larger heavier boats take this in their stride, but Radiant Heat, being lighter and shorter, began to fly up one wave only the smash down in a trough or the face of the next wave, making the boat shudder, leaving me to thank the heavily built fibre-glassing of the 1979 era.

But even then we closed the gap with Oasis and on one tack we passed ahead by a mere boat-length. So we were marginally ahead of Oasis but Turbodactyl was further ahead now but closer to the Pender shore as we fought our way through the seas, passing Channel Islands and then Yeo point. The current helped as at a 2 knot ebb into the 15-20 knot winds, but kicked up the worst seas we were to encounter. We both worked our way into Swanson Channel and Singebiss was closer but gaining little.

As we worked into the channel with another tacking duel the cat passed a quarter mile ahead on course for the west side of Portland island. Then Oasis now tracked down Radiant Heat as we turned for the long beat to the south of Portland. Shingebiss seemed to have a head sail problem and headed to the Beaver Point shore. On a radio enquiry from RH to see if all was well we were informed Shingbiss was practicing sail changes and all was Ok, thanks!

We made good speed while close hauled with Oasis in hot pursuit. The cat was barely visible ahead, Shingebiss was never seen again from behind Beaver Point. We suspected a retirement but later we saw her finish the course well back. Mia and Gyle must be pretty slick

with those sail changes with an hour of extra practice . We look for very sharp tacking in the next race even if sail changes are required!

Meanwhile we took a wide tack to clear Celia reef and Oasis skimmed closer within a Whisker or two. It was a long beat gradually becoming a close reach to clear Moresby island and here the waterline length of the 42 foot Oasis began to assert itself as she gradually overhauled Radiant Heat and by the turn at the East end of Moresby was 200 yards ahead.

We had seen the cat ignore the Celia reef mark and radioed twice with no response. We would have liked them to throw in a couple of tacks but they passed leaving Celia to starboard rather than the required port.

On the turn we were still in the Ebb but now fighting the 1 knot current on a broad reach it was only 12.30 or so. It was proving to be a fast trip close to a record I wondered. We stuck with a reefed main and jib and went as deep as we could but we had trouble trying a downwind wing on wing in a 15-18 knot stiff breeze. Oasis moved further ahead as she achieved better speeds. Shortly the wind began its anticipated move to the South and we gybed but stayed on course . Oasis was now a quarter mile ahead and heading for Beaver point. Radiant heat took a deeper course North of that to enter Captain's passage North of Deep Ridge buoy. Indeed there was an adverse ebb current still running and in Swanson channel the North to South current was pushing her a 15-20 degree offset. Into Captain's passage the wind went further West but suddenly we had 10 minutes from the East. go figure, just as we raised the spinnaker and had shaken out the main reef. For 5 minutes we observed that the 2 knot ebb at Beaver point was butting head with the progress of Oasis. but she powered through and cut away from the current in behind Channel Islands and to the North side. Now we spotted Phoenix sailing the last leg from the Alternate K race. We passed to their Windward side as we waved to each other while they snapped memorable photos.

The wind now went ahead to a westerly Beam reach and then as we came close to Sisters we dropped the spin and upped the jib. Ok, but the wind went to 4 knots and the jib did not pull the jib. "Do we use the genoa," mused John.

There was a large hole stretching before us but there was a dark blue patch on the water down in the harbour. The genoa was unpacked and deployed just in time to be hit by a 15 knot NW that, in the 5 minutes we were rigging the sail, swept up the harbour to overwhelm us. We now discovered sheets were cross and neither sail could be properly raised and so both were dropped as we tacked out of Boulder Bay just in time and the mess was sorted out by good crew John. I'll have to have a chat with Gyle and get some tips on sail changing.

We finally raised the jib with just three tacks to the line but I did note that RH sails well , smoothly, but more slowly under main alone. Raising the jib gave us another two knots of boat speed so at least we finished in grand style a half hour behind Oasis.

All in all a very fast sail with Oasis round the islands in 5 hours. Well sailed.

After putting Radiant Heat to bed ready for the next Sunday Long Harbour Race we repaired to the sounds of laughter and jollity, aboard Oasis tied up at the dock, and joined the camaraderie of the happy sailors within.





**Portland-Moresby - 9/17/2019 at 10:30**

Start: Start 1, Finishes: Place									
Rank	Boat	SailNo	NHC3	Start	Finish	Elapsed	Corrected	BCR	Points
1	Oasis	421	0.958	10:30:00	14:05:08	3:35:08	3:26:06	0.958	100
2	Turbodactyl		1.15	10:30:00	13:36:45	3:06:45	3:34:46	1.104	0
3	Radiant Heat	67901	1.015	10:30:00	14:38:46	4:08:46	4:12:30	0.828	67
4	Shingebiss	49077	1.031	10:30:00	15:32:42	5:02:42	5:12:05	0.681	33

Please note Turbodactyl will be re-scored DSQ for missing Celia Reef and the other racers places adjusted accordingly.

**Currents K - 9/17/2019 at 10:30**

Start: Start 1,  
Finishes:  
Place

Rank	Boat	SailNo	NHC3	Start	Finish	Elapsed	Corrected	BCR	Points
1	Evangeline		0.897	10:30	13:21:33	2:51:33	2:33:53	0.897	100
2	Skeena Cloud	121	0.816	10:30	13:59:06	3:29:06	2:50:38	0.736	75
3	Phoenix		0.793	10:30	14:48:06	4:18:06	3:24:40	0.596	50
4	Sparky	67901	0.918			DNF			0