

Wednesday Night Racing - Week 3, June 18th

Written by Tony Brogan and Greg Taylor

Pictures by Tony Brogan and Eric vanSoeren

Years ago, soon after Janice and I got together, we stayed at a ranch up near Kamloops, where we planned to ride horses across the sage covered grasslands. I knew Janice had owned horses and competed, and did well, in several disciplines, in her youth. I had ridden horses a few times, read just about every western book available, and loved old western movies.

On our first day we were introduced to our horses. Two older, reliable, complacent animals set in their ways. Upon getting up in the saddle and taking a few slow, deliberate steps, Janice leaned over and whispered into her horses' ear, 'this will not do at all', followed by some subtle adjustments with her legs, hands, and seat.

The horse, shocked out of its somnolence, snapped its ears back onto Janice, raised its head into the air, and gathered its haunches under her. Before I could begin to grasp what was going on, Janice was galloping her horse across the grasslands, both the horses mane and Janice's hair streaming behind them. I sat atop my horse, who was taking a dump, ignoring both me and what was going on, looking on in awe and consternation. Awe of the beauty of horse and rider framed against the sage and sky. And consternation that sitting atop a horse, reading, watching, and being in my head is not near the same as riding.

And so it was last night when Paul Faget boarded Skeena Cloud. I motored us out to raise the mainsail and gave Paul the helm. I raised the main and, after following one of Paul's many generous tips, turned off the engine.

While I was busy raising the main, Paul, I am sure, leaned down and whispered to Skeena Cloud, "this will not do at all". Paul immediately had Skeena Cloud leap to attention under main alone, cruising up and down on a reach, parallel to the start line. Skeena Cloud had never sailed so freely, fast, or gracefully under any combination of sails, never mind under main alone.

As Paul got a feel for Skeena Cloud, I watched him also take in where everyone else was. I am guessing here, but I think only once he had a sense of what others intentions might be, and foreseeing where they would likely be over the next three minutes before the start, did he ask me to unfurl the genoa.

We ran parallel to the line towards the Club end where most were gathered, turned back on ourselves and slowed, running feet from the line, until there were 15 seconds to go. I was ordered to harden up and we crossed the line right as the clock struck 5. 'Oh', I thought, 'that's how it's done'.

I should also tell about the run out of the harbour. Instead of tacking back and forth across the harbour as I would have done, Paul felt the current wind, noted where it

might be next, avoided others 'dirty air', and kept track of the other boats. (Instruments? I never saw him look).

The result was we never sailed more than two hundred meters from the Chain Islands. The only mishap we had the entire night was when we launched the spinnaker. I have never used my large spinnaker single-handing, worried about having to drop it safely as I careen into Squalor Bay, or having to repack and launch it mid-race. I used Paul's kind offer to race with me as an opportunity to see how I might do it single-handed. *(I think the final agreed upon answer was the same as it would have been if he was asked if I should gallop the horse. I could, but it might be best to have someone close by to pick up the pieces)*

I somehow didn't get the halyard attached correctly (believe me, I felt the responsibility of not embarrassing either myself in front of Paul, or Paul in front of the fleet, heavily) and was horrified to watch the spinnaker collapse into the water as the shackle flew to the top of the mast.

I thought, we are done. We have to sail back ignominiously under white sails alone. I was beyond horrified. But Paul says, here, grab the wheel, goes forward, reorganizes the lines and spinnaker, has me drop the genoa, and we use the genoa halyard to launch the spinnaker. We were still in the race!

(I should mention that Paul did look at me and enquire with some surprise, 'you only have the two halyards?. Something new on the to-do list).

And as a coda to this recounting. During the race, I told Paul I had yet to get up the nerve to go up the mast. Upon getting in, Paul insisting on hoisting me into the sky to retrieve the halyard, not an easy task considering the size of Skeena Cloud's winches.

I will pass this narrative over to Tony, but there were a few small things Paul was doing I didn't catch. Martin wrote later:

'Skeena Cloud looked good tonight, I hope you were taking notes. Paul is one hell-of-a-good-sailor, congratulations for snagging him as a skipper. I noticed he was doing wild things on the tacks to get the leach of the main past the backstay. I had a good view from behind as I muffed the start, almost died from lack of oxygen and had to gybe around and duck the fleet to get clear air. Imp and Radiant Heat sailed well upwind and Battle axe had a stellar run to the finish, reeling me in hand over fist all the way. A fun night on the water.'

Tony's Report

Having studied the weather forecast yet again it seemed we were in for very light airs of 1-2 knots. But up at the house the trees were waving in defiance of the forecast and I was asked if it was safe to be single-handing on such a day. Notwithstanding the concerns expressed, snacks were packed and I headed out.

On the dock the wind was steady and more or less from the SE and the instruments showing a steady 4-6 knots, while on the water it seemed to be on the order of 6-8 knots. Moreover, peering up the harbour suggested there were no soft spots visible as far as the eye could see. The only worry now was would it all fade away to nothing by 1800.

Caution was exercised in setting the sails on deck as I voted for the jib upwind and the spinnaker downwind if appropriate.

The radio roll call came through on time from fleet captain Greg and enthusiasm crackled over the airwaves. "Would the fleet go for a longer course?" enquired the FCR. Immediately there were suggestions but Bob Jones dominated with his suggestion of Start, Martin's Mark(S), Horda Shoals(S), Ganges Shoals(S) and finish. Quickly realizing this gave just the one downwind run and the course required no repacking of the spinnaker while sailing up wind, I was in favour of such a course. Acclamations of approval were heard over the radio and so the course was set.

Out on the water for the pre-start the wind 6-8 knots was confirmed at 6-8 knots and with 20 minutes to spare RH decided to try a couple of test runs from the starboard end. Most of the fleet were out in the harbour at the port side. So me and Radiant Heat turned for Squalor bay, off the wind, turned close to a float, hardened up, and headed for the line.

It took a minute and a half to run back to the line, but we could not make the pin. So we tried again, this time a starting the run a little more inshore. It took 1 minute 20 seconds this time and we were bang on the pin. Back again the third time and straight for the float this time gave close to 1 min 30 secs and a good approach.

There was now 4 minutes plus to the start and other boats were eyeing the starboard end. Getting to the float with 2.5 minutes to go, we lazily slid passed the float and gently came around, noting it was just over 2 minutes to go to the start.

As we headed for the line, suddenly there was Kay D coming in from Port tack and turning for the line just three boat lengths ahead and being a little early luffing. There were two boats on the starboard side I did not want to tangle with so quickly eased the main to slow. Deciding to duck Kay D, she was now the meat in the sandwich as windward boats coming down were Martin's immediate concern while we were to his leeward.

Imp shot across our bows with 10 seconds to go, barging in from the starboard side and to avoid being too early, was forced to luff or she would be in danger of being forced outside the line.

Radiant Heat hardened up the Main, passed Kay D, and headed for the line with 5 seconds to go with Imp hardening up to leeward. We were over in good position and close hauled.

Headed over to the Chain Islands shore all the boats to the lee had to tack back earlier than us . Some were passing behind but three big boats including Pturbodactyl, and Rampart were fast enough to pass ahead. Now it was a tacking duel out the harbour. We noted the winds tended to be stronger in the center and so often tacked earlier than going all the way to the shore. There was also some oscillation in the wind direction and on occasion we took a 10-20 degree lift.

Imp was sailing well and Pturbodactyl had moved well into the lead never to be seriously challenged, eventually taking line honours. The first crossings were a close affair with Oasis , Rampart and Skeena Cloud, showing her true colours, being not only up in the pack, but in the front half, almost easy hailing distance from us.

Two more tacks and it was now Imp to the fore followed by RH and then a little back the pack of the "big " boats angling to round 2nd sisters to Martins Mark.

It was a close, close reach to Martins Marks and boat speed increased to 6+ knots. I was gratified to see RH was holding off the marauding pack following but could not gain on Imp, who fast tracked as usual.

Rounding the Mark, Imp immediately tacked out to the south of Welbury but at a wide angle to the Horda shoals mark. Radiant Heat simply rounded and hardened to close haul, heading toward the Scott Pt. shore. Shortly realizing that although it was a more direct route to the next mark, we would have to tack several times to and from the shore, we decided to tack to the right, and followed Imp out, but now we were considerably to weather of her.

Imp tacked to the left and as she passed ahead. We could see we had gained a little. It was now a case of playing the 45's as I call it. There is a tendency to want to go on a tack as far as one can before tacking on the layline to the mark. In an oscillating breeze this does not always pay as one finds the breeze direction moves enough either to leave you short of the mark or overstanding the mark (causing one to have sailed too far). *(Interesting to note that Paul was teaching me the same thing, at about the same time – ed)*

Once the angle to the mark is less than 45 degrees, the other tack is a shorter distance, being less than 45 degrees (assuming one tacks through 90 degrees. If one tacks through 80 degrees as does RH in a breeze carrying the jib, then tacking as soon as the 45 degree angle to the mark is reached, will give a 35 degree angle on the new tack.

Imp went on the accustomed long tack, Radiant Head on the two short tacks and the result was That RH was on the lifted side of the breeze on starboard, while Imp was headed on the port tack.

Result ...Radiant Heat rounded ahead of Imp by a bit and the "big boats" were a little further back, but still bearing down with bones in their teeth.

Apparent wind during this tacking period went as high as 16 knots and we had extended periods of 12-14 knots.

Turning down wind it seemed that the wind had "stopped". It was now only 3-4 knots apparent. The scramble to set the spinnaker was now on. Setting the autohelm takes time, going to the foredeck to loosen the bag takes time, setting the pole, more time. Securing the guy in the right place and then the sheet, more time still. Now the spinnaker halyard could be hauled. Hallelujah the sail filled with wind. Drop the head sail. Go forward to pull down and secure the jib along the rail and get back to the helm. Adjust the trim, adjust the course and now there is time to look around. *(All single-handed one notes -ed)*

Amazingly, after all this time with my head down getting the spinnaker set everyone was not ahead. Imp was abeam but her spinnaker was not set, quite yet. Boats behind were rounding but only some setting spinnakers .

Concentrating on the set and the trim for the faster boat speed I headed for Sisters. I quite forgot that Ganges Shoals was a mark of the course. I credited Imp's course to them using faster sailing angle. I was rescued by a friendly Bob Jones reminding me of the mark . Oops . An immediate course correction put me on a hotter angle and faster boat speed and no distance lost to Imp who was still astern as I rounded Ganges Shoals . Pturbodactyl's spinnaker was viewed halfway down the harbour.

Imp went closer to the Saltspring shore and near Boulder Bay and picked up extra breeze before gybing back out and crossing 5 boat lengths ahead of Radiant Heat as she made her way to the center right of the harbour. Radiant Heat was subjected to three wind changes deep reaching down the harbour forcing 3 gybes before the finish line.

Imp taking the longer gybes maintained her lead, finishing a minute ahead. The gap had widened with the boats behind but after stowing all sails and motoring in I was graced with the lovely sight of the fleet coming into the finish line under colourful spinnakers.

What a beautiful day. What a lovely sail. What a great time to be on the water. Those I saw briefly after the race had big smiles. And we were gifted by the sight of two Humpback whales feeding in Captain's Pass.

There were a couple of grimaces as FCR was hauled up the mast to retrieve an escaped halyard, another one for the broken tiller award. Give it a name and tell the story. Masting, Hauling.

I suspect that the podium belongs again to the slower boats, but at least their handicap ratings will subside soon to normalcy!! I hope! *(I don't think on need worry too much about Skeena Cloud without Paul aboard. Second Wind and Battle Axe's rapidly declining ratings will put soon place them in the general mix of the fleet – ed)*



Club Rating	Boat	Skipper	Finish Time	Corrected Time	Place	Rating for Next Race	club points
337	SKEENA CLOUD	Taylor	18:54:33	01:26:53	1	322	100
268	SECOND WIND	van Soeren	18:55:57	01:35:39	2	256	91
297	BATTLE AXE	Raddysh	19:04:35	01:39:07	3	288	82
135	IMP	Leitch	18:42:07	01:41:20	4	129	73
167	OASIS	Jones	18:47:56	01:42:07	5	164	64
132	RADIANT HEAT	Brogan	18:42:47	01:42:28	6	135	55
195	RAMPART	DeRoos	18:55:57	01:45:25	7	201	45
6	PTURBODACTYL	Tulip	18:25:31	01:45:41	8	15	36
200	KAY D	Herbert	19:02:02	01:50:10	9	212	27
121	THAT'S LIFE	McAllister	18:59:14	02:00:54	10	136	18
300	STAR GAZER	Manton	dnf		11	300	9

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