

Round Prevost Challenge

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Windy weather site has been forecasting 14 knots with gusts to 25 knots and a balmy 10 degrees for this Wednesday so I contacted our newest Flying Fifteen owner, Nicholas Sladen-Dew to see if he was interested in crewing for me. He responded with a "big yes" so we agreed to set off at 2.00 and give the "Round Prevost Challenge" a go. At 11:00 the clouds were scudding by my studio and I thought, we are missing the best wind, despite the forecast calling for a peak at 2:00. By 1:00 I couldn't stand the wait any longer and went to the club to rig the boat. Tony Meek was down working on Minke and confirmed my worst fear, it had been honking at 11:00 and was much less now. Drat!

We set off at 2:10:20 with a moderate spinnaker reach at about 4.5 knots with all hopes of a record attempt a hazy dream. There was some talk of what planing felt like and Nick asked if we would be planing at 6 knots, which is technically above the hull speed of a Flying Fifteen. Not really I replied but at about 6.8 knots you were aware that the boat was humming and at 7 knots the wake flattened out and the wave pattern was longer than the boat. On cue a gust made the Kay D pick up her skirts and start to move. As we rounded the Sisters and hardened up to a beam reach the spinnaker we got some puffs that brought us to 8.8 knots and our hopes revived. We chased off down wind on a broader reach hoping for 9 knots but not heading around Prevost but at her. I saw in my mind eye Tony Brogan shaking his head and thinking "going fast in the wrong direction is not going fast" and of course he is correct so we lowered the spinnaker and sheeted in for Peile Point. There was less wind off the point but something intriguing beyond, huge mounds of waves, so we decided to continue. Just before Peile Point the wind turned on and as we cracked off, the Kay D leapt ahead. It was solid white caps now with white sail speeds over 8 knots when we plunged into the waves. This must have been caused by the ebb coming down Trincomali meeting the ebb from Active Pass and they were steep. I was pumping the main to get us over the hump and then we would surge down the face. At one point we hit 10.4 knots. I heard the voice of my mentor Duk Dudock Van Heel saying "steer downhill". Nicholas was surging aft to keep the bow from burying and it was Game On. What fun.

We had a few ugly lulls, still in the big waves then came out of washing machine just before Portlock Point and re-hoisted the spinnaker and had a lively reach across to Point Liddell. A big gust was coming out of Ellen Bay and I chose to drop the spinnaker as we were sailing quite tight to the wind at the time. It was a mistake on my part as the gust lifted us and we might have seen the best speed of the day. Once round the point it was hard on the wind and hoping that the wind would clock as predicted. With tide against and two gentlemen of a certain age "hiking" we were only making 4.7-5 knots. We held Starboard tack all the way over to the Saltspring shore and just as Batt Rock passed to Starboard we picked up the back eddy and jumped to 6 knots but the lift never materialized and we were forced to tack for home. Just past Boulder Bay the wind went lighter and shifted against us. We finally crossed the finish line at 4:47:19 for an elapsed time of 2 hours, 36 minutes and 59 seconds, far off the record. Still it was a great day on the water and lots of fun moments.