

ROUND PREVOST CHALLENGE BY KAY D

Martin Herbert, March 25, 2021

Thursday March 25th looked like a good day to try for the Round Prevost Challenge and my best guess at the correct start time was to hit the line at 9.00am. A few morning hitches pushed that back to 9.30.

Standing on the dock waiting for a lull so I could paddle out of my slip. But the gusts were strong, and the lulls short, so finally, exasperated, I pushed off hard, paddled like a madman, and managed to get to the buoys marking shallow water by the creek.

The next gust stopped all forward motion, despite continued frantic paddling, and then the wind increased so I could no longer hold the boat head to wind. I drifted sideways into the sailing school docks and made a soft landing, hopped out, and with the painter, hauled the boat head to wind on the innermost finger of E dock.

Well at least I was head to wind and could hoist the mainsail. Now all I had to do was push off, hop in, bear off onto a reach heading for the beach and get enough boat speed to tack in the 2 1/2 boat lengths available before I went aground.

Whew, just made it with the help of a little left shift just as I tacked and it was off to the start line, already exhausted before the challenge had even begun..

I had elected to go No Flying Sails as the day seemed to be enough of a handful as it was. I had no crew so it seemed the safer choice. The wind was blowing straight out of the harbour, but oscillating by about 15 degrees, so I decided to sail on broad reaches, gybing with the shifts so as to have the most direct course down the harbour. This bumped my running speed up about 1 knot in the mean wind, and over 2 knots in the gusts, and did not add a lot of distance.

Once past the Sisters I had hoped for a beam reach but the wind bent around and all hope of wild planning disappeared. It got a bit light off the mouth of Long Harbour and my speed dropped below 5 knots, the death knell for a record time.

Once my nose poked out into Trincomali Channel, however, it was full on, big waves, massive gusts and a Port tack broad reach excellent for surfing. As a long time inland dinghy sailor I still find the chance to surf down the face of a big wave very exciting. The Kay D made 8 knot quite often an over 9 knots five or six times and once she slid down a big one and got to 10.7. About half way down the far side of Prevost the big waves get more confused as they are joined by the flow of water from Active pass but the tides were not strong today so there was no big washing machine of waves waiting to fill our cockpit.

At the bottom of Prevost it got very windy. We were doing a steady 9 knots when it came time to gybe. That was when I found I was not long strong enough to pull the main over. Looking aft there was no break in this gust for a long time, what to do?

I decided that the only way I could pull off a gybe was to reduce the pressure on the mainsail. I lined up a big wave and initiated a surf and as the boat broke the 10 knot mark, surging downhill, I bore off and threw the mainsail across. Whether it was the adrenaline or the reduction of apparent wind due to the surf I don't know but the gybe was done.

The wind bent around into Swanson Channel as well and we broad reached by the light at Portlock Point at one hour and seven minutes into the race. In the lee of Prevost speed dropped to the 5 knot range with gusts taking us to 7.5.

Once around Liddel Point the wind was on the nose and coming in big gusts. In the first part in the turbulence off the island I had to hand hold the mainsheet as the gust were also lifts and threatened to round us up. Once clear of the wild shifts it got much more windy and I was missing the ballast of a crew.

I had the jib eased out for a close reach, but was pointing high enough to have the whole luff de-powered. The main was sheeted so that only the back foot of the leach was full of wind, and in the big gusts I headed up enough so the whole main was flogging. We were right on the edge of being overpowered and I considered reefing in most of the jib on the roller furling. The upwind speed trimmed like this was 4.5 knots. With a crew we would have been doing 6 knots.

As we approached Batt Rock the wind eased and the Kay D sped up to 5.2 knots. We had to do six tacks to get into the harbour and another six to get to the finish line. The wind was going light and our upwind speed dropped to just over 3 knots, all hope of a good time evaporating. After we crossed the line the wind dropped even further; we had made it home just in time.

A fun sail, much drier than the bath we got on Sunday. Our start time was 9.49.20 and our finish time 12.40.10

Corrected Time to beat: 2:02:09