

Notes for a Trans-Atlantic Race

In 2015, David Siwicki of the New England Fleet was a member of the crew of Prospector, a Farr 60, in the Trans-Atlantic race. The Navigator's notes are included below and are well worth a read. Enjoy.

Prospector

July 2015

Transatlantic Crossing Notes

1) 01 July 2015 Start at 1413 edt / 191913.z in Newport. SW wind 15-20 great sailing conditions.

2) Strategy was to head south to stay in front of a cold front and get to the Gulf Stream for stronger winds and favorable current. Changed from Jib to Jib Top to Code zero as wind got lighter. Webbing on CZ broke, necessitating change back to JT

3) 02 July 2015, sailed into warm eddy at north of Gulf Stream. Stayed in eddy for 3 hours and then lost it. Spent next few hours in foul current searching for Gulf Stream. Squalls come and go. Warm, tropical weather conditions.

4) 03 July 2015 find Gulf Stream at 0250z. Put up A6 in 18 knots wind. Boat speed increases to 12 knots, 2 knots current push gets SOG to 14 knots. Began gaining ground on competitors. Wind build to 20 knots, BSP to 20-22 knots and SOG to 23-25 as we enter core of Gulf Stream. At 0450, a squall hits bringing winds to 40 knots. Tried to get A6 down but were too late. The A6 blows up and comes down in pieces. An important weapon lost. Proceed on with J4 and reefed main. Overnight a massive wave tosses Paul, Henry and Dave around on the deck. Henry, a big man, is swept in to our port carbon wheel which breaks with a loud crack. Dave is swept under the aft lifelines, thankfully, he was strapped in and pulled himself back in the boat. The boat is wet and hot after a day of squalls, big waves and 30-40 knot winds. Conditions below decks are very unpleasant.

5) 04 July 2015. Spent the day reaching with the A5 and Spinnaker Staysail. Wind, 20-30 knots, and seas, 10-20 feet, down a bit. Tery, Quinn and Lu repair port wheel. Lots of surfing in typical mid ocean Gulf Stream weather. Colette breaks out mini apple pies for the 4th.

6) 05 July 2015. Winds lighten and back to the west. Routing suggests a gybe, but Larry decides to hold off to cover the other boats in the fleet who are on the same gybe rather than give them leverage. Water pump goes haywire and starts running constantly. FB150 goes down. Water pump fixes itself. Tery fixes FB 150 by swapping coax with the Iridium Satphone. Finally, at 0330z, in continuing lighter breeze, we gybe. We lost some ground delaying the gybe, falling from 1st to 4th. We put up our masthead A2, our biggest downwind sail in 20-25knots wind. BSP up to 13.5 to 14.5 knots, SOG at 15-16 with a 1-

1.5 knots current push. It was a magical day, bluebird skies, bright sun, cooler temperatures and drier air. After 4 days someone turned the seas off. Shorts, t-shirts and sunscreen for the crew. The day is spent on maintenance and drying damp gear on deck, turning Prospector in to a floating clothes line. The crew has dinner, Mexican Chicken and Rice, on deck. We are now leaving the Gulf Stream and are glad to be out of the unpredictable weather that comes with it. But, we know the respite from the weather is going to be short lived. We are heading north to catch the southern edge of a low pressure system moving towards us. We are intentionally sailing toward bad weather in a system that is going to dominate the rest of the race. We are playing chicken with the system. Getting as close as we can so the ride isn't miserable.

06 July 2015. The hard part of playing chicken is knowing when to blink. We began the early hours of the day with the A5, Spinnaker Staysail and full main sailing north to find the southern edge of the low. We were expecting to get there at 6am. At 3am 25 miles from our chicken way point, the wind built to 30-35knots and the A5 blew up. We now had no A6 or A5 our two best heavy weather downwind sails. We gybed away and put up the J4 and Genoa Staysail. Another great day, sunny and bright. We surfed along downwind at 12-15 knots. Waves built over the course of the day. Prospector became a 60 foot surfboard. The wind build and we put in first one, then two reefs. We consider gybing in a left shift back toward the storm, but decided not to, our second blink of the day.

07 July 2015. Poking the bear. After blinking twice on 06 July we decide to gybe north to look for more wind. We sailed fast with the J4, GS and single reefed main. Breakfast on deck. Great surfing conditions for Longboard Larry. Matt takes photos and videos. The wind starts to build and we put in a reef and prepare to gybe away from the storm. The wind builds to 42 knots and we decide to do a chicken gybe. We put in a 3d reef and douse the GS which had torn. We are going very fast, straight towards the finish but the wind and waves keep building. The J4 gets trapped behind the pulpit and gets torn and bends the pulpit. We change to the J5. We sailed with the low to our left, behind a warm front and ahead of a cold front. Squalls were popping up along the cold front. Winds built to 40-55 knots. Seas 60-70 feet. Driving rotation shortened to Henry, Tim, Tery and Paul. Larry tracks squalls on radar. A wild day and night. 1242 nm to go.

08 July 2015. We continue on with J5 and three reefs. At daybreak conditions begin to ease and we increase sail, putting up first the Jib Top and then the Genoa Staysail, which Scotty had repaired. Finally, one at a time, we unwind the reefs. We settle back into our normal watch schedule. Winds ease to 25 knots and sea settles down. Everything is wet. After a tough 18 hours things have settled down. The crew enjoyed Breakfast Skillet on deck and surfing licenses are reissued. Winds dropped throughout the day as we sailed away from the low. We put up the CZ, repaired by Scotty, and carry that in the early part of the night. As winds continue to drop we put up A2.

09 July 2015. A glorious morning. 61 degrees, west wind at 18-22 knots and calm seas. Another dry out day for our wet boat. As the wind gets lighter we gybe north for more wind. We try to change to the CZ from the A2, but a sheared bolt in the starboard wheel required removing the wheel. The wind gradually built to 20+knots. After an F1 pit stop the wheel is repaired. We launched the CZ after Larry spun out. Lasagna for dinner followed shortly by arrival of squalls. CZ doused and J4/GS put up to get us through the night.

10 July 2015. North Sails North Atlantic loft open for business as Henry and Scotty try to repair the A5 and A6 in the wee hours of the morning. We pick our way through squalls overnight. Prospector becomes Carbon Beach on a warm, sunny day. Lots of gybes and sail changes as we work on keeping boat speed up. Main damaged during a gybe, is partially lowered and repaired by Scotty in another F1 pit stop. The A5 is ready to go by mid day. The A6 is down for good. At 2pm we launch A5 and hold our breath to see if it will hold. The crew lets out a loud cheer as it fills and begins to pull Prospector forward. We could now sail 2-5 knots faster and 10 degrees lower, both big improvements. At 6pm, with a squall approaching the A5 comes down in favor of the JT/GS combo for the night. We climb back in to 3d place, with the repaired A5 making all the difference.

11 July 2015. We expect a quiet night the JT/GS in 20-25 knot winds. Instead we get a night of squalls. The wind builds to the low 30 knots with gusts to 45-50 knots. Paul spins out as we rush to put in a reef. A second squall brings a 2nd reef. At 0430z we put in 3rd reef in a 3rd squall. The fourth and last squall takes out the JT and GS, now done for the TR. We put up the J4, kept the reefs and sped on. The day is wet and miserable. It is grey, windy and dumping rain; our worst day so far. We are going fast and spray is everywhere. This is the weather we had expected, but we have become spoiled by the warm, sunny days we have been getting. We spend the day grinding toward the finish. The wind is too strong to put up our big sails or go on the attack. As the wind falls from 30+knots to 20 knots we shake out all three reefs. Lawn Dart Dave, with Henry's guidance, spends his watch surfing. The night is very dark and winds drop. Prospector lumbers in a sloppy sea, but we are hesitant to increase sail area because we can't see much in the darkness.

12 July 2015. At 0445z we hoist the A2, now dubbed the Super Model. The grinding is over and we are going on offense. With 215 miles to go we are in an all out push for a podium finish. The day is overcast with 14-18 knot winds and 1-2 foot seas. Wet gear is brought up to dry. Tery inspects the rig and reports that the bolts holding the port spreaders to the mast have sheared. The spreaders are barely attached and if they come loose the rig will come down. We adjust our routing to head south of the Scilly Isles to minimize gybes. Entering the shipping lanes of the English Channel we keep a watch on the radar to monitor traffic. Lu translates messages to French fishing vessels for Larry. We are almost there.

13 July 2015. As we approach the finish at the Lizard the wind becomes light and variable. Carefully, given the condition of the rig, we execute multiple gybes to keep Prospector pointed at the finish. We cross the line at 0332:54z, completing the crossing in 11 days, 9 hours, 19 minutes and 54 seconds. Shots of rum, cigars, photos and lots of hugging ensue. We finished 3d in our class, fulfilling our stretch goal of a podium finish. Our TR finish is our start for the Coastal Race to Cowes. After pressing hard to cross the Atlantic for 11 days we are taking this part of the event pretty easy. We sail on with the A2 and full main. We are gybing east toward Cowes. During one of the gybes, about 2 hours after the finish of the TR our main rips horizontally from luff to leach. Our Coastal Race now over we continue to motor on to Cowes. We arrive in Cowes at 9pm, greeted on the dock warmly by a crowd of 15 of our families and friends. After a brief ceremony at the dock, with more hugs, photos, champagne and beer we head to one of our rented houses for a first rate party and a meal of burgers and fries.