

Master Mariners' Regatta

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A light westerly wind rippled over the blue-bell waters of the East Bay. Fair skies portended a strong afternoon northwesterly but nothing fierce as forecast. After detailed preparation and final checks of the rig, we pushed off to motor over to the SF foreshore. Pegasus hung against the ebbing tide behind Alcatraz while crew ate lunch. Then we hoisted the sails for a test run at the line.

Marvelling at Alma's superbly handled tacking to approach the line at their noon start, we found the right angle of approach and timing. We tacked back west of the Committee boat and gybed down the shoreline with main close-hauled to slow down and kill time. As our start approached, we gybed onto port tack, luffed up one more time to slow down, and headed for the line, BANG, we were away for a great start (-12 secs). We flew over leg 1 with the main reefed.

At Little Harding buoy, we came onto the wind closehauled, gathered boat speed and tacked onto starboard. We headed out to search for the strongest ebbing current to give us a lift across the port bow. Here, I made a tactical navigation error as the lift was actually too great by about 100 meters over the 2.4 mile leg. Thus, we should have headed off onto a very close reach to increase boat speed over the first segment of leg 2 where the tide was not so strong. This would have kept us on the shortest course-over-the-ground (COG) over the whole leg (100 meters overshoot at 8 knots = -22 secs).

As we approached Blackaller buoy, we rocketed past a smaller woodie racer who looked a bit alarmed at Pegasus roaring up on their stern. We went outside to windward, stole their wind (!) and were ready to give them inside rights as we passed the buoy, but our stern was already clear before we closed the buoy, so we simply gybed around and took off.

Leg 3 runs down SF foreshore to Blossom Rock, almost a dead run into a strong ebb tide. Inshore, you get less tide the further you go, but also back-winds off the hills--and it's further by about 200 meters to hug the line rather than stick to the direct COG to Blossom Rock further out in the channel. We were able to wing our jib on the direct COG and keep boat speed up, so we elected to stay out. A tug under tow decided to cross our bow at the last moment as we ranged onto Blossom Rock after entering the shipping channel. Fine-tuning this leg with distance and set calculations might have saved us some time, but in the wash due to the offsetting vectors, not much (guess: lost - 30 secs) but by going inshore, we might have avoided the tug too by serendipity (-30 secs).

Leg 4, Blossom Rock to Southampton Shoal was another broad-to-beam reach with two currents, both ebbing, one from the Delta on our nose as we neared Angel Island; and for the first half, the south bay ebb tide off our starboard stern quarter giving us a lift but also sweeping us to the west towards the Golden Gate. We stuck to the direct COG except to veer to the east to stay for as long as possible with the south bay tide giving us a lift and to avoid bow-butting into the outgoing Delta force. I am not sure how we did it as this leg is not usually one of our strengths, but we gained substantially on the boats from other divisions who had held their own with us on the previous leg. Perhaps it was because we remembered to align the propeller vertically at this time! (lost time up to then: 1 hour at 0.1 knot due to needless drag from prop: about - 60 secs).

The gybe and trimming the sails for close-hauled starboard tack as we left Southampton Shoals to starboard to head back to red buoy #4 on leg 5 was truly superb, a real testament to all the training and skill-building over the years. We hardly slowed down at all in this complicated maneuver which entailed raising the staysail, gybing the jib, main and mizzen.

On this leg, we were surprised at first that we didn't get more of a lift from the delta and later, from the south bay. It was a toss-up whether to follow the Birds (savvy racers) some of whom tacked west toward Angel Island seeking stronger stern current but risking squirrely winds which would affect heavy displacement Pegasus more than a light Bird; versus staying to the east, maximizing the wind, having less stern lift at first, and then later, more lift from the outgoing Bay current across the port bow towards the windward buoy, but also a small reduction in velocity from the slightly forward angle of the South Bay ebb across our bow. I looked back to see if any of the bigger M1 Division competitors were taking a long shot and needed to be covered. They were all following us...

Therefore, there was no need to figure out this horribly complicated set of offsetting vectors in the moment. Instead, we stuck with simplicity and stronger wind, and hoped that being closer to the buoy when we made our move to tack back to the west would enable us to judge the two tacks more precisely to get around the mark, thereby saving more time. Two more superb tacks with barely a reduction in velocity, and we were right on the buoy, around it, and heading for home.

For the first time, I looked aft instead of forward focused on tactical navigation. We had not come to this Regatta with racing in mind. In fact, we planned to sail sedately. The moderate winds enabled us to do both. And there, not far behind us, was the great beauty 60 foot Alden staysail schooner Barbara, M113 [<http://www.geocities.com/soho/8626/>] slicing through the waves, our closest competition from the Marconi 1 division.

Would they turn on their afterburners and charge past us at the finishing line as happened with Dauntless two or three years before? All eyes were on sail trim which was changing constantly as the wind veered to the south of west. We also steered very close inshore to the north point of Treasure Island so that we would face less ebb tide right along the shore, sail the shortest final leg to the west end of the line, and be as far to windward as possible if the wind forced us to close-haul and tack to the finish. Barbara closed the gap but not nearly enough. Pegasus crossed the line only a few yards from the committee boat.

BANG, we were home first. A fitting finale to the Pegasus Project, first place, Marconi 1 Division, Master Mariners Regatta, 2004. How sweet it was. Congratulations all.

Peter Hayes

Pegasus Crew, Master Mariners, 2004

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Peter Bertelsen
Mark Caplin
Patty Donald
Chris Erickson
Richard Gillette
Andrew Harkness
Peter Hayes
Paul Kassatkin
Paul Marbury
Jeanne Moje
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