



The 2008 Inner Circle Rum Polar Challenge – Race Report from “Epic Venture”.

19th July 2008 dawned as a beautiful day for the Polar Challenge, 10-15kt WSW forecast to lighten then shift NW in the afternoon. For me myself and I, the challenge would be to hopefully clear Sydney Heads without gybing the spinnaker, then try to predict whether to go north into the predicted wind shift or opt to sail more to the south where the current SSW was stronger, hoping to set myself up with the kindest work back to weather, and the finish.

10am the race started with some boats opting for a port pole while some went for starboard. Having gone with port pole myself it wasn't long before I was seeing the front-runners having to gybe to starboard to clear Nth Head. With everything set for the 7metre sprint to the foredeck for my gybe, I waited for a slight lull then went for it. Halfway through my gybe the tiller pilot wasn't quick enough to react allowing – my worst nightmare - a round-up under spinnaker! Fortunately we only suffered a single spinnaker wrap around the forestay and were able to free it as we came back onto course. When the dust settled, with time to look around at everybody else I noticed I wasn't the only one with spinnaker trouble.

After clearing the Heads most of the fleet was heading off on port to the north while three boats were going for the more southerly option. As the wind freshened outside slightly, I opted for sticking with the southern fleet in case the forecasted change didn't arrive. Just over half way out, things were lightening off considerably so the 7mtr foredeck sprint was on again. This time performed without incident, saw us heading northeast towards the majority of the fleet, by this time along way ahead of us.

Dropping the kite had to be done early enough to allow for possible trouble resulting in over shooting the meridian therefore this began with a half a mile still to go. This completed uneventfully we turned just .116 over the line. No.3 jib was hoisted then one reef put in main for the work home. If that wasn't enough work for the weary not 25mins had past until the wind lightened. “OK full main up”, then another 15mins later we needed headsail changed to No.1. After all this was completed the only boat I could make out was the NS38 ahead of me. 9knots of apparent wind was perfect for “Epic Venture” if only it will hold in. No it wouldn't!

Becalmed somewhere off Sydney heads my thoughts turned to the leading boats finishing on the end of the breeze, me, out the back door. Unbeknown to us the front-runners suffered the same fate as myself, only for longer in the lee of the Heads. A faint sea breeze started to puff from the northeast ending my abuse at the wind gods. As we neared Sydney Heads a group of whale watch boats appeared on a closing course with us. One of the largest humpbacks I have ever seen seemed to be on a collision course with us only sounding at the last minute to clear within metres of my keel. To my surprise ‘Wideload’ passed us coming out of the Harbour, as we went in not far from the finish. 16:03:53 concluded the race for ‘Epic Venture’ and a great day's sailing.

However for me it didn't end due to a broken down motor off Long Reef, and a slow sail home, had us drifting back to Pittwater. At 9.30pm the phone rang, thinking he had rung to check I wasn't still out at sea, Peter McCorquodale, to my sheer amazement had phoned to congratulate me on a handicap win. 11.30pm arrived at Bayview, picked up the mooring and so concluded Polar Challenge 08'.

Bruce Dyson-Smith – ‘Epic Venture’