



Ship's Log - Nov 13, 2022

– somewhere over the centre of the Pacific Ocean, altitude – 38,000 ft, heading – 215°T; speed 870 kph

Right, yes, it is fair to say that the log keeping has been a bit lax. Well in truth, totally unrecorded until now. We have been a bit busy with one thing and another and keeping the log up to date didn't appear to be such a high priority. However, when you undertake such a journey and don't record the learnings, why bother undertaking such a journey in the first place?

This all started about five years ago when I stationed myself in Tampa, Florida for several months to better understand how my US business was working. I figured that doing it all from Aussie was not giving me the right 'sense' of what I had to do to sell stuff to the Americans. While there I met up with one of my customers who happened to sail a J35 keelboat called 'Rocket' at one of the local yacht clubs – Davis Island Yacht Club, Tampa, FL and he invited me to participate in their Thursday night social racing. He didn't have to ask me twice! I must have done OK helping out on the fore deck, because in no time I was issued with a 'Rocket' cap! I was one of the crew!

So fast forward – there was talk of running a 2.4mR World's at Brighton in 2024, and since I only started sailing these fun little boats in January of this year, I figured that I should do some more homework on how you sail an international regatta, having never done that before either. The fact that the Championship was at one of the 'funnest' yacht clubs I have ever been to had real appeal and catching up with my friends at DIYC was the icing on the cake.

I raised the prospect with John Collingwood who has his 2.4mR next to mine on the hardstand at RBYC – "Hey John, how would you like to do the World's in Florida?" It only took just a little bit of prodding, but John has had a lot of experience with many world's in the Etchells class, so he seemed to think this was something we could do, the plan was developed – more or less in this order: book charter boats [X]; suss out surroundings for accommodation conveniently located to the sailing venue [X]; accommodation also close to ready supply of essential services (food and refreshments) [X]; enter the event [X]; book travel and transfers [X]; and practice starts [].

All that should have been easy, and some of it was, the rest... well let's just say that if I did not have the experience of travelling to the US and further afield over 80 times, most normal people would have quit.

Fast forward – The flight was long and tiring as expected, and after 26 hours of travel we find ourselves in Tampa with a huge black rental truck – dubbed BBT (you will figure it out) large enough to run over an entire village and not even notice, fit our bags and our most valuable cargo, our sails in their transport tubes. We drove directly to Davis Island, which is an island and an upmarket inner suburb of Tampa, with Tampa 'downtown' just across the river.



Davis Island Yacht Club, Tampa, FL

We found our very cute little apartment one street back from Davis Island Village, just five minutes' drive to the yacht club. The village had all the essential requirements – three pubs, and many little restaurants covering all the primary food groups (most deep frying everything beyond recognition) a pharmacy and a 7/11.

No need to go in yet, we went straight to the yacht club so we had a sense of what was ahead of us. We drove through the front gate closely followed by a guy towing a good-sized trailer/van that happened to have our two charter boats inside – perfect timing. Jeff and Amy Linton introduced themselves and our boats, and made it very clear how welcome we were and how pleased they were to have a couple of Aussie sailors at their local club. The hospitality just got better from there and it never wavered.

We unloaded the boats and examined them closely. They were in good shape, recently polished but rigged quite a bit differently to how we have our own boats rigged – it was going to take a bit practice to sail them as effectively as we do our own.



Team Brighton has arrived

The biggest issue was the oppressive heat and humidity – it has been a cold miserable winter at home and now we were in 88°F and 94% humidity. We were both melting! Amy came by a couple of times to ensure that we were getting sufficient hydration reminding us many times to keep drinking (water).

We spent the next three days fitting shrouds and spreaders, running sheets, standing the rig and generally checking stuff out. That sounds like we really didn't try real hard as it shouldn't take that long. Well, it was really very hot and there was no wind (we were melting!) and John likes to chat to the locals – getting the low-down on the conditions, the competition, the boats etc etc). Basically who's who in the local zoo. A shout out to DC – David Clement, USA60 who was also most welcoming, presenting us with a banana bread cake that he cooked himself, just for us. Thanks DC.

With boats rigged and a couple of light weather sails hanked on, we launched the boats and headed out onto Hillsborough Bay in very light breeze – generally north/north east and less than 4 knots and dropping. Jeff gave us the lowdown on what we were to expect as regards wind but did say occasionally it changes dramatically for no apparent reason. He also provided clear instruction on areas to avoid so as not to run aground.

Okay here we are, finally sailing on Hillsborough Bay – this was exactly what we had planned for – zero to 4/5 knots. John spent ages developing light and medium sails for this event on the basis of the anticipated conditions and here we were, in EXACTLY what we were expecting! Jeff came out to sail alongside, doing a bit of 'speed testing' but actually sizing us up! We also had Dee Smith come by and provided us the opportunity to size him up too.

Being there a couple of days ahead of the rest of the incoming competitors was very good, it was supposed to be a bit of a holiday as well, so we moved at a reasonable pace, just keeping up with the locals.

Over a couple of refreshing beers discussion turned to the developing tropical low forming off The Bahamas, no dramas though, “we never (hardly ever) have hurricanes in November”. In fact, only two since 1876, so it will not be a problem for the regatta, we had hurricane ‘Ian’, last month, we’re all good – OK?

Got another day of random sailing in before the scheduled practice race (the ‘Invitation Race’ for some) but that turned into bit of a fizzer. Breeze dropped out completely and we drifted home sitting in a bathtub of sweat and wondering how we were ever going to race in these conditions. Rattling around in my head was the information I saw about several regattas in Europe this season getting no racing in at all – what a tragedy that would be after coming all this way?

John discovered a new way to get to know the locals – you run aground just a few metres off the rock wall in front of the yacht club (to be fair there was no wind to drift anywhere else) and was rescued by an amazon women named Amanda, one of the local ladies who waded into the alligator infested bay to give John a good push off the bottom. Nice work John!

By this time 2.4mR’s were popping up all over the place – every nook and cranny in the club’s yard had at least one or two boats tucked away and people hanging over the gunwales preparing, rigging, sweating, swearing, drinking, sweating... Clearly lots of old acquaintances were being remade and much good cheer. The regatta atmosphere was warming up to match the weather.

More discussion this night about the developing tropical low. Not looking good for later in the week...

Official proceedings consisting of measuring, weighing, measuring, grumbling about 200 grams, checking, weighing – wow, this regatta scene is hard work. Having never been involved at this level before, I found the atmosphere quite intense! Clearly everybody else knew what to expect and how to navigate the various processes, but this little black duck was a bit over-whelmed. We presented our sails for measuring in accordance with the requirements and were delighted to find that our boats had already be scrutinised and passed measurement and weighing. A couple of jobs we didn’t have to do, so we went sailing.

Light jibs rigged, let’s try to figure out what the wind does in Tampa. 3-6 knots, east, then north-east, then nothing. Hmm. Going to be an interesting regatta.

After drifting for a couple of hours and finally getting the boats back onto the trolley’s it was to the bar, where discussions continued about this developing tropical low that had now been given a name – ‘Nicole’. Not good to get a name – it means that the people who know are taking this seriously. Bugger!

John rushed back to the BBT to get his heavy jib so he could get it measured and to scratch the second medium he measured earlier. For those who don’t know (because I didn’t) you can get two mains and three jibs measured according to the regatta rules. Sorted, now what exactly is the weather doing? A lot as it turned out.

Next day more measuring of sails, weighing boats, lifting lead ballast out, putting lead ballast back, grumbling and etc. Then the official welcome from the most charming regatta director, Jennifer Holmberg, and regatta briefing from the PRO, Eric Robbins. Eric raised to possibility of a serious impact from ‘Nicole’ and the need to perhaps crank up the program – stay tuned. We did, and then went sailing.



The practice race gave us a good solid breeze from the NNE much stronger than had seen in the entire previous week. We rigged our heavy jibs and gathered to start racing at the southern end of the bay. The regatta was on in earnest now. All the 'gun' sailors were sizing each other up while many of the rest of us were simply trying to stay out of trouble – it was a busy start line. Sadly, one of our para sailors, a most delightful young lady Siobhan MacDonald from Canada got 't-boned' in a port/starboard incident, and had a very neat impression of a 2.4mR bow on her stern quarter. Her regatta was not off to a good start at all.

The practice race turned out to be hard work, with an ugly chop caused by boat wake and reflected waves from the shore. If this is what we were going to get, then it was going to be a busy week.

Race committee floated the possibility of doing 4 races on day one, anticipating that the second and possibly the third days would be blown out. Dismay on the faces of some – we just completed one race in tough conditions and that was hard work, how would we ever be able to complete four!

Overnight, the winds got stronger, and 'Nicole' kept coming, making landfall on the east coast of Florida amid flood warnings and all the rest of it. The locals were bracing for another hammering from the weather, just a couple of weeks after Hurricane Ian ripped them apart.

Race day arrives with all the predictions being just about right – strong winds, 16-20 knots, gusting 25+ knots. Some very handy helper patched up the hole in Siobhan's boat, then covered it with a sticker. All good, let's go racing.



Ray - AUS808 ducking John - AUS34 in the practice race

Describing a yacht race is like watching grass grow, so I will spare you the finer details. The great sailors made good starts and were clear ahead at the top mark. The boats to watch were reigning world champion, Meagan Pascoe, GBR163, Dee Smith USA7, Jeff Linton USA160, Marko Dahlberg FIN196, Antonio Squizzato ITA112, Bruce Millar CAN75 and Rikard Bjurstrom FIN201 and then there were the rest of us, and that is how it worked for the next four races. Dee was off well and ominously posted a 3,1,1,1 for the first day and with the likelihood of the entire regatta being decided on the first day, he had it locked in.

A side story that was most disappointing for Team Brighton was gear failure, and not the sort of things that we had expected. All boats were shipping lots of water, it was an ugly chop and we were working in a little bit of water in the bilge or a lot. Infuriatingly, the electric bilge pump was wired with a momentary contact switch. This meant that if you wanted to pump water out, you had to hold the switch on. That's OK I guess, if you had nothing else to do, but we were working our arses off to try and compete. John made great starts as he usually does but had to focus his entire efforts on not sinking!

Sadly, these efforts were in vain as the manual bilge pump had a defective bladder, and most of the water that he was moving about stayed in the boat. He sank on the first upwind leg and the very efficient rescue crew came

alongside, secured his boat and proceeded to pump him dry so he could start race two. One down, all is not lost – yet!

John made another ripper start, you know what the coach said - in the front row, clear air, gun goes, bow down! Only to ship lots of water with no effective means to get it out! He sank again. Bitterly disappointed, John withdrew from race two and was towed home by our coach, Ryan Minth.

I was not aware of all John's challenges and had my own problems stemming from the same issue – an electric bilge pump that you had to hold on to operate! REALLY!!! It is hard enough sailing these boats in heavy weather at any time, but trying get water out using the electric pump switch (holding in with one hand) and pumping the manual pump with the other – how do you trim sails and steer the damn boat? What single brain cell thought that system was a good idea?

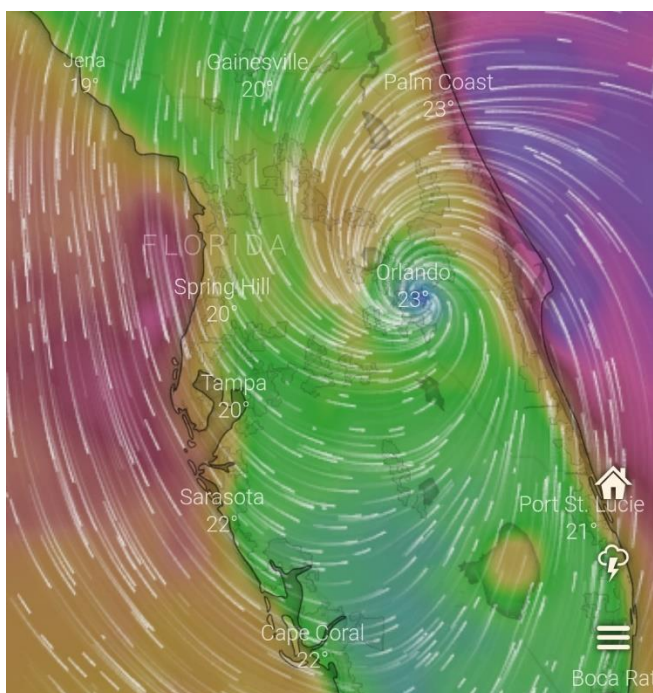
Anyway, to take nothing away from John's disappointment, it got worse for me. I was having a ripper race, I rounded the top mark in the mid-teens, say 16 or 17 reckon, and passed another two guys downwind, shipping a bit of water as everyone was, I round the gate mark in good shape, take a big wave over the bow and expressed a few feelings out loud and started manually pumping like a man drowning only to have the bilge pump disintegrate in my hands! I dropped my jib as a sign of distress and awaited assistance. Coach Ryan came by, advised Race Control that Ray was done and set about rigging for a tow!

Once alongside the dock, the racing bureaucrats got involved and we had to seek permission to be lifted out (it was a 'wet' regatta which means the boats stay in the water for the duration of the event). Permission was granted and we then investigated how our entire campaign just got completely unravelled!

The manual bilge pump on John's boat was pulled apart and we found that the bladder was perished and had split across the middle on both sides. Useless from the start.

On Ray's boat it transpired that the brain cell that designed the electric bilge pump configuration had another brain cell cut half the casing off the manual bilge pump, rendering the device structurally unsound. When it was really required to do some serious pumping of water, the casing simply split in half.

A lesson here, I think. Something that **MUST** be considered by the measurers is a check of all the gear on the boats, not just the sails and the weight. They were obsessive about sail measuring and boat displacement, but seemingly couldn't care less about the mandatory safety gear. Something for future discussions for sure.



Tropical Low 'Nicole' makes her presence felt

If one was a conspiracy theorist, you might say it was planned – how do we scrub out the two Aussies? Making up for 1983! However, the charter guy had 4 or 5 other boats in the regatta, and they all performed OK, but our regatta was shot before we even had a chance.

Well, as predicted, the hurricane brought gale force winds and a **Storm Warning** was issued for the next two days. All boats were hauled out at the end of day one and secured. Some even dropped their masts as a further precaution and we all adjourned to the bar. Except John and me – we had to fix our boats and rewire the electric bilge pump so it pumped water.

The Race Committee decided that we should try to get a few races in on the last day and a swarm of volunteers from DIYC turned out to help get the boats back in the water and rigged, ready to race. It took the team just 90 minutes to get the entire fleet of 42 boats back in the water. What a wonderful bunch of people, and it was a workday for most of them too. Just amazing,

The last day of the regatta saw 15-20 knots from the south, with serious chop and gusts around 25 knots. A couple of postponements due to a wind shift and the pin mark boat drifting on its anchor, then three general recalls, the last two under flag 'U' (if you get caught on the wrong side you get disqualified). Once again we did our usual thing, John made a good start while I was thinking about it. We get to the top mark and turned back to the north, towards the club house and out west was the blackest sky you can imagine. To underscore that this was serious, a massive lightning strike lit up the sky, so the RO shortened the course at the gate and we all went home for lunch just as the skies opened up.

A passing shower! The sun came out and we went sailing again! Got another race in and the results are on the board.

With a drop, Dee Smith USA7, achieved what his lovely wife called a picket fence – 1,1,1,1,1. Nice work Dee, you cleaned up. I asked Meagan what Dee did that she didn't and she said "He was faster!". An understatement for sure.

A huge thank you to all the guys at DIYC. That was one holiday, interrupted by a World Championship, that I will never forget and will be dining out on for years to come.



And the sun sets on another 2.4mR Regatta

This is my story of the event, others will have theirs.

Thanks to all our new friends in Tampa, the 2.4mR people I have met and hope to see again soon, and to JC for sharing this amazing story with me.

Ray Smith
RBYC
2.4mR - AUS808 – aka BOB