

Out to Lunch (Skipper: Jennie Darby) 24-Hour Endurance Yacht Race March 2020

Round and round and round

Some thoughts on the 2019 24-hour race

I had taken part in the first 24-hour race, on *Pulse* as a crew member, missed the second one (I was lying on a beach in Rarotonga!) but 2019 seemed to be the year for *Out to Lunch* to have a go.

I prevaricated, delayed and deferred doing anything until Theo, who can be very insistent, was on my case. Three weeks before the race I had a crew, had paid my fee, had moved extra stuff from the boat to the store and found the spinnaker in the garage.

One week before countdown the crew (Daniel Benton, Daniel Millar, Lars Vandrey, Steffen Mertens and I) met for the first time to plan the race. We spent some time on the important things – who would provide what food, and any dietary restrictions there were. We agreed that we would fly the spinnaker during the day but not at night, lack of practice and a baby stay made that decision seem appropriate. We decided not to have a shift system, but that people would sleep when tired and that there would always be two people on deck.

So off we went. I hardly covered myself in glory by stalling on the start line while trying to squeeze round the start mark and hitting *Pulse*, enough said.



The first two long circuits round the harbour were an opportunity to settle down, only Lars had sailed on the boat before, and we had a chance to practice with the spinnaker. It also gave us a feel for the where the marks were. We had lunch!

We also had a go with the RaceQs. The signal seemed to be variable around the harbour. When it did work it was great.

We had a glitch when our VHF stopped working. I thought the house battery might have gone low and we ran the motor (in neutral) for a while. We notified race control (on the hand-held). Contrary to the comments being made on shore that implied that the lead

connecting us to the berth had finally given way, one of the connections to the radio had come off – easily fixed and we were quickly back in contact.

As the night set in we had established a flexible routine, dinner, resting, sailing, waking etc. Night sailing was amazing. Lots of stars and reflections. The marks were easy to find and seeing other boats on the same course was comforting. It was never too cold, and the conditions were variable. In the early hours of the morning Lars and I drifted off mark 19 with no wind at all. The night was so calm that the reflection of the moon wasn't the yellow lines so beloved of Victorian artists but just a round yellow ball. Within minutes though we had 15 knots and were heading up the east side of the harbour to the next mark.

In retrospect:

- I should have checked the spinnaker before we started – the bag rotted to bits on the first pull and the spinnaker had to be pulled through the hatch using the ring as a guide.
- It was good having prepared food and lots of nibbles. While I appreciate that some boats have great cooking facilities, starched linen etc (as shown on the video of Freedom!), cooking from scratch on a stovetop in a small boat on rough seas would have been difficult. Cooking was made more difficult when we lost the nut that enabled the top to remain level – I'm still finding scrambled egg in the gas jets! Vacuum flasks of hot water or soup were good. Having freshly ground coffee and a plunger was a great reviver!
- We only had two accessible sleeping berths rather than the three needed during the night, bags and the spinnaker took up space which should have been used for resting/sleeping.
- Having the crew deciding when to sleep and waking up a sleeper to swap places did not cause any problems
- At night we kept forgetting to call up race control when we went through the start line and noting the time on paper. An issue with having only two people on deck and a VHF down below.
- Head torches that, when switched on, go white before they go red are not great.



Raising the spinnaker through the hatch

Finally: many thanks to Theo and all the support crew – you were great. But, in all fairness I think every boat should be allocated a navy crew member!

Crew comments:

DM – “A big thanks to you for inviting me aboard!”

DB - "It was a great experience to join up with a crew that were well organised even though we didn't know each other. The crew spirit on the boat was awesome and some great conversations were had while on the long tacks across the harbour. The fatigue that was setting in by the end of the race was not enough to ruin the pleasurable memories of long stretches on the helm under the stars during the night - definitely an experience that would be hard to replicate in any other way”