

Rambler 88 Fastnet Race

I've been working on the Rambler 88 as a rigger since 2019, although the boat has been in storage for 2020 due to the covid pandemic. In June 2021 we got the call up that the boat was going to sail the 2021 season with the Fastnet race being the first event. After 2 months of work to get the boat ready, ship from the USA to England, self-isolate in England, fit new daggerboard bearings, new sails, test a new A2 gennaker (all other forward sails are furling) for better light air downwind vmg performance. Along with countless other jobs, and a couple of practice sails we were ready for the start.

This year I made the race crew for the race. Pretty cool to be part of a crew that between them they've got countless campaigns in the Americas cup, volvo/whitbread and the Olympics. My role onboard is to help out on the bow, getting the sails up and down and to help run all the sheets, a bit on at times with up to 4 sails in front of the mast at times during manoeuvres. The smallest sail weighing about 40kg and the big MH0 about 200kg (dry).

The start was windy. Constant 28kts with gusts up to 35 as we tacked out of the Solent past the Needles at the western end of Isle of Wight. We started with 2 reefs and our J4 up. We got a good start, but waterline length is everything (unless you count foils...) and skorprios (the newly launched 125ft boat) got round us. With our 7m draft we had limited options but to short tack up the channel. Once past the needles the wind against tide had some massive waves. Fully launched and airborne off some of them, there must have been some massive loads all over the boat. But Rambler was built for this stuff and held together ok. We decided to tack up the English south coast in the westerly breeze. There were another couple of tidal waves (rips) of rough water, but once we had past Weymouth the wind had dropped to 20knts and the water was much flatter. We shook the reefs out and changed up to the J2 as the breeze died down.

The night was pretty uneventful, we were now into a watch system, 4 hours on, 4 hours off, trying to get some rest on the off watch. We discovered the bow compartment had some water in as the bobstay pin had started leaking as the fairing cover had been washed off with the bashing over the big waves during the day. We managed to pump the water out and slow the leak to a drip.

There are exclusion zones on the course to keep the fleet away from shipping and we decided to go inshore, hoping to cut the corner and lay the fastnet rock. This meant we had to reach underneath the zone, and we lost some height against Apiva (foiling imoca 60) and skorprios who had decided to sail outside the exclusion zone (more miles theoretically, but in hindsight the better way to go) Unfortunately for us, we couldn't lay the Fastnet rock, and lost miles tacking up to it.

10 years ago, the keel fell off Rambler 100 (George David's previous boat), leaving the boat upside down with 6 crew adrift. They got picked up by the Irish coastguard after about 6 hours in the water. George donated a new lifeboat to the Irish coastguard as thanks and they came out in it and followed us for a bit as we approached the rock. A special moment for him. We rounded in the evening just before dark.

The call was made to gybe set round the rock in search for better breeze inshore. This involved getting the MH0, J4 and staysail up, and take the J2 down. As Rambler sails with 3 sails up in front of the mast over 15kts of breeze and sails faster than the wind with apparent breeze. A bit on up the front for the manoeuvre but the bow team nailed it.

During the night the wind dropped, and we peeled to our new A2 which worked well in the lighter breeze allowing us to keep good speed whilst sailing vmg downwind. There wasn't a cloud in the sky

at night and there were heaps of stars, but it was pretty cold. The next day was quiet light with a few gybes to keep us in the best pressure. We were gybing along the south coast of England before making a crossing across the English channel towards France where the finish was. There was another exclusion zone here. We went one side and Apiva went the other. Once we rounded the corner of it, we peeled back to the MH0, J4, staysail and heated it up and reached towards the finish, just managing to overtake Apiva and finish 5 miles in front. But 2nd to skorprios who claimed line honours.

During the day before the finish, we realised we had made a tactical error by gybe setting at the Fastnet rock as the exclusion zone there had to be taken to port as part of the course. Rambler retired after finishing the race. A disappointing start to the season with some much work going into getting the boat ready to race.

Without being able to land in France our chaseboat came over from England with some supplies and refreshments for the 90mile sail back to England. We cruised at 18kts for the first part before the wind died and we motor sailed the rest of the way. Nice flat water, a bit different from a few days before. Rambler's next event is the maxi worlds in Sardinia, and its all go to get ready for the next event.

Jono