

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

The race

Wednesday, 08.06.2011, 12:00 local (16:00 UTC), 12:02.1N, 073:26.8W (62nm north-east of Cabo de la Aguja, Colombia). It is hot. The washing is hanging over the rail, drying quickly. We sit and sleep under the shade of the awning. The fish find shade under the boat. I make a tuna noodle salad. Canned tuna. Encouraged by Nur and Baha I have bought the lines, hooks and rubber squids as bait for catching tuna and set everything up. But we can't bring ourselves to trail the line. Killing big game for food is not yet part of our lifestyle. Consuming it in little anonymous canned portions is easier. Again we eat, sleep, sit, read and talk. There is talk of marriage, kids, writing and working. And a lot of laughing. I feel ready to turn to a completely normal life - a home, job, kids. But first we have to get to New Zealand. No, first we have to get to Colombia. During the afternoon we drift with some current back north to within a mile of where we were Monday at noon. Various items of garbage are drifting with us. Spilled into the sea either from a river or a freighter. As the sun begins to set thunderclouds form. Beautiful clouds, shooting high into the sky. Colored in layers from white at the top, through blue to a dark red at the base from the setting sun. I take out the camera and run around the deck excitedly. Click, review, adjust, repeat. With the thunderclouds comes the wind, from the north this time. There are individual thundercloud cells to the north, east and south of us. It was very hot all day, and the clouds are very big. This is not looking good. The only way out is west. We set all sails and hope that we can out-run the clouds. Liz has become very good with handling the lines by now. Halyards, downhauls, sheets, runners and reefing lines hold no mystery for her anymore. Well, almost. Still, I am impressed. There are 22 lines leading into the cockpit of Gudrun and it took me a while as well to get them all sorted out. The race is on: "Gudrun vs. Thunderclouds Of The Caribbean". One of the most exciting evening entertainments imaginable. Liz stands at the back of the cockpit and watches the spectacle as each of the thunderclouds fires a volley of lightning into the night. I go to sleep to be fit for the final, should we fail to out-run the clouds. It is 1am. Liz goes to bed and I take over. We're clear of the western and southern thunderclouds for the time, But the northern one is hot on our heels. Too hot. The wind has shifted to north-east and we're going west too slowly. The cloud is catching up. The way back is blocked, as is the way south. I change course to north-west, windward. Close-hauled we go faster. The moon has set and it is pitch black. Except when the lightning flares up the sky in shades of color from golden to purple. I get the camera ready. What a great photographic opportunity. 3am. The thunderclouds are firing off three to six flashes of lightning per minute now. I stare through the viewfinder into the black and try to compensate for the movement of the boat. When the sky lights up I click away. With patience I have found the right balance between aperture (1:2), exposure (1/30) and iso sensitivity (3200). But getting the focus right in the dark was the hardest. Most of the earlier pictures are useless. The cloud is also closer and more westerly. I estimate that we are ahead in the race and that the show will be over in an hour. But I'm not known for being the most accurate weather frog. I put the camera away, it's enough. I lie down on the cockpit cushions and enjoy the highlight of the show. I think we're winning the race. 4am. It's over. Gudrun has won. I gybe and turn south-westerly towards Santa Marta at 5kn. During the race we've sailed 14nm to the north that we have to sail south again. I am tired. Liz comes up at six and I go to sleep for a few hours. The wind drops gradually during the morning and we switch to the Parasailor. By 11am the wind is barely enough to keep the sail inflated. But we're moving. It's very hot again. Looks like there will be another race tonight.

Posted by Axel Busch at 12:03