

Tuesday, April 24. 2012

Battle of the squalls

Tuesday, 2012-04-24, 12:00 boat (18:00 UTC), 7:03.2S, 111:11.7W, COG 255, SOG 7kn, Wind 20-25kn ESE, overcast & rainy

Liz says it was the longest night. Especially the time between 3am and 7am felt very long. At least we had the Parasailor down by 3am. 35kn of wind isn't a lot, but with a Spinnaker-type sail up it can get a little hairy.

The squalls had started coming around 5pm. Rainclouds dotted the eastern and southern horizon in intervals of only a few miles, and I knew it wouldn't be a dry night. But the clouds were small and only light grey, just like all the other nights before. So I left the Parasailor up, not wanting to give up the stability it gives the boat as Liz lay down to sleep.

Until 10pm everything was business as usual. Without a moon and a pretty complete cloud cover it was almost impossible to make out incoming squalls, just spots of deeper darkness in the dark. And because they were so small, holding little rain, they didn't show up on the radar either. But squalls bring their own distinctive wind pattern with them, and I knew one was coming close when the wind started to shift. Then I changed course higher to the wind and tucked in behind them, such avoiding most of the rain and wind. The anemometer barely went up to 20kn. Easy. It's when you feel like you are in control when it hits you hardest.

The sudden increase in wind speed to over 30kn came as a complete surprise. I had just passed one small squall and had run squarely into a big one. Torrential rain splattered down, and the wind hauled in my ears. Usually not an issue, but with 90sqm of sail up in the air ... ups. There's no way I could get the sail down other than dropping it into the water or cutting the lines. But it wasn't time yet for such desperate measures, there was a way out, and it meant: hand on the rudder, straight downwind, and fly the sail as high as possible. With the cleats 8m above deck the boat speed was a manageable 9 to 10kn, but keeping the boat straight was hard work. But it was impossible to see the incoming waves from the back, and two times I reacted to slowly and the waves turned the boat 40 degrees and heeled it over hard. Then the speed increased to 12kn, and the lee fence went under water. First time we lost the barbecue. Second time we had thrown everything from the cockpit down the companionway.

Usually it only takes about 20min for a squall to pass through, and there is a distinct lull in the wind behind it. I was waiting for that lull to head into the wind a bit and take the parasailor down. But the lull didn't come, instead we got hit by squall after squall with little respite. For five hours. I'm full of respect for Liz, no tear or complaint, instead she watched out and helped where she could, and didn't get in the way where she couldn't. The city girl is turning into a true sailor after all!

When the lull in the wind finally came a little past 3am it was about time. As much as I like adventures, they're so much more fun when you're not wet, tired and hungry. But the good thing about this route is that getting wet doesn't matter, because it's warm. The rest of the night passed, very rolly and very slowly. When the sun came up I cleaned up the mess of lines and assorted cockpit stuff, and when I was about done I smelled baking. Liz' head popped up in the companionway with a smile, and looking past her I could see pancakes on the oven. Fantastic!

Today the sky is overcast and it's raining frequently, winds between 20 and 25kn. Waves are 1.5 to 2m. But every half hour a 3m wave hits the boat and everything slides to one side. According to the weather forecast it's going to be like this for the rest of the week. But the forecast is usually wrong anyway, so I'm getting my hopes up that tomorrow will be nice again

Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 13:13

Thank Gawd for pancakes!
Anonymous on Apr 25 2012, 02:03