

## 2008 RNI Review

16 Mar 2008

Well it's been nearly a week now and like a lot of the competitors I'm still in recovery mode ! But now that all the boats have finished, appropriate time penalties imposed and the results look set to be finalised it is time to review the race.

The RNI (Round North Island) race has always been something special (make sure you read Letters from competitors <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/news.html?id=123>) . It was originally set up by the late Sir Peter Blake and run by the Devonport Yacht Club before going into remission and later being reinvented by SSANZ. A quick look at the past trophy winners reads like a who's who of NZ yachting... But to focus solely on the racing misses most of what the race is all about. For many the race is the adventure of their lives but one that they can take part in with a regular boat. Just to complete the race is a great achievement in itself. The New Zealand coastline can be a very rugged and inhospitable place, to travel over 1200miles with only 2 crew while staying close to the coast and rounding notorious weather blackspots (like North Cape, Westcoast, Cook Strait, Cape Palister, Wairarapa Coast, East Cape and Cape Colville) is a great challenge. The other great thing is with only two people on each boat and 3 stopovers (plus a party after the finish) everyone gets to know their fellow competitors. Unlike virtually any other event everyone helps out their fellow competitors with any repairs needed to ensure they complete the race. In this race rival sailmakers worked together right through the night just to ensure everyone could make it to the restart.

The 2008 race got away after a delayed start due to a terrible forecast in a nice breeze. However this soon died away only to come in from another direction and then repeat the cycle. Everytime the big boats could get away they ran out of breeze and got caught up again. Understandably on handicap it was a smallboat benefit. Mangonui welcomed the fleet for the first stopover and as always impressed with their hospitality (as well as world famous fish'n'chips on the wharf)

Leg 2 to Wellington started well with the fleet making good time to round the top of the North Island. This is where we saw the navigators earn their money. Lots of pre race predictions favoured heading well out to sea to catch the first of the new breeze, however Ran Tan II hugged the coast. The wild west coast failed to live up to it's name and the fleet drifted along for a few days. When closing together Andar was right by Ran Tan II would suggest the offshore course was definitely favoured but once again boats further back in the fleet seemed to experience better conditions. On this leg Nevenka caused some concern by missing radio scheds. Maritime Radio and the rescue centre did a fantastic job and a search by an Orion soon found them safe and well. Waka really scorched for the second half of the leg to win overall on PHRF.

Leg 3 saw the fleet start with plenty of wind and bash their way to Cape Palister. Unfortunately the wind then shifted so they were only just cracked sheets to Napier. This leg was definitely a big boat leg and Ran Tan II got to stretch her legs and blast away to win on handicap as well as line. It was at this stage of the race that Sunstone's consistent performance moved her to first overall on handicap for the race to date.

Napier is often a favourite port and with an extra day those crews on top of their boat maintenance get a chance to take in the sights. For some reason the majority tend to go on a wine tour... In Napier the boats all get rafted side by side backed up to the pier right outside the yachtclub. The atmosphere is fantastic and I'm sure a lot of crews are reluctant to leave.

The final leg got away in very light air eventually filling in so it would be directly on the nose to East Cape. This leg was particularly tricky with a few park

ups...particularly just after rounding East Cape. This was interspaced with some quite breezy moments with many of the fleet experiencing over 30 knots of wind. Waka in particular found these conditions particularly wet and uncomfortable.

The first finishers were in the wee hours of Monday morning and the majority by 10pm that night. After parking their boats competitors made their way to "Trinidad" David Cooke's (race director) launch for a post race celebration. There were obviously quite a few tired yachties as 2-3 days later many of the fleet looked like they had been abandoned in their berths with sails still to be stored and ropes everywhere !

Overall results have Ran Tan II winning on line

Sunstone winning on PHRF and IRC

Danaide winning on ORC

Prizegiving will be on Saturday 5th April

Please have a good look around the SSANZ site for post race reports photos (just added a heap more) etc. Waka has even posted a video on uTube

Links... Letters from competitors <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/news.html?id=123>

Waka video <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/news.html?id=121>

Sunstone reports <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/news.html?id=124>

photos <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/photos/index.html>

results <http://www.ssanz.co.nz/results.html>

Regards

Cameron

SSANZ News Sunstone's Leg 1 report

25 Feb 2008

Hi Cameron,

Well, it was a little tedious in the middle, but the beginning and end were pretty nice sailing.

More by luck than judgement, we had a pretty good start, despite being forced to bear away for the port tacked Bushido. 10 tons of varnish would have made some nasty scratches on that new paint job. Once beyond Rangitoto the boat got into its stride and we made good time until not far from Rodney, staying well in with the second half of the fleet.

With the easing breeze we started to lose out some and tried a shy kite for a while with only marginal success until we peeled from the .75 to the .5, which went better. We were surprised to see so few spins with lots of crews opting to stay with headsails even when the wind was quite far aft. By 1930 the wind was so light even the .5 wouldn't fly and we went to genoa - and like everyone else flopped around for the next 4 hours. When the zephyrs headed us we went west to join a pack inshore as Windfinder said that the SWly would fill along a line from the WSW. It was right and got the time correct to within half an hour. A little breeze came in at about 0030 or 0045 and we got going under plain sail with the breeze building intermittently to about 12 knots.

We had been at the back of the inshore pack near Bream Tail, but by Tutukaka some of the stern lights were getting brighter. At dawn we were off Whangamumu with the .75 up and alongside Insight, Oracle, Expressway and not too far behind Danaide and Escapeology, with other bigger boats in sight ahead.

Like everyone except Insight, we went outside at Brett and picked up more breeze once past, close reaching, no longer with the spin. This lasted all the way to the top of the Cavallis where we had a few heart-stopping moments shooting the passage with backed genoa. It was here that Insight, which had been right

next to us made her break, getting a clear half-mile ahead, while Oracle, which had also been right with us got stuck as did Carezza, which had caught us all. With wind heading, we hardened up and once through the flat patch off Flat Is. (is it all those trees?) the breeze picked up and we were away in Sunstone's favourite weather. This allowed us to make up some ground on Insight until the breeze lifted and she started using her close reaching speed again. At Berghan Point the wind headed us as everyone else, but we seemed to be able to hold higher in perhaps slightly less foul tide. Both we and Insight tacked inshore much earlier than many boats ahead and came close to weathering the final point, but need another pair of tacks before the fast reach to the finish.

Though we closed the gap to only about a minute and half, Erin and Jody on Insight beat us cleanly for a well deserved 1st overall on PHRF. It was a small boat leg, as the 4 hours down-time for the whole fleet could never be overcome by the big boats.

We were chuffed with our 2nd in PHRF and with our 1st in IRC - but this was only a sprint and there is a long, long way to go.

Thanks for all your hard labour on the website!

All the best,

Tom & Vicky Jackson, Sunstone

SSANZ News

## Sunstone Leg 2, 3 and 4 reports and overview

16 Mar 2008

Post-Race Wrap-up from Sunstone

### Sunstone's Leg 2 Report

Having turned in a reasonable performance on the first leg we started the second leg full of optimism - which was almost immediately disappointed, as virtually the whole fleet sailed away from us on the reach after the start. The lack of a gennaker or asymmetric told on us heavily once we took down our spin.

We then cut the corner at North Cape too finely and took a little time to get back into slightly firmer breeze. We watched stern lights fade ahead and knew it wasn't just dimmers turning them down, as we only just scraped past Reinga before the tide turned.

The next couple of days were frustrating for us as for everyone else, though we knew that with the clock running, it was not likely to be a big boat leg. We have worked our way through these long calm patches before, with the No. 3 sheeted hard to an outboard position and the main with flattener in, on a preventer to the rail. We also expected to gain some advantage when the wind filled from a NWly slant. This it did, which helped us to get back in touch and we gradually reeled in those ahead.

The visit of the RNZAF Orion in search of Nevenka would have been a welcome break for everyone, if it hadn't been for her mission. So it was a relief to hear a day later that Nevenka was OK.



With the breeze building from behind we couldn't match the dramatic gains of Waka and Ran Tan, but still managed to reduce our deficit, while biting our nails occasionally over the forecasts of heavy winds in Stephens and Cook Strait. In the event, we stayed ahead of the anticipated blow all the way to Wellington, suffering instead some really peculiar shifts and calms south of Egmont and later just before entering Wellington Harbour. We, like others in the fleet, were probably too cautious in our sail choice for the actual conditions, given the constant forecasts of 40+ knots. Though we had a slightly frustrating time just before entering Wellington we did not have to suffer as some others did being in sight of the finish with no wind. We were also lucky with the tide, picking up the fair tide where it was most advantageous and bucking foul where it mattered least.

We tucked into our hole in Chaffers just as the wind really kicked in and listened with sympathy to Topflight's struggles as she tried to beat in against both wind and tide.

#### Sunstone's Leg 3 Report

And then it was Wellington - with all that means in terms of wind. Despite the discomfort we were looking forward to the beat down to Palliser, knowing that we would be likely to come out of it better than most of the lighter boats. Nevertheless we admired the way Nevenka carried a big headsail and full main out of the harbour, while we were down to the No 4 and a reef.



As soon as we were out of the harbour we kept going east and seemed to gain by going into the progressively backing breeze. We shaved Palliser almost too closely, having to tack out briefly a couple of times when the wind failed under the cliffs. We thought we might have lost by this, but found by the first sched that we were pretty well up. After Palliser we settled to close fetching with occasional headers, but no tacks. We stuck to the No 4 most of the time, though we did roll out the No 2 a couple of times when the wind freed. However, in the lumpy seas we were a little worried about the amount of water we took in the foot of the bigger sail. Though we took a reef occasionally we mostly had the full main. We were happy to stay a little further offshore from the dry, inhospitable coast than most, especially when the wind headed as we approached each corner.



We were in two-minds about setting a spinnaker after Cape Kidnappers, but when the wind veered progressively as we approached Napier, we were happy we hadn't, especially as we ended up on the wind to lay the finish. We also had a shock when we heard Nevenka call in a couple of miles ahead of us, knowing that they only had to give us 25 or 30 minutes. In the event we pipped Nevenka for the Division by three minutes. It was tight, though we have before now won or lost races by as many seconds. These things happen.

It was great once again to have Steve Ashley's help into the maze of Napier harbour, the only one we hadn't visited before. We were also grateful not to have to back into the dock below the club. Sunstone has a marked preference for going forward!

## Sunstone's Leg 4 Report

We knew that the start at Napier in very light winds would be a problem for us. However, we could not believe that we would be expected to start in no wind at all. We have raced in 17 countries and never before had a start in less than 5 knots of wind. It was actually dangerous, as no one had real steerage. We saw two minor collisions and several right-of way-boats had to give way to others to avoid contact. In the end, it took us 37 minutes to cross the start line. The wind filled about an hour after the start, though it was still very light for a boat as heavy and under-powered as Sunstone. We limped out of the Bay toward Portland.

As evening came on, the wind built nicely and we began to make some progress against the few other boats still in sight. After a light spell in the lee of Portland, the wind finally filled in earnest. We peeled to the No 3 and really started to move. During the course of the rest of the night, we caught and passed four or five boats, while also weathering on a few others. We were pleased with the progress and hoped for more. For a time in the late morning, we thought our hopes would be fruitless, as the wind eased and we had to change up to the No 2. However, the wind freshened in the early afternoon. We had hitched into the shore while matching Insight tack for tack, fortunately in phase with the shifts. Once the wind built back up, we left Insight behind and became more optimistic about making the crucial tide at East Cape. We slipped past the Cape just after dark before the tide turned and continued north for a time to stay out of the worst of the tide. But then we took a longish tuck to the west in anticipation of westerly shifts during the next day. Unlike the bigger boats we were still north of the rhumb line, but well to the west of the group who had continued north after the Cape.



Like most of the fleet, we worked the shifts during the lighter spells of the next day, however, we generally went further into the headers than most and figured that we gained by doing so, sailing the inside rather than the outside of each lift on the new tack. When the true SWly filled in the evening we were in position to lay the Mercs and we had Not Negotiable in our sights two or three miles ahead. The evening sched was very encouraging and we were hopeful of a fast finish, while fearing the vagaries of a hot day in the southern Hauraki Gulf. During the night we worked hard, with the wind up and down. We peeled up and down between the two and three, spending lengthy periods under water on the plunging bow while doing so. The things we do for a little boat speed!

At dawn we were steaming past the Mercs with every chance of making the tide at Cape Colville, something we knew to be critical after a very bad experience on the White Island Race. Though the wind went soft and headed at the Cape, we still got past and back into firm breeze pretty quickly and followed the bit of string pulling us down to the Motuihe Channel - where it all threatened to fall apart as the wind died in the midday heat. Not Negotiable was trapped close by and we both played with spins, whistled and scratched our backstays to waken the wind. Nothing availed until a weak sea breeze filled from the NW at about 1530 and we picked our way through the holes into the Harbour, where we finally

found some pressure beyond North Head to carry us with much relief to the finish, having heard those behind catching up quite quickly. We braved the threatening fleet of Stewarts as we crossed their start line in order to slip across our own finish line. We were incredibly relieved to hear that the big boats had had their own troubles getting home. We knew that we had taken our division, but began to speculate that we might have done even better.



#### Looking Back

What a great race! Counting our blessings, we were very lucky with the weather, though it often didn't feel like it at the time. There was relatively little light beating which is very tough for Sunstone, while there was a lot of moderate to fresh, beating and close reaching, in which the boat does very well. We were especially lucky that most of the distance from Wellington to Auckland was on the wind or close-fetching. As it happened the timings tended to put the smaller boats on the wrong side of the tide gates but we managed to just slip through. Sadly for them, it was never a big boat race, with major parking lots on the first two legs and very little in the way of fast spinnaker work.

Though we have done lots of two-handed sailing, as we expected, this race was much more challenging than long ocean passages. On the latter we would get

regular solid periods of sleep on a watch system. On the Race we rarely had more than an hour's sleep at a time and mostly less. Though we used our Monitor vane steerer very occasionally, we could only do so in moderate conditions on the wind, close reaching, or when changing sail, as the unit is significantly slower off the wind and not realistically usable in light conditions.

As so often offshore in tricky conditions, we knew that we would be unlikely to do well on pure boat speed and would have to employ geriatric guile. We spent a good deal of time prior to each leg looking at wind predictions and made sure that we had done as much navigation preparation as possible to avoid doing much during the legs themselves. As a result we were in a good position to take advantage of the shifts and timings of filling breeze from expected directions. Though we were caught out a couple of times, we generally like to avoid getting too close to the shore. Our past experience is that trying to play shore breezes works less often than it fails. On the other hand, it is well worth looking for those progressive shifts and trying to ensure that you are both on the right side of them and go well into them before going with the lift.

There is no doubt in our minds that having sailed 130,000 miles in Sunstone was a huge advantage. Being in tune with your boat is a colossal advantage, especially in a race like this. While racing with your spouse may have its odd down-side, mostly the news is good. 35 years of marriage isn't a bad way to prepare for an offshore race!

We were very impressed with the consistently excellent performance of Danaide and Second Nature, while Insight gave us wonderful racing again and again throughout the Race. We also admired the Wakas and the Topflights, the former for their courage in tackling the Race in such a light, inshore-oriented boat and the latter for their perseverance in a small boat. It was a pleasure to get to know so many other sailing racers in so many different kinds and sizes of boats.

We are so grateful for the selfless support of the SSANZ Committee for the Race. It was very impressive that a small club with limited infrastructure should be able to stage an event like this so effectively, with the excellent support of the Clubs at the three stops.

Tom & Vicky Jackson, 16 March 2008

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