

GENERAL LEE 01



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AUCKLAND TO FIJI RACE 2010

We have all seen the brochure before – a downwind sleigh ride in the trade winds, shirts off, surfing waves, grins from ear to ear and ending up in a tropical paradise. Perfect! Auckland to Fiji race here we come! With the boat launched only weeks prior to the race we set about clocking as many miles up as possible to learn as much as we could about the boat and to give time for tuning. We did 200 miles in the weekend the boat was launched in some testing conditions, then Scott Beavis (project manager) set about the task of race preparing the boat including provisioning, spares and safety. He did a fantastic job and the boat hit the start line immaculately prepared. His Volvo Ocean Race experience really shone through here.



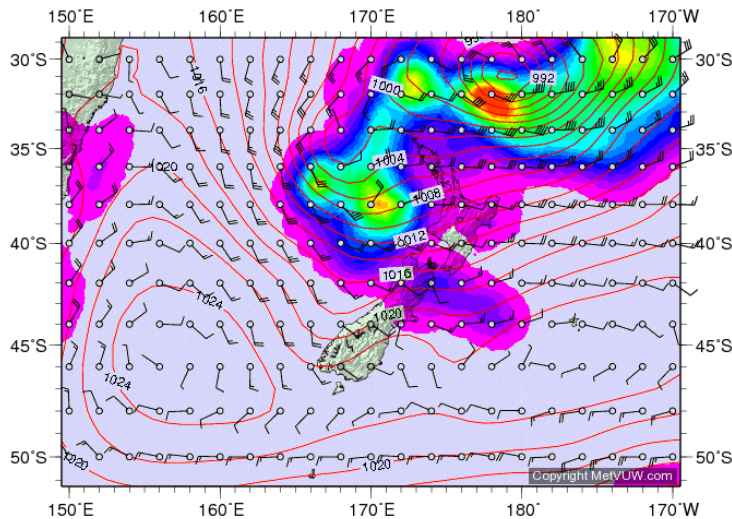
The team for the Fiji Race was Scott Disley, Paul Eldrid, Rodney Keenan, Scott Beavis, Simon Minoprio, Martin Hannon, Hayden Goodrick. Being a small boat with a small team, there was always a cross pollination of roles to be filled on the boat. We all just did what was required to keep it rumbling. Scott Disley had the hardest task as dedicated navigator – such a big race in a little boat is a big task. All of us have been involved in many programs in the past with the latest being Limit. Through many of these programs we have all become

very good friends over the last 10 years or so, and when the opportunity came up to sail together for the Fiji race everyone jumped at it.

108-hr forecast of MSLP (hPa), surface wind (kts) and 6-hr accumulated rainfall (mm)

Valid for:- 1800 NZST Monday 24 May 2010

Forecasts issued at:- 1800 GMT Wed 19 May 2010 (0600 NZST Thu 20 May 2010)



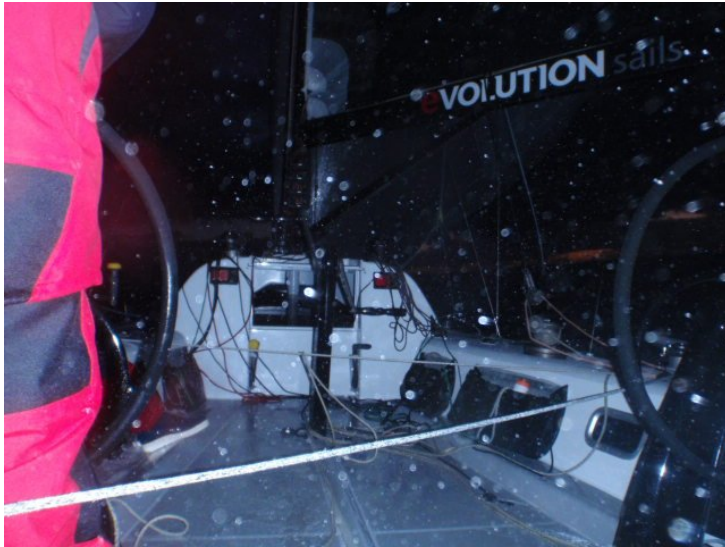
Plotted by James McGregor, MetVUW.com

The forecast was all doom and gloom initially. It really looked like a carbon copy from the Auckland to Noumea Race last year which we did on Limit. With this still fresh in our minds we were apprehensive about taking on such an intense low in a small boat. Especially as we had minimal break in time, which is why we proceeded with caution. The forecast was for winds up to 55 knots with 20+ seas, backing west after the low and blowing up to 45+. Again, even though we would be downwind, 45+ knots in huge seas in a little boat is dangerous. After 3 days the forecast had the breeze easing up, and eventually dying to nothing, before filling from the North and backing again to the west as two Highs approached Fiji. Still the question remained – could we survive the Low?

The morning of the race the forecast had eased a little to a 45 knot maximum. Our plan was to start the race and re-assess the low as we raced north. We figured we could monitor the system and make a better decision in this time, as forecasts were changing so dramatically. If it looked like it would sustain over 40 on the nose for over 24 hours we would pull into the bay of Islands and consolidate from there. If it looked better, we would take it on. The key was risk management and always having an exit plan without jeopardising the safety of the team or the boat.



We ended up running out of Auckland in a gentle southerly. At about our exit strategy point just past the Bay of Islands the breeze had gone to the North and increased. The latest GRIB files showed a maximum of 35 – 40 knots. At this point the seas were choppy but not rough and the wind was 25 - 30. With not as much West as anticipated we were making pretty good VMG on Fiji, and the boat was relishing the conditions with 1 reef and a J4. We decided to press on.



As the conditions deteriorated and the seas got to 5 – 10m and we re-configured the boat to two reefs and the J4, then the Storm Jib when it got to 35 gusting 40. Still the boat behaved well and kept chugging along. With each position schedule we were buoyed by just how well we were hanging in there. The boat Exceeded our expectations. Knowing we were going into a pretty intense low pressure system at the worst possible time we were concerned at being such a small, light boat. To our amazement the boat hung in with much larger rivals and extended on the 40 footers – all whilst sailing upwind in 30+. Davey Norris Boatbuilders did a fantastic job – this boat is solid and between Brett Bakewell White and Davie Norris, the boat is very well

thought out and one of the driest offshore boats we have raced.

After the breeze backed on the other side of the low it was obvious the fleet would not see extreme running conditions and that the system would not be with us for long. We pushed hard here utilising the 20 – 25 knots we had and from 6am to 6pm that day covered over 200 miles, then the following 12 hours another 130 miles or so as the breeze started to back off....then eventually shut completely down. From here the race got totally weird and nearly every forecast and grib file was completely wrong. Sensing this, we tried to keep the boat on the making board as much as possible while looking for telltale signs of the real time breeze and forecast breeze aligning. We spend considerable time flip/flapping with a wind-seeker, then on the wind with a jib, then Code Zero and back and forth for days.



We did eventually get the not forecasted SE Trades as they tried to re-establish in the aftermath of the low. Still the Grib files and forecasts called for breeze from the West. As it became apparent they were in to stay, then they magically appeared on the grib files some 6 hours later! The upside to this was knowing that we could keep our corrected time on the boats in front of us, some of whom had already finished. The down side was knowing that the boats behind would have been in this breeze for a while and would continue to “point and shoot” at the finish faster and faster as it built from behind. We raced extremely hard through the last night knowing that every minute counted....and in the end it did, just not in our favour by a just minutes, after 8 days at sea!

Human nature changes when you are in a small environment, frustrated with no wind with a bunch of mates! When you have run out of stories and fart jokes things start to get interesting. For us, it turned into a game involving a label maker that Beavis had on the boat. Little messages stuck in discreet confines of the boat ready for your "mate" to discover at some unexpected time. I bet the delivery blokes were discovering more and scratching their heads on the trip back to Auckland!



Being a small boat there is not much room to provision fresh produce. Most of our food was broken down into daily snack kits, then one freeze dried meal per day. Whilst we didn't run out of food we were getting a little low, and so as to not take any chances while we were flip flopping around in between systems and our ETA increasing by 24 hours every 12 hours, we started to make provision for further days at sea. We ended up finishing with 60 litres of water left and 3 freeze dried meals and a few snacks.

Upon finishing and docking in Port Denerau, Fiji, there was one more challenge – just which team member would concoct a drink worthy of the name "The General Lee"? After countless efforts and experimentation, Scott Beavis was declared the winner with a delicious yet deadly cocktail which tipped the team completely upside down.

Many thanks to the Royal Akarana Yacht Club and Denarau Yacht Club for their warm welcome both in Auckland and Port Denarau. Not forgetting sponsors ANZ and Tourism Fiji. For anyone considering this race, put it in your bucket list....and pray for the Trades!

To all those who have supported this project, we thank you and hope you have enjoyed it and had fun with the General Lee. Brett Bakewell White, Davie Norris Boat Builders, Evolution Sails, NZ Rigging, Clough Marine Electronics, Kiwi Yachting, Sailing Products Australia, Scott Beavis Project Manager, Sailing Products New Zealand, and the crew of the General Lee.

For more information please visit
www.generalleeracing.com.au
www.bakewell-white.com
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