



## Round D Gulf Race – 2010

Chaguaramas stirs to life as dawn breaks across the still waters of the Gulf, a line of pelicans heading out for a day of fishing skim effortlessly over the glassy green surface. Cyclists on the road and a lone kayaker heading out to five islands are the only things moving. A few sailing boats sit motionless, sails hanging like Sunday washing on the clothesline ... but wait this is the Round D Gulf Race! What the hell is going on?

Rewind to the afternoon of the previous day, nine boats have registered for this revival edition of the venerated TTSA Round D Gulf Race probably last held fifteen or twenty years ago. The present Race Committee suggested that we re-introduce this old 'favourite' on a full moon weekend. The Coast Guard was informed, the entries were drummed up out of the reluctant fleet and the course was set. Everyone at the briefing was energized and raring to go, but where was the wind? Just a light zephyr teasing from the south west. This was looking disastrous.

We headed out early in the Committee Boat, Phillip Farfan's 44ft Fountaine Pajot powercat Trou D'or ably skippered by his brother Mark. As we got out of TTSA and headed for the Five Islands there was only a light 5-6 knt Northerly blowing out of Tucker Valley so Mark suggested that we lay the start line inside the Five Islands. As we began getting the ground tackle ready we saw a windline rapidly approaching from the east. Graham Diamond and I quickly got the buoy in the water and had Mark set the anchor for the committee boat. By now the early competitors had noticed that we were setting up South of Tembladora were heading towards us. Well most of them

anyway, C-Mos and Breakaway were nowhere to be seen. Our Start Committee of Susan Reece and Erica SeeTai prepped us for the start. At the first signal (17:00) the easterly was blowing at 12-14 knots and after the start the majority of the fleet was off romping up to the wreck. Eventually the late starters, C-Mos, Breakaway and Sea Dancer crossed the line and headed east with the setting sun behind them.



We pulled up the anchor and the distance mark and chased the boats up to the wreck. At the wreck, they were still pretty close together with Andiamo leading the way and Nirvana and Pirouette close behind. Survivor had the clew on her headsail blow up on the beat up to the wreck, good thing they had the sailmaker aboard. Sea Dancer was struggling with her yankee and had to make do with her

staysail and as a result was about 40 min behind the leaders at the wreck.

Everyone rounded the wreck and headed for Cronstad Island, it was a bit eerie as the boats ghosted silently past the lee side of the island in the orange glow of the bright lights of the Baroid Mud facility. The fleet was tight as Nirvana, Breakaway and Linda had made good gains under spinnaker. Sea Dancer radioed in that they were retiring due to a malfunction of their navigation lights. As the boats punched out from under the lee of Cronstad they were back into the lively easterly which combined with the rising tide produced a lumpy sea which I am sure kept the crews refreshed as they close reached toward Couva Platform.

At Couva Platform it was dark as Hades and there was no light, navigation or otherwise to be seen. The 40 footers had





stretched their legs on the reach up and Andiamo and Pirouette rounded first with C-Mos beginning to make up some ground. Breakaway and Blurred Vision rounded within a few boat-lengths of each other. Nirvana promptly hoisted her spinnaker and showed everyone her transom. We booked it down to the waypoint about 12 miles south with only Linda left to round the platform.



On station at 10:30N and 61:41W the wind was still east at about 8-10kts and the moon was now up paving a slivery highway on the water. Looking up to the east we could see the masthead lights of the boats converging on us. The spinnaker boats made good time on this leg and Nirvana was the first round the leeward mark with C-Mos continuing to eat away at the deficit between her and Andiamo. Linda was the last boat round but made up some ground under spinnaker on the down-wind leg.

Back up to the Couva Platform, nice to motor directly into the wind at 10knts, everyone else tacking and beating up towards the glow of Pt Lisas. At Couva Platform we could see that the boats were well spread out and the wind had dropped to about 6kts, most of the boats were well to the south making their approach to the layline on port. C-Mos finally caught up and past Andiamo to round the platform first, Norman and the boys from Joia ecstatic to be in front with only two legs to go. Lloyd and the crew of Nirvana still very much in the lead on corrected time at this point. Blurred Vision was the penultimate boat round the mark as we headed back to Five Islands to set up the finish, leaving the boats to find the unlit wreck on their own.

As we left Couva and headed north west we could feel that the Easterly was waning and knew that the North wind would eventually push through. The finish line was set up inside Five

Islands between the Committee boat and the green flashing buoy at Tembladora West (we figured that if anyone was going to finish in the dark it would be a good idea to have a pin that was lit). The north wind coming out of Tucker Valley was like air-conditioning and we had to take refuge in the cockpit. As we anchored up, Andiamo reported that both they and C-Mos



had rounded the wreck and were headed west. But these boats that headed directly west were becalmed in the transition between the easterly and the northerly. At 05:00 Linda reported that she was finally around the wreck,



Fred perked up quite a bit when he heard that no-one had yet finished and rushed off to put up his spinnaker.

Now after 11 hours of racing we had all the competitors strung out between five islands and the wreck on the same leg. Pirouette and Breakaway staying further to the south managed to avoid the parking lot off of Cocorite and sailed around C-Mos and Andiamo. Pirouette crossed the line first after 12hr 41min of racing with C-Mos second over the line (Norman still asking to have the 20min that he was late for the start subtracted from his elapsed time) and Breakaway (smallest boat in the fleet) crossing third. Everyone finally got the northerly and was finished by 7:30am Sunday morning.

A thoroughly enjoyable evening and night was had by all, big thanks to Mark and Phillip Farfan, Erica, Susan, Graham and Danvers for running a safe and efficient race. Thank you to the TT Coast Guard (the crew of the TTCG-Chacachacare) for standing by in case of emergency. Thanks to the TTSA and Mark De Freitas for their support in reviving this old classic. I am sure that based on the enthusiasm of the competitors that we shall see a larger turnout for the 2011 Round D Gulf Race.