

The Rona Sailing Project - Rona II

Tall Ships Race 2011

Stavanger, Norway – Halmstad, Sweden.

We arrived in Stavanger at 8 a.m. after having started my journey at 1 a.m. in Exeter! We set about tidying up the boat: re-flaking all the sails, restocking food and giving the boat a general clean so that it was race worthy. This went on until the late afternoon after which we had some time to go out and explore Stavanger. The 'last night' party was already kicking off with music coming from many stages and hundreds of people lining the port. The evening was brought to a close with bands playing from one of the largest ships in the fleet, followed by a huge fireworks display.

The 'parade of sail' saw the fleet leave the next morning, with many well-wishers lining the shore. Then a four-hour sail to the start line, where our 'class D' start was at 8 p.m.. Our start was fantastic; we timed the line perfectly and were one of the first across the line with the spinnaker up within minutes. Then the wind started to peter-out and died within a few hours of the line. Gradually the lighter smaller boats started to gain on us. As night fell we were still sailing in a respectable 5th out of 8th in our class. However, things turned worse towards the morning with 5-6 knots of breeze, the spinnaker had to come down because it was doing nothing and at one point during the early morning we were drifting away from the waypoint!

The breeze gradually began to pick up however, it was now heading us, which isn't bad for our type of boat, but for the large square-riggers it was really bad news, as they can't sail very efficiently into the wind. The slow progress continued until we reached the waypoint in the early hours of the second day. By this time the front runners had passed the waypoint a good 6 hours ahead of us and we were 7th out of 8th in our class and doing well in the overall fleet ranking - around 20th. Later on that day we heard over the radio that the race would be cut short due to most of the fleet struggling with the light wind. The race would end at 2 p.m. when everybody would radio in their position and the results would be worked out from that. After the end of the race it was another 100 NM to Halmstad.

We were one of the first boats to reach Halmstad and we were greeted by many onlookers already enjoying the 4-day festival. Our mooring was right by the pontoon, with the heart of the festival just minutes away. The four day stay was filled with many things to do including; an inter-boat football competition, music, great food and on the last night our own boat party that went on into the morning.

It was very hard to leave Halmstad after such a good time. The 600NM trip seemed very long, especially as during our stay we had slept less than we had during the race. However, the 'parade of sail' was still greatly enjoyed with thousands of people watching the fleet sail the last stretch of water before each boat went their separate ways.

The sail back started with a bang as we sailed the edge of a storm down the Kattegat Bay with our boat speed averaging 8-9 knots. It was then brought to our attention that there was a large weather depression building in the North Sea and that we were heading straight for it! I came on watch at 4 a.m. the day after we left Halmstad; there was blue sky, no wind and we were motoring around the tip of Denmark. This was the calm before the storm. The winds started to build toward the afternoon with the sea state following suit. At around 8 p.m. the winds were gusting up to 50 knots with the on-watch soaked from 6-7 metre waves crashing over the side. My last watch, before I went on to mother watch, was 6-8 p.m. At the

end of my watch we were sailing with 3 reefs in the mainsail and just a staysail. During the night the mainsail was taken down completely, yet we were still managed to sail on just a staysail with boat speeds of 7-8 knots.

The storm was still blowing hard when I was making breakfast. My watch suffered some losses due to the storm. Both watch leader and watch officer plus one other member of the crew were suffering from seasickness. Another took a tumble during the night, banged his head, and was out cold with concussion. A further member of my watch had suffered the leg injury in Halmstad and was also out of action. So this left Jonny and I to cook breakfast, which was proving difficult during such rough seas.

The skipper then took action to find a port and have a break from 24 hours of full on gales, but mostly to check if Ryan - the crewmember that had taken a tumble during the night - was ok. We landed in Denmark in a small fishing town with very little to do and see and stayed for only one night.

We left the next morning in similar conditions to when we arrived. Later conditions improved with blue skies and a strong constant breeze behind us, pushing us at a steady 8 knots towards Lowestoft. These perfect sailing conditions lasted right up until the last 20 miles where the breeze freshened.

It was quite a relief to arrive at our final destination after a long, tiring trip. We then had one last final push to clean the boat before having a little time to see Lowestoft before departure.

Alex Millington-Jung