



The Southern Hemisphere Cruising Season Officially it Starts on 1st May for those heading to the SW Pacific from the more Temperate Climes.

That was the headline from the first section in our last news letter, but someone forgot to tell the **weather gods**

This years exodus saw the largest number of yachts and other vessels leave New Zealand since 2019 and the Covid Years.

Many left on what was dubbed the first weather window, or did they? Some had a good passage and some, well, not so good!

Not all the problems however were Weather, there was a Human component too!

WHY?

There are two very important parts to weather routing. The first is Departure Planning. Weather of course plays a big part but understanding the boat and how it performs is also important. Polars, or a set of values that lead to the accurate performance of a given boat in a full spread of conditions is the first part, every make, model and design of vessel have different characteristics. Take for a start the difference between Monohulls and Multihulls.

It doesn't stop there, you've then got to factor in the human component. Not all humans will sail the same way given the same boat and the same conditions. An ex-racer with a gungho crew aboard will likely sail much harder and faster in the same type of vessel than Mom and Pop who are more interested in comfort than speed.

Add in the purest in comparison to the petrol head (or in most cases Diesel) when the wind gets light and you've got an interesting mix that will cover the whole gambit of time and speed. It's this time and speed formula we need to get right in order to see where each boat will be in relation to the conditions for as far out as the forecast will allow. Only a router whose also a sailor can fully get this.

There are also differences in the various passages in the South Pacific. passages running from East to West are reasonably straight forward, heading with the prevailing wind, usually in the tropics. The reverse, not so much. To go from West to East you'll be down in the southern ocean in order to get the westerly flow or have a mountain of fuel and patience to get a soft period up close to the equator.

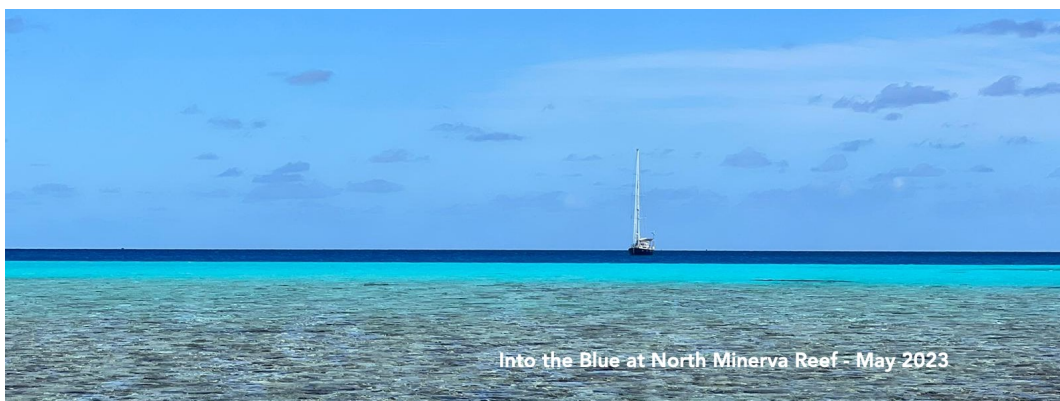
Heading both North and South from the tropics to NZ (late in the year) or in the instance of this so called weather window, are more a mix of conditions and bring in the second important component of good weather routing. Putting the boat in the right place for the weather that's coming, the direct route is not necessarily best, or from a timing perspective, the shortest.

Fleet Routing or telling a group of wildly different vessels and skippers, today is the day to leave will only serve a small portion of those vessels. Put your earplugs in when others are talking weather, in many cases the information will not best serve you. Even worse if the conversation is happening while on passage. If you've started a passage with a number of boats in sight you'll agree, the likelihood of them all being in the same relative position come morning is small. Boats at the front of the group after a couple of days may be in an entirely different weather pattern.

So now, to why some of the boats had a good passage and others not? The short answer goes back to the time and speed formula. While the weather models were not in total agreement 5 days out they all showed the next trough coming through. Heading South to North on passage you're going to get Northerlies from the trough. Uncomfortable at the best of time but like many of the systems before it, this system packed some punch.

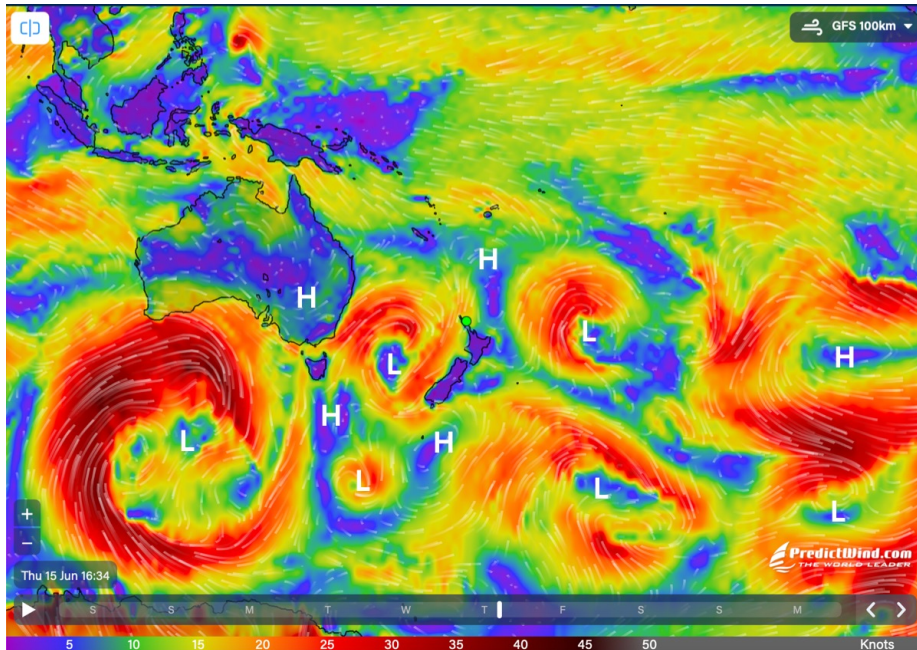
For the slower vessels the only way to have avoided the trough would have been to leave earlier. That choice would have left some with a bit of a conundrum. To have left earlier would have been to have left on the back end of the previous low pressure in what many would consider "Spicy" conditions. For my money I'd prefer a strong tail wind and seaway to one on the nose.

While the first Cohort of C&OC boats in this years Pacific Rendezvous were sitting comfortably in North Minerva reef the boats just 100nm south were getting a hammering, two of which turned back to NZ with serious damage.

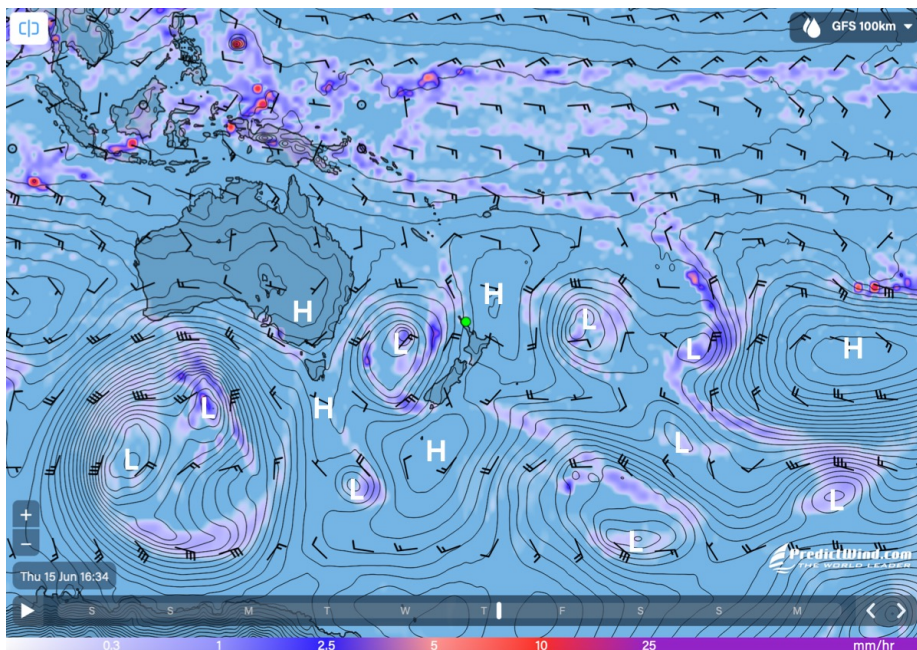


It may take a little longer to provide, but all of the C&OC vessels had individual routing. As you can see from the image above, Into the Blue sitting at anchor North Minerva Reef, the conditions on arrival were still good. As the trough passed, the boats in Minerva saw winds averaging 25-30 with gusts to 35, quite comfortable in good holding in the lagoon. Local knowledge also plays a big part in where it's safe to anchor and in what conditions.

The weather has been chaotic this year in the SW Pacific, three Cat 5 cyclones and numerous ex tropical depressions and a couple of AU East Coast lows in the mix. Since the event above there have been some slender windows for faster vessels. C&OC's second Cohort is now waiting for the next opportunity to leave NZ but judging by the weather shown in the image below it may be a while yet.



Small Highs and lots of large lows in this forecast. While the animated wind forecast from PredictWind is nice to look at I find looking at the isobar map below easier to digest.



For more information on Ocean Tactics [click HERE](#)

Words by John Martin -Images courtesy of PredictWind & Zoe Peace