

FULL RACE REPORT 74TH EDITION OF BOL D'OR MIRABAUD 2012, LAKE OF GENEVA.

(from the perspective of the Quant28 « Allianz »)

Geneva-Rolle-Geneva was a very good race for us (see racereport on www.quant-boats.com). So far so good. But everybody wanted to see, how the „Allianz“ Q28-Team would end in the big race – the 74th Bol d'Or - and the expectations were quite high. Is this boat and its performance showing during Geneva-Rolle-Geneva just a mayfly, or is it really able to keep up with much bigger boats over a longer race?

The pressure was on us: Another good result would help to promote the new Q30 and shut some more skeptical voices. Forecast for the raceday was quite optimistic, with westerly breeze up to 20kts. This means a very fast downwind to Evian, then some more or less chaotic hours and then westerly breeze again. I didn't believe in this forecast – there wasn't an explanation where this wind should come from and if - then later in the day and not around starting time. I learnt to be half right and half wrong.

When the race took off – almost no wind. So it didn't really took off then. With one exception: We on the „Allianz2“ bet on the Swiss side instead of the french or getting out in the middle. As a result of all the congruent forecasts, the Swiss side of our line sector was not empty but empty for a Bol d'or.

We had a perfect start on the new headsail. No dirty air, no traffic and the horrible wake hit all competitors the same. The Q28 went instantaneously into racing mode and while the light breeze turned more on to the shore (thermal wind) we prepared to change on the best kite i ever saw on a sportsboat – our precious A1 from North. In some minutes we moved in front of all the monohulls and as the catamarans suffered also from the absence of any airflow – we were lying ahead of all the boats after 25 minutes in the race. Nice perspective also for some of the boats from the press.

They – for once - followed us and not Ernesto B. or his sister Dona☺. Very funny.

Later on, enough of the catamaran fleet got some breeze and they rapidly were catching up and the spectator fleet were again following them – back to normal and quiet and easy sailing for us again on a beautiful day, on one of the most beautiful lakes in the world.

We were leading the pack of all monohulls for almost two hours. « Raffica » (ex «Principessa» a legendary Libera A) passed us not until we reached the end of the petit lac around Nernier. « Raffica“ won the monohull division in style over all.

Passing into the grand lac (the big and open part of the lake) meant „back to normal » Upwind in very difficult, unstable, shifty and weak conditions. Very unreliable, very unpleasant to use a polite expression. Patches and then oily parts again, a new picture every other minute – and it was still a very long way to go.

Together with around four of the fastest monohulls we still were lying massively in front of the fleet. From a tactical or better – strategical - point of view we wondered whether we should sail along the Swiss coastline over Lausanne and then up the „La Côte“ to Vevey and then crossing the lake to the mark in Bouveret in the latest possible moment? A very long way to go! Thanks to our huge advance we postponed this decision for the moment.

Shortly after, the fleet came up very quickly as the westerly breeze set in. All the relevant boats now

have passed into the grand lac. We still had to sail upwind. Although this was painful to see, I was quite sure, that this breeze would die in the open zone of the grand lac and all the boats would have to face the same difficulties, we stuck in. But still it was annoying and bad for us in regard to a top result after corrected time.

„Full Pelt“ and „Swiss Interim“, belonging to the group of the tallest and fastest monohulls were lying in front of us, but still quite close. They took the „Swiss option“. In the meantime I decided contrarily. I wanted to go to the french side tacking upwind along the shoreline in short legs. Full Pelt was revising the decision for the Swiss coast and came back to where we sailed. And they made good progress there. Even after the race it is difficult to decide, which side was the better option?

The Psaros40 named „Syz & Co.“, skippered by Jean Psarofaghis – a legend on this lake - was lying far behind, when we left the petit lac. He entered the grand lac later and profited by the westerly breeze extending more and more close on the Swiss shoreline, direction Lausanne. Next to this fact he could observe how the leading group of monohulls was doing. The decision for him was easy. They sailed up the Swiss side more or less in a strait line starting in Rolle till Vevey or even beyond. That was good for Syz and Jean.

We didn't have this option. I think the group of the fastest monohulls – including us - reached the grand lac too early this day ending in the middle of the lake, where we all had to look for some breeze.

4.30pm Syz and Swiss interim were lying close to each other. Full Pelt was doing quite good tacking up the French coast and we were close to get there also.

6pm the situation was very clear now. Many boats – also slower ones – have optically passed us on the Swiss side. I wasn't concerned much about this fact. They would have to cross the lake, leaving the Swiss side in Vevey or even Montreux to get to the mark in Bouveret on the french coastline. In this type of weather – I assumed - this would end in carnage for most of them. It turned out to be exactly like this – we paid before, they were paying now.

It was interesting to see the gaps opened between the fastest yachts, we were sailing with, most of the day. After 9 hours in the race, when rounding the mark, we still stayed together much closer than I thought. The leading Libera „Raffica“ took the mark first: 6.56pm, Full Pelt 7.08pm, Syz 7.14pm, Swiss Interim (the older Full Pelt) 7.20pm and then the little Q28 Allianz 7.38pm.

In our class (TCF 1+2) two boats were rounding directly in front of us – a defect but not yet tragical. Second half of the race left, to adjust upwards.

For the way back to Geneva i again decided to sail close under the french side to benefit of the light breeze either from the Valais (big valley at the end of the lake) or seaward breeze from the woods and the little canyons on the steep french coast. Sailing with the kite for maybe half an hour, we just take over the lead in our class again.

Shortly after 8pm, we had to face kind of a rolling swell from the west. Very strange for a lake, but i experienced the same phenomenon here before, announcing the westerly breeze – with the potential to squeeze all other windsystems. But it can take hours until this new breeze would extend all over the lake. Who will get it first in our class?

The position we were choosing under the french coast was the the right one. We changed from Kite to

basic jib and after two minutes we were sailing upwind fully on the foil in about 18 to 20kts true. We learned later, that many competitors lying more in the middle of the lake on their way back, struggled to get in this system for a very long time. It was getting darker and therefore harder to control the other boats.

The idea was to sail a long leg towards Lausanne over the bay of Lausanne to the Swiss coast, as I fancied a wind shift more to the north by getting closer to the Swiss side, allowing us to tack and sailing more directly down the petit lac to the finishing line in Geneva.

The wake was really bad. I was pressing a little bit to let the Q28 run on the foil with around 8 to 8.5kts. It was crazy. The boat was blasting over the waves, banging into the next one really badly and we were looking up worrying what our rig was doing. To our delight, the mast was totally unimpressed. Once the boat didn't go over the wave but through. Volvo Oceanrace in small. But we on the racks saw the water coming and going without getting wet really. Very comfortable. The foil was working perfectly and I experienced now in all clearness, what Hugh (Welbourn) told me about some of the nice side effects of DSS. The boat was running a straight course, totally well balanced. Rudder movements reduced to the max. It was pure pleasure as the wind was warm and quite steady.

We had to change our decision (to sail to the Swiss side) by tacking again to get back more on the french coast (around Evian), as the awaited windshift just didn't show.

The more interesting part of the Bol d'Or was more or less over, as we couldn't really compete anymore (Darkness) and we suspected the wind to drop latest by entering the petit lac again. The rest of the distance would be sticky business. Unluckily it was like this exactly. Tacking, jibing, changing sails many times. Horrible – and we didn't know about our position in the fleet and in the class.

After daybreak a direct competitor named „Meteorite“ a Modulo 105, with a huge rig passed us by choosing a very close course to the french shoreline. Although everybody on our big dinghy was exhausted and very tired, we managed to get back in the racing mode again and during the last few miles we succeeded to put some minutes on « Meteorite » before we crossed the finishing line.

It was all worth it, as with this effort we took line honours in the class, which we learned half an hour later, when checking in and signing some paperwork in front of the race comitee.

„It ain't over till it's over“, this is what the Bol d'or is all about, more than any other lake race I did.

But the best for my taste was the overall ranking: 7th monohull over the line. And everybody who knows the scene on this lake, must admit, that such a result is more than respectable after such a long race on such a small boat.