

TELEKURS GROUP SETS SAIL: PART 6

The big adventure is getting closer. On 16 September 2007, Jacques Valente and the “Telekurs Twing” will start the Transat 6.50 regatta along with 83 fellow-sailors. Ahead of him lies a journey of 4200 nautical miles (about 7800km) to the finish line at the port of Salvador da Bahia in Brazil. Without the benefit of meticulous preparation and reflexes so well trained you can sail in your sleep, it would be impossible to complete this gruelling solo race in a yacht that is just 6.50m long.

Jacques Valente (Telekurs Geneva)

My last race, which I reported on in the last issue (see *realtime* 01/07), highlighted the area I needed to concentrate on: my reflexes. You don't have much time to think when you're racing. You hardly get any sleep, you're tired, hungry and permanently stressed. This affects your concentration. It is therefore essential that I know exactly how to react in any given situation and how to execute every single task aboard the “Telekurs Twing” in my sleep.

Training camp in France

In order to train these procedures thoroughly, I attended the Centre d'Entraînement Méditerranéen (CEM) near Montpellier for three days every third week throughout the winter. Every day, after briefing, I was on the water from 11.00am to 6.00pm with a coach. It was exhausting, but this kind of high-level training is vital if I

You will find the latest information about the Transat 6.50 on the official Mini Class website:

www.classemini.com

And everything you want to know about Jacques Valente and his race project on his new site:

www.jacquesvalente.com.

am to have a chance against the professionals competing in the Transat.

The doldrums

Apart from sailing technique, the other factors that will affect my chances of winning are my choice of route and the weather. I have therefore studied very closely the routes taken by the last three winners of the Transat and the prevailing weather conditions around the time of the race.

The area known as the Intertropical Convergence Zone presents sailors with a particular challenge. Situated at the Equator, it is also known to sailors as the doldrums. In the northern part of the doldrums, the wind blows in a clockwise direction and in the southern part it blows in the opposite direction.

This results in weather that fluctuates from violent storms to dead calm, and back again. Its French name “pot au noir” is a reference to a shameful chapter of the colonial period. When slaving ships were becalmed for long periods and food supplies ran low, they simply threw their human cargo overboard.



Target speed

In further preparation for the Transat, I used a computer to analyse all the technical data measured during my training runs in order to find out the boat's target speed. The computer program can determine the optimum position of the boat in relation to the wind for achieving the fastest possible speed for every wind speed. This data will be a useful aid to decision making during the Transat. Of course, all of the ship's instruments will play an important role, too. After all, the autopilot was my undoing during the MINI Barcelona. I've now modified it to make it much easier to repair. This is the kind of small detail that can make the difference between victory and disaster. ■