

Cape to Rio 2025/6 SV Serendipity

Crew

- 1) Geoff Genricks (Owner/Skipper)
- 2) Deon Coetzer (1st Mate)
- 3) Michael Wessels (Foredeck - 2nd Cape to Rio Start)
- 4) Richard Sissons (Cockpit piano player - 3rd Cape to Rio Start)

Distance Sailed 3700NM
Days sailed 24d 3h 57min
SV Serendipity 44 Ft Elan

The building up to a Cape to Rio is an expensive exercise and takes months and months to prepare the vessel. Checking and replacing rigging and hardware were necessary, filling in countless forms for SAMSA and safety requirements, food preparation and crew preparation, both physically and mentally.

The start on the 27th of December creeps up all too quickly and last-minute dash arounds, victualing, water, diesel, spares etc. making certain to have everything for a voyage of 30 days and cover approximately 3700 nautical miles.

The day arrives with a typical boisterous "cape Doctor" SE windy day in Table Bay.



After leaving RCYC docks after the blessing of the fleet, for the first time ever, a sail parade through the waterfront with all racing vessels following each other.

Flying battle flags, to the cheers and well wishes gathered on all sides of the V&A, was a unique experience indeed. We set off from there into the bay for start procedure.

SA Navy Frigate impressively forming part of the start line, firing an on-board canon to start us off.

All 12 competitors with reefed mains and smaller head sails, dashed off, mostly picking the Northerly track inside Robben Island.

Our first day was good sailing and quite moving, watching our Table Mountain of the mother city get smaller as the miles clicked away under our keel.

We soon realized that our communication and weather downloads were not behaving as they should and debated our options for many hours, eventually deciding to put in at Saldanha to effect repairs. Yes - the old days, they did it with a sextant and dragging a log for speed and very little else.....

We were joined by three other vessels in Saldanha from the fleet, Frydd, Solitaire and the single handed Suidoos 2, all for various issues.

Our faulty gear was fixed and fitted in record time, and we were off again under 24 hours, followed closely by Solitaire, Frydd and then Suidoos 2... race was on.

Within days we were in the deep blue, warm water, the trade winds filled in to begin what I like to call 'Champagne sailing'

Perfect 15 knots of wind from behind, relatively calm seas and downhill sailing at a respectable 7- 8 knots of boat speed.

Imagine doing this for 22 days and nights??

Awesome!

The extraordinary game of Cat and Mouse begins!

Geoff and crew spent a lot of time watching and planning the continually changing navigational route, when to start turning West.

It's all about the 'Mid Atlantic High pressure' which stands between us and a rum line (shortest) course to Rio de Janeiro.

How close do you dare to go in order to shorten your overall course sailed?

This High pressure also moves, and one can easily be caught out, being clawed into the becalmed windless zone (eerily remembered by some sailors as the 'Horse Latitudes')

This game continued for the entire race and many times (High Pressure) would threaten to come up N and fetch us and immediate Northerly runs had to be taken as you could see on our track.

Led by Deon, crew are kept busy with sail changes and optimum boat speeds are sought continuously while keeping safety at the top of the list.

The Machine

The 4 of us worked well together and after a few days, man and vessel become one.

You look after the vessel, and she looks after you, until you become a well-oiled machine with all moving parts in symbiosis.

The one man on watch at night for 2 hours at a time, gave proper rest to all, but never a problem or grumble when 'all hands-on deck' is called to do a sail change or maneuver that required more than one man to do it safely. This often happened between 12 and 03:00 strangely enough?

To lose a man overboard is simply not an option worth contemplating so all safety protocols were strictly adhered to.

Fishing

We thankfully did not have to rely on fish for our protein, or we would have been in trouble.

We did however have a single medium small Dorado grace our plates once early on which was cooked by Mike and enjoyed by all alongside a vegie bake.

The two impressive tuna rods stood guard port and starboard ready for anything, and 3 or four bungees should have done the trick.

We were flabbergasted when we got not one, but two Black Marlin strikes with a tail walk display before getting off – Thank goodness for that!

We were then attacked by a school of 'skollie' Tuna who just took our lures unceremoniously, sending the one bungee springing back into the cockpit as if to be giving us the middle finger??

All we were after was a small dorado for the pan!?



Birthdays

We celebrated both Geoff and Mikes Birthdays at sea on the 4th Jan and 16th Jan respectively.

I think we were allowed a second beer or glass of wine on those occasions.

Shore crew

We must not fail to mention the devoted shore crew, the wives, family and friends who were watching the YB tracker day in and day out. Willing us on and hoping for a safe passage for all. The support we were given through build up and through the race is hardly mentioned but is fondly remembered and highly appreciated. Thank you all!



Sunrise Sunsets

Both are spectacular out at sea, and we had many that were just awe inspiring! The early watch when welcoming the sun rise is always an uplifting experience.



NYE

What did you do New Years Eve??

We were having a Steak and Boerewors Braai off the stern of Serendipity in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, with a remarkably clever gas braai system.

Perfectly cooked medium rare by Skipper Geoff.

RCYC had also packed us all a happy box of goodies to eat and lights to put up around the boat and we had a very funny video of us all around the table whilst we let our self-steering gear do its duty.

Night skies and rain squalls

Night skies are particularly beautiful due to the lack of city light pollution and displays of super intense stars, satellites and shooting stars accompanied us on our watch.

When sitting there alone on watch with just the sound of water rushing past the hull, in the vast infinite darkness, but for the starlight sprinkled across the endless sky, you cannot help feeling closer to a higher power.

Rain squalls can generally be seen on the horizon but often arrive unannounced particularly at night. Wind speeds can change from a leisurely 10 knots to 35 knots in seconds, and keen sailing skills are demanded to control the runaway. They disappear as fast as they come and often sailors have told the tale of soaping up on deck in the rain and then before you are done it's gone. Does leave the decks squeaky clean of salt though.

The Approach

We were sent a weather warning from Race Control as we closed in on our destination, talking of high winds of 45Knots and seas of up to 5m, for which we began preparations.

Great! Day 22 at sea– we have 2 days to go, and we are going to get a “Snot Klap”

Thankfully only 30 knots and steep seas of no more than 3.5 meters were experienced.

In my head I thought, Storm?? This is not a Storm!! Come to Cape Town, we will show you storms!

Cabo Frio is the Headland that you aim for on your Northern approach to Rio, Guanabara Bay entrance.

It is renowned for either storm or no wind, mostly the latter.

We had a great ding dong throughout the race with the old girl Solitaire, Dave Alcocks Compass 47 whom we could never quite catch.

On the last 36 hours, Solitaire ran into no wind at the entrance to the bay.

Great excitement on Serendipity as we edged closer, closing a gap of 100NM down to 38NM.

We were convinced we would catch her!

Then, last night at sea, we suddenly ran out of wind and the rain came down.

Drifting off the beaches of Ponta Negra. We could see the lights and on a lee shore, we were doing 360's with no steerage.

Those few hours of trying to sail in no wind and driving rain was probably my highest stress levels throughout the entire campaign.

In the early hours just before sunrise, we found some wind to take us through the beautiful entrance to Guanabara Bay, Rio de Janeiro we have arrived!

The Finish!

The Sugar Loaf Mountain loomed up in the distance marking the end of our 24 day voyage of 3700NM as we sailed the last few miles with jubilation on Serendipity, looking out for the Committee boat with the RCYC and RIO welcome party which marked the other side of the finish line.

Great excitement with Vitor and Jenny leading the welcome party and all who congratulated us whilst rewarding us with ice cold beers and bottle of Champagne!!

We did it!!

