

17th of May 2009

Beluga Crew rejoices heartily after victory

Herrmann & Oehme now invincible in the race around the world

CHARLESTON. The high-sea sailors Boris Herrmann and Felix Oehme, respectively from Kiel and Hamburg, can already let the champagne be chilled. Just after winning the fourth and penultimate leg of the Portimão Global Ocean Race, they are practically incapable of being overtaken. In the early morning hours of this Sunday (17th of May), the blue and white Class-40 yacht “Beluga Racer” crossed the finish line near Charleston (USA) with a lead of around 150 nautical miles over their immediate pursuers from Chile. Only a most improbable disqualification along the final leg of the regatta around the world, which returns to the starting point Portimão in Portugal this June, could thwart both 27-year-old sailors in the stellar ascent of their sporting careers. Indeed, they now enjoy a very comfortable lead by seven points.

The sun had already disappeared beyond the horizon along the coast of South Carolina, USA, as the “Beluga Racer” – following several windless hours – once again gained speed and steadily sailed along a mild breeze towards the goal of this fourth leg. In the homeland of the two new stars of the German sailing scene, it was in the middle of the night. At 02:49 hours and 47 seconds, to be exact, it was over. And the celebration was just beginning. With glaring red flares in their hands, Boris Herrmann and Felix Oehme stood arm in arm in the cockpit and relished in having achieved the third of their four possible leg victories. In Cape Town (South Africa) as well as in Wellington (New Zealand), they had already won, and in Ilhabela (Brazil), they were beaten merely by a nose.

A champagne cascade followed a beer shower aboard, just as friends and relatives greeted their heroes. “On the one hand, it’s a bit sad that the race has now been decided more or less, but we’re naturally very happy that hardly anything can go wrong anymore,” said the skipper Boris Herrmann, expressing mixed feelings even in the midst of jubilant moments. “Even as the rudder of the Chileans broke in the thrilling duel, they continued to battle in a self-sacrificing manner and even achieved greater speeds than we could reach. That represented a great sporting spirit and the ideal advertisement for high-sea sailing aboard boats which are only twelve meters long.” Critics had viewed the matter rather skeptically, initially questioning the capability of these yachts to thrive in a regatta around the world, but such doubting voices were soon silenced by the facts.

The defeated Chileans, Cubillos and Muñoz, expected to arrive Sunday evening, were actually the first to congratulate the Germans, doing so via satellite telephone. Nevertheless, the congratulations from the homeland followed soon thereafter. “That is a magnificent achievement by our team, one which can’t be praised enough,” commended Niels Stolberg, “the crew kept calm after initially trailing at the start of this leg, and it can now enjoy the rewards of having sailed courageously.” The managing director of the primary sponsor, the project and heavy-lift shipping company Beluga Shipping GmbH, based in Bremen, keenly followed the successful course of the “Beluga Racer” via the internet site www.globalracetracker.com,

whenever possible, and he even praised the defeated pursuers as well. “The Chileans demanded a great deal of our guys and even kept going after their rudder defect. That deserves respect.”

Herrmann and Oehme were still shocked, nevertheless, with respect to an incident which had transpired a day ago, further behind in the field. Michel Kleinjans, aboard the “Roaring Forty” from Belgium, collided with a container ship east of the Bahamas. Fortunately, the solo sailor had a quantum of luck in his misfortune, for he remained uninjured and was able to continue in the competition without external assistance, despite a broken bowsprit and damage along the deck’s edge. Apparently, he had rammed the freighter – instead of it being the other way around. “It doesn’t bear contemplating what could’ve happened as a result,” says Herrmann, “indeed, it was a close shave.” Nonetheless, it proves that decisions are first made along the finish line.

Just two days after the start, the British sailors Jeremy Salvesen and David Thomson aboard the “Mowgli” were experiencing their first material problems along this leg. During an unsuccessful maneuver, a spinnaker became entangled in the forestay and wrapped itself around the masthead. Only after seeking the protective coverage of the Brazilian coast, and thus forfeiting all chances of attacking its way into the duel way ahead, the crew was able to unravel things. On Sunday, it found itself some tow days away from the finish line.

Indeed, this very duel kept the fans in suspense. The Chileans commenced with a superb start and soon sailed rapidly away. However, after 220 nautical miles, the “Beluga Racer” soared on by with maximum speed, even reaching 24 knots (nearly 45km/h), barely 50 meters ahead of the bow of the flaming red “Desafio de Cabo Hornos” and extended its lead additionally by virtue of the scoring gate near Recife. “We’ve discovered a new sweet spot of our boat,” explains Felix Oehme, “with a good beam reach coming from an angle of 100 degrees to the course, we were always disadvantaged. And the pursuers reckoned with it.”

However, the expectations of the pursuers were not fulfilled this time. The Beluga crew cruised with a new sail configuration, namely a gennaker with a reef in the mainsail, breaking one record after another. Thus, the German duo required merely three weeks, nine hours 49 minutes and 47 seconds for distance of 4,770 nautical miles along the fourth leg – even faster than along the very windy legs of the Southern Ocean. Even before the broken rudder, which happened as the “Desafio de Cabo Hornos” struck an invisible object beneath the surface of the water, the Chileans hardly had a realistic chance of attacking the “Beluga Express”.

“A dream has come true,” said Felix Oehme following the swift arrival, “and we’re ecstatic.” The crew had battled hard and gave everything, particularly with respect to increasing their velocity. “We even stowed the toothbrushes on the windward side for the purpose of optimizing the trimming,” the co-skipper explains further. “That is a very moving moment for us and for the entire team,” added Boris Herrmann, “but we’re remaining ambitious and want to win the final leg as well. Being the first to sail into the harbor in Portugal, that would perfect this fantastic triumph.” The start is planned for the 31st of May, the final leg is expected to be approximately three weeks long.

(The end)

NOTICE for editors:

Photographs and professional television images of the arrival at the finish line are available. Should you desire to interview Boris Herrmann or Felix Oehme, please feel free to inform us.

Intermediate status after the 4th leg this Sunday (17. Mai) at 11:20 h:

1. **Beluga Racer**, Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg)
 2. **Desafio Cabo de Hornos**, Felipe Cubillos/José Muñoz (Chile) 101 nm remain
 3. **Mowgli**, Jeremy Salvesen/David Thomson (Great Britain) 364.3 nm remain
- Kazimir Partners**, Lenjohn And Peter van der Wel (South Africa) did not start

Overall ranking in the Portimão Global Ocean Race:

1. **Beluga Racer**, Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg) 46 points
2. **Desafio Cabo de Hornos**, Felipe Cubillos/José Muñoz (Chile) 39 points
3. **Mowgli**, Jeremy Salvesen/David Thomson (Great Britain) 29 points
4. **Kazimir Partners**, Lenjohn and Peter van der Wel (South Africa) 6.5 points