

## **“Beluga Racer” leads before the next scoring**

### **Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme sailing with full speed ahead**

The sailors of the Portimão Global Ocean Race around the world are facing a tense weekend: On Friday (the 6<sup>th</sup> of March), the field of participants was in its final spurt towards the so-called “Scoring Gate”, a threshold allowing each team to accumulate points according to the order of passage, a goal representing approximately one-third of the third leg, a leg spanning the distance of more than 7,200 nautical miles between Wellington/New Zealand and Ilhabela/Brazil. Practically overnight, Boris Herrmann and Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg) aboard the “Beluga Racer” overtook the lead. Currently a dozen nautical miles ahead of the Chileans Felipe Cubillos and José Muñoz aboard the “Desafio Cabo de Hornos”, the German duo now has the best chances of garnering the two scoring gate points to be awarded to the first crew. Nevertheless, after two weeks of unusually little wind, a storm is waiting to greet them with towering rising to heights of ten meters.

Like a monstrous cyclone, a low-pressure area with 930 Hectopascal (hPa) is raging throughout the South Pacific, countering a high-pressure area that is spreading with 1025 hPa. The clash of these two weather patterns is causing extremes in the barometric pressure levels along the regatta route. “In the North Atlantic, you’ll find a weather situation of this nature only every five or ten years”, compares Sven Taxwedel, the Beluga meteorologist. Fortunately, the yachts were relatively slow at the beginning of March, a fate allowing them to avoid the worst moments of the storm. Nevertheless, he forecasts winds of between Beaufort 7 and 8 for Sunday, expecting heavy squalls and sea swells of up to ten meters and more – thus typical circumstances for the region beneath the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel of southerly latitude, home of the “Roaring Forties”.

“The waves are the most dangerous part for us, particularly when they don’t run parallel to the wind direction”, explains Boris Herrmann, the skipper. So-called cross seas (beam seas) force a yacht easily from course, the abrupt stop takes a heavy toll on the material and damages primarily the mast. “Weaker winds in a deep trough can be problematic as well, if a gust emanates from the wave peak shortly thereafter and the crest breaks simultaneously.”

Nonetheless, the high-sea sailors were pleased at reaching boat speeds of more than ten knots and thus making considerable progress. “I can see the Chileans through the portside porthole. They have a smaller headsail than we do, that’s why they’re so slow at the moment”, reports Herrmann during his watch between Thursday evening and Friday morning. “Michel Kleinjans is sailing on the other side behind us, the Brits are further to the south.” It might have appeared to be a short race along the coast, but it was actually the situation after 13 regatta days and 2,000 nautical miles on the high seas. The competing crews ran neck-and-neck, constantly assuring pure thrills.

Co-skipper Felix Oehme was sleeping in his berth, as the 27-year-old standing along the chart table felt a “most unpleasant beam wave” and began to worry about the autopilot’s ability to keep the “Beluga Racer” on course. The wind blew along the border of an occlusion with 18 to 25 knots, namely Beaufort 5 to 6, precisely from the west. “We were running before the wind and jibing every two or three hours”, explained Herrmann further, so that we wouldn’t cross the Ice Gate along 45 degrees southerly latitude.” This border was established by the regatta management for safety reasons. Afterwards, the co-skipper Oehme, born 27 years ago in Luebeck, took over the watch. “The autopilot steers too conservatively during sea swells and is often still unable to stay on course.” Thus, the ability to steer with the “bare hands” is a necessary talent.

Approximately 24 hours prior to the next scoring, the crew analyzed as follows: “Felipe should actually try to stay in our vicinity and keep trusting this speed potential.” The „Desafio Cabo de Hornos“ has advantages by virtue of its very construction and could theoretically sail more rapidly – if her crew optimizes her abilities. Accordingly, the Chileans have no reason to take tactical risks. However, purely from the standpoint of sailing, the Germans obviously have even more advantages. “We were able to press ahead to the lead almost in the last minute, and we naturally want to grab those two points.” In the overall ranking, the “Beluga Racer” has a total of 24 points and is in the lead, running ahead of the South American boat (18.5).

A glance at the Internet Race Tracker ([www.globalracetracker.com](http://www.globalracetracker.com)), which allows you to follow the regatta and view the boat positions with updates every three hours, indicated not only the imposingly close proximity of the competitors after nearly 4,000 km. It also illustrated the wind field of the storm, indeed with many violet markings (45 knots) and even a black arrow representing an average wind speed of 50 knots. That corresponds to Beaufort 10 and is a sobering indicator of hurricane winds along the peak, at any rate south of the Ice Gate.

In the first two weeks following the re-start in New Zealand, the field has experienced two expanded wind calms, doldrums periods in which more than four days of the calculated schedule were lost. After rounding Cape Horn, the southernmost point of South America, light winds may be expected again. And on Friday, the participants still had a total of some 5,000 nautical miles ahead. Thus, the arrival in Brazil will hardly take place before the end of March, perhaps not before the beginning of April. Afterwards, two legs will follow via Charleston/USA back towards the starting point and final destination in Portimão/Portugal, at the end of June.

In the midst of the stubborn calms, everything appeared to be too far away. However, the Beluga Team was fascinated by the situation, hours without a single breeze and absolutely smooth seas. “Our moods were quite good, we were not particularly bothered by it”, claims the crew unanimously, even though the team was trailing by almost 50 nautical miles. “That too is a part of high-sea sailing.” Pancakes, scrambled eggs and other freeze-dried delicacies keep them together as a crew. Herrmann: “The ship is afloat and cruising, we still can’t complain of any damage and we’re optimistic. We’re doing just fine.”

(The end)

Intermediate rankings of the third leg as of Friday (6<sup>th</sup> of March) at 10.20 h:

1. **Beluga Racer**, Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg) 5,080.6 nm remain
  2. **Desafio Cabo de Hornos**, Felipe Cubillos/José Muñoz (Chile) 12.7 nm behind
  3. **Mowgli**, Jeremy Salvesen/David Thomson (Great Britain) 16.4 nm behind
- Kazimir Partners**, Lenjohn und Peter van der Wel (South Africa) did not start.

Intermediate rankings following 2 of 5 legs of the Portimão Global Ocean Race:

1. **Beluga Racer**, Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg) 24 points
2. **Desafio Cabo de Hornos**, Felipe Cubillos/José Muñoz (Chile) 18.5 points
3. **Team Mowgli**, Jeremy Salvesen/David Thomson (Great Britain) 14.5 points
4. **Kazimir Partners**, Lenjohn und Peter van der Wel (South Africa) 6.5 points

High-resolution photos and videos are available in the Mediacenter of the Beluga Offshore Sailing Team at <http://presse.beluga-racer.com>.

The intermediate rankings will be updated every three hours, and you may follow via <http://www.globalracetracker.com>.

Additional background information may also be found via the internet sites [www.beluga-racer.com](http://www.beluga-racer.com) as well as [www.portimaorace.com](http://www.portimaorace.com).

The PR crew of the Beluga Offshore Sailing Team is delighted and ready to answer your questions, including interview questions for the sailors, at all times.