

19th of March 2009

With whiskey and willpower around Cape Horn

Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme climbed the Olymp of high-sea sailors

This Thursday (the 19th of March), at exactly 11 o'clock German time, the two twenty-seven-year-old sailors Boris Herrmann and Felix Oehme, respectively from Kiel and Hamburg, wrote "Cape Horn abeam" in the logbook of the "Beluga Racer" and celebrated yet another milestone in their still young sailing careers. The Germans, as the overall leaders and the winners of the first two legs of the Portimão Global Ocean Race around the world, sailed around the legendary landmark in the southernmost Region of Chile some nine hours after the Chilean natives Felipe Cubillos/Jose Muñoz had done so aboard the "Desafio Cabo de Hornos". Until Ilhabela in Brazil, the destination of this third leg of the five legs altogether, the crews still have to contend with some 2,000 nautical miles and twelve days.

In his personal logbook, skipper Boris Herrmann describes the last hours prior to the emotional moment, a moment regarded by high-sea sailors as the Mount Everest Experience, as well as the ceremony aboard, as their "Beluga Racer" departed the South Pacific and began the journey "back home" in the Atlantic:

Wednesday, the 18th of March 2009

15:00 h: Felipe sent a mail and warned us as to the rocks 'Islas Il Defonso' which are more southerly than indicated on the chart. He ought to know.

16:00 h: Regatta Manager Josh Hall transmits a storm warning along with the recommendation to make a detour around the South American continental shelf due to heavy seas. We decide against the recommendation, hoping to make our passage prior to the severest winds. Anyway, we tend to avoid detours, and we insist of taking photos of us along the Horn, no matter what it takes. We're taking guesses at the strength of the current in the Le Maire Strait, that's because we don't have reliable information.

17:00 h: As I read about the Gaza War in a report in "Zeit", I'm very moved. I'm trying to compare our lives to those of the people facing the bitter reality there. I can imagine that they would regard our adventure as being either senseless or heavenly, at any rate very strange.

20:00 h: We congratulate Felipe already via the telephone. He is some six hours ahead of us. He warns us as to winds with 50 knots coming our way.

21:31 h: Radar echo amplifier recognizes the first signal since New Zealand. Probably a naval vessel. Because the land is some 30 nautical miles away, and the nearest lighthouse at least 50. Beaufort 5. Genoa and a hastily bound reef in the mainsail. I was just cooking pasta. Aldente successful. Firm, not soft. With Bologna sauce out of the jar, Parmesan cheese and some pepper – a culinary treat for us. An albatross closes in on us. He is either hungry or simply curious. With each half-hour, it's getting rougher. Outside, it's grey and greyer with drizzling rain. Below decks, it remains comfortable with 17 ° Celsius. Without heating, it would be below 10.

21:45 h: The wind is chaotically changing it's direction, back and forth by 20 degrees.

With the Bluetooth remote control for our Autopilot, I adjust the course from inside. If it involves changes by more than five degrees, I go out and trim the sails personally.

21:50 h: 993 Hectopascal barometric pressure – low.

22:05 h: Iridium SMS from my friend Sebastian: 'After the Cape, throw out the anchor!' A loyal Motivator.

22:40 h: Felix crawls out of his berth, I inform him as to the latest developments.

23:04 h: It smells like diesel fumes. Another ship in the vicinity???? Quick, radar! Still fog, visibility only ca. 2 nm.

23:20 h: We've reached the continental shelf. Depth 140 m, according to the soundings. The seas are getting calmer. I climb out from behind the splash-guard of the cockpit and watch developments from atop the cabin.

23:30 h: LAAAAAAAAAAND IN SIGHT! For the first time in our lives, we're seeing Chile. A jagged mountain chain with white between the toothed lines and dark clouds. Snow? We're enjoying the beautiful view of the mountain panorama with fresh coffee and milk, typically foamed up thanks to a battery screwdriver. What a feeling! Now, the photo session.

Thursday, the 19th of March 2009

Midnight: In terms of visibility, it's clear towards the north. The snow-capped peaks can be plainly seen. Further towards the west and the east, the mountain chain disappears in haze and fog. A pale, mystical light, just like being in a storm. A touch of pink over the mountains. A blue illumination ahead. Dark gray behind us.

More albatrosses than in the previous weeks. Small ones. It smells like land.

Still 90 nm or estimated nine hours until Cape Horn. We'll probably sail around it in the dark.

01:00 h: Mainsail fully reefed, luffing, wind moving sharper. Now 60 degrees to the true wind. Releasing water from the after ballast tank. Wind decreases to 13 to 14 knots. A pitch black night. No land and no lighthouse in sight. Some hefty blows, as we try to sail on along the backs of waves. Radio interview scheduled for 04:30 h.

02:00 h: Ship's lights astern.

03:40 h: Indeed, the rocks in front of Cape Horn appear to be approximately four nautical miles further to the south, when compared to the chart. A quick doze for the skipper.

04:20 h: New position update. We close in on Felipe by a mile. Distance 78 nm and fastest ship.

04:25 h: First reef in.

04:30 h: Felix and NDR moderator Jaqueline Heemann speaking about Cape Horn and the time of his last shave.

05:30 h: First reef out again.

06:30 h: First reef in again. Autopilot wants to tack again. System starts anew. What's going on?

06:40 h: Autopilot breaks down again.

06:44 h: Third autopilot failure. 'Rudder Drive doesn't respond'. We switch on the reserve pilot. It works. We're battling our way a mile at a time ahead.

10:10 h: Genoa in, jib hoisted.

10:15 h: Lighthouse Cape Horn in sight.

10:20 h: New position report: 80 nm behind Felipe and Jose. Darkness, rain. Land silhouetted in the north. Gusty winds. Aurora starboard ahead. Each of us eats an apple.

10:40 h: The silhouettes of Cape Horn appear in the darkness. We're magnetized. The wind shifts, blowing along the nose. We luff, pulling the sails tightly in. It's gusty, but the sea is flat in the wind coming from the shore. Slowly, the darkness fades.

11:00 h: We have Cape Horn abeam, and we're starting to shoot pictures and videos as well. Notices of the cover of a crate in which we store the photos which at first become dark. I have to grab the big flash and protect the camera against the rain with a garbage bag.

11:30 h: Now, it's time for us! A good gulp of whiskey goes windward into the sea. 'Aberfeldy', a 12-year-old Single Malt Scotch Whiskey. Felix is filming, ich wink and wave at the Cape. A reversal of the previous procedure.

11:40 h: Finally, it's quiet. Each of us opens a can of beer. The rocky shore is already ahead, but land and rocks are visible before and after the Cape passage. It looks like the Lofoten in Norway. Gray, gusty clouds dragging along the fjords. Fantastic. We're thrilled. The telephone is constantly ringing, but it has to wait a minute. We're approaching the rocks in a serpentine manner. It appears to be mild here – probably because we're so excited.

The whiskey and the beer on an empty stomach tend to raise our moods. After nearly four weeks, finally. Land is grand. The landscape is spectacular. It's like an arrival in a regatta destination harbor, only more beautiful. The, it keeps going, and we don't have to go ashore. Class-40-Star Giobanni Soldini advises me per email to transit the Le Maire Strait. We're going so high as possible on the wind, so that we can traverse along a northeasterly course.

14:00 h: The Olymp of the high-sea sailors is in our wake, 300 photos are ahead of us. We're happy and pleased. No one can take these moments away from us.

Intermediat rankings along the third leg, Thursday (19. March) at 16.20 h:

1. **Desafio Cabo de Hornos**, Felipe Cubillos/José Muñoz (Chile), 2.057 nm remain
 2. **Beluga Racer**, Boris Herrmann/Felix Oehme (Kiel/Hamburg) 63,3 nm behind
 3. **Mowgli**, Jeremy Salvesen/David Thomson (Great Britain) 248,9 nm behind
- Kazimir Partners**, Lenjohn and Peter van der Wel (South Africa) did not start