

On Board Spirit of Bermuda with Laurie Fullerton – June 20, 2015

The Spirit of Bermuda team awakened today to a school of dolphins just off the bow, a gorgeous sunrise, fairly flat seas and a nice pace of 7 to 8 knots as the vessel is now 85 miles along into the race. The vessel is on the continental shelf but will soon leave the shelf and head out into the true deep.

“So far, this is just a great way to introduce ocean sailing to people who have never done it before,” said Jim Butterfield, President and CEO of Butterfield & Vallis who is on the early morning watch. “What this is great for, too, is sleeping weather as we are not getting a great deal of rocking motion. It has been ideal conditions so far – especially for the first timers.”

Not only has the weather held, but also the fleet is still within sight of one another as the vessel edges closer to the Gulf Stream. With a variety of factors in play, the Spirit of Bermuda is choosing to sail about 60 miles west of the Rhumb Line in order to take advantage of anticipated conditions in the Gulf Stream that will enable the Spirit to make a nice turn towards Bermuda at a point of sail that favors this vessel.

So far, the weather has been good, with some light air overnight giving way to a steady 15 to 18 knot breeze and a good pace.

As the team from the Spirit of Bermuda includes employees from Butterfield & Vallis, wholesale food distributors in Bermuda, its CEO Jim Butterfield, as well as Spencer Butterfield and the Governor of Bermuda it provides the team with its natural leaders, as well as its captain and navigator. Although each watch is unique, for those on their first time offshore there is something reassuring about listening to the Governor of Bermuda report back from the bow by radio if he sees any passing vessels.

Today, those who were patiently watching the sea were rewarded with the shout that a school of dolphins were racing by the boat. The Governor was at the helm of the boat at that time.

“I have to say that seeing the school of dolphins this morning was quite a sight, “ said the Governor.

One of the great advantages of sailing on Spirit of Bermuda, is the teaching philosophy of the new captain of Spirit of Bermuda Stuart Birnie of New Zealand and crew, as well as the guest navigator Larry Rosenfeld of Marblehead, Mass. Rosenfeld is an ocean sailor and adventurer who brings a lifetime of navigating expertise and strategy to the race.

Rosenfeld conducts weather briefings during each watch, keeping the watch captain and the crew abreast of any changing conditions. He welcomes anyone on board to stand at the navigation station where he patiently details the wind shifts, currents and ongoing location of the other boats. He clearly explains his racing/sailing tactics to the crew and is as clear and concise even though the Gulf Stream can be muddled and tricky. It is an excellent opportunity for the full-time Spirit of Bermuda crew to learn from one of the best in his field.

While the late night watch finished its shift at midnight with the coast of Martha's Vineyard still in view, this morning reveals open water all around. The horizon is populated with a few fishing vessels heading home to New Bedford with their catch and a container ship – along with other Marion to Bermuda vessels sailing a similar course towards the Gulf Stream and ultimately the finish line.

While the team on deck is fulfilling its four-hour watches, the rest of the crew try and catch up on sleep and the Spirit of Bermuda is able to accommodate everyone comfortably. Fortunately, there is a very competent cook on board who keeps everyone well fed with dishes like spaghetti and pancakes. Not a single person on the boat has mentioned anything about being on a diet, and it seems being offshore makes one hungry and although meals are brief between watches, the food is terrific.

“For me, the start of the race was great. We loved seeing the sign on the race committee boat that pointed towards Bermuda. We were able to fire our cannon off from the Spirit as we crossed the start, said Spencer Butterfield, COO of Butterfield & Vallis. “We enjoyed tacking and sailing up Buzzards Bay last night. We really enjoyed sailing up the coast at night surrounded by the mast lights of the fleet, which will likely not happen as we get closer to Bermuda. What is great is that everyone is feeling well and we are excited to be offshore.”