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Turn the Tide on Plastic leads charge as fleet dives south



Leg 7 from Auckland to Itajai, day 1 on board Turn the Tide on Plastic. Dee Caffari leaving Auckland.
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Volvo Ocean Race

Auckland to Itajai, Brazil - Leg 7

An intense start saw the seven-boat fleet - back up to full complement with the return of Vestas 11th Hour Racing - sail straight into a 30-knot easterly just hours after the leg start on Sunday.

Monday has brought little let-up with winds hovering around 25 knots producing similar boat speeds as the teams charge deeper into the Southern Ocean on the 7,600-mile leg.

An opening day lead for Dongfeng Race Team and MAPFRE was cut short when Turn the Tide on Plastic and Team AkzoNobel skirted around the outside of the fleet as it piled into an unpredicted wind hole.

The manoeuvre gave Caffari's crew a slim lead of around two miles on Vestas, with the chasing pack a further five miles adrift.

"Ourselves and Turn the Tide on Plastic just pulled off a nice 'Buffalo Gals' move as the rest of the fleet parked in a cloud," Vestas' navigator Simon Fisher explained, referencing Malcolm McLaren's 1982 hip-hop hit that includes the lyrics 'Buffalo gals go round the outside'.

Meanwhile, Bouwe Bekking's Team Brunel was left scratching their heads as the two teams passed them.

"Wow, what is happening here?!" a tweet from Brunel account asked. "Turn the Tide on Plastic and Vestas 11th Hour Racing is on the highway as we park up. There's supposed to be a 15-knot easterly breeze?"

With the easterly breeze forecast brought on by an anticyclone due to remain in place for several days before backing, the tactics early on is relatively straightforward - dive south as fast as possible.

Only when the wind turns more to the north will the fleet be able to start the curve towards Cape Horn and the heavy weather that lies in wait further down the line.

"For the next three days it should be quite simple," Dongfeng's Kevin Escoffier said. "We're going straight south towards the ice limit, then turning around the bottom of the high pressure.

"Then we've got a front to pass, and it will be a completely different story after that. The forecast is for windy weather, so now we have to sleep, get some rest, and be ready for this part of the race."

For Vestas skipper Charlie Enright, the start of the leg means the resumption of his team's quest for Volvo Ocean Race glory having had to sit out Leg 6 with damage to their boat.

"It feels good to be back on the water," he said. "We're a little on the back foot but I guess that's to be expected. We feel good that we've got another 7,000 miles ahead of us. It's all or nothing - we treat every leg the same. We certainly couldn't try any harder."

Mark Towill, Vestas co-skipper, added: "We've just got to out-work all these other guys. It's just going to come down to hard work and determination. We've got plenty of that."

At 1300 UTC there was a split of just 17 miles from Turn the Tide on Plastic to seventh-placed Team Sun Hung Kai/Scallywag - and with Leg 7 counting for double points, the action is guaranteed to be closer than ever.