



SKIP NOVAK

AS THE VOLVO OCEAN RACE RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS, SKIP IS GLAD TO SEE THE SOUTHERN OCEAN LEG RETURNED TO ITS PROPER PLACE

I was very pleased to see the new course for the next Volvo Ocean Race. Looking at the map graphic, the course line is once again more or less a logical circumnavigation. In previous editions the line that defined the course was a pretty unseamanlike piece of rope, thrown haphazardly across the deck of the world.

It has now been rerun and straightened out, with only a single bight north to Hong Kong on the 'far side of the world'. This should appease the diehard traditionalists of the Whitbread era.

Having said that, they might gulp in their beer when they learn the new course is a staggering 45,000 nautical miles. The Whitbread races were a mere 27,000.

The classic stops are all accounted for: Cape Town, 'Tavern of Seas', is always a given. Frankly there is no practical alternative. Known to the Dutch East India Company as a 'refreshment stop', that description is as

true today as it was then when its ships took on wood, water and provisions.

I for one will never forget Table Mountain looming above a clear horizon when 50 miles out on Leg 1 in the 1977-78 Whitbread race.

Auckland is in and would be a tragedy to ignore given the Kiwis' enthusiasm and support

for the event during all these years. I love the place so much I became a New Zealand resident after the 1989 race on *Fazisi* – but then lost it when I focused on my charter business in Tierra del Fuego.

Fun in the sun

And of course Brazil (if not Rio this time), to recover from the cold and have some fun in the sun, is a must. We were broke in Rio in 1977 on *King's Legend*, but no matter with the carnival in full swing. And now there is the mandatory stop in America at Newport before the finale. After that the rope's end gets messy, tangled up in

European ports to satisfy various commercial interests that evidently cannot be ignored.

Yes, the ports still have leverage. Such was the paucity of entries on all previous recent editions that any semblance to a 'round the world race' had gone by the board. It was more of a regatta that happened to take in the entire planet.

Abu Dhabi's decision not to take part in the coming edition, and there being no other takers from the Middle East, certainly made the impetus to simplify the course that much easier.

Saving the show

More continuity is certainly evident, largely owing to the legacy CEO Knut Frostad left behind. He can be credited with saving the show. The decision at last to go for a one-design was clear thinking and represented a watershed. Recycling the former fleet into the next event was the guarantee. If anyone can build on this situation it is the new CEO Mark Turner, the Svengali of ocean racing management – and he is off to a great start.

What is exciting for everyone, though, is the return to some serious Southern Ocean sailing. This is what always attracted those of us during the Whitbread era. We looked forward to diving south and enduring the thrills and spills. And equally we were very glad when it was all over and we turned that corner at Cape Horn into the relative calm of the South Atlantic. Note that we never had limits on how far south we could go. This will be interesting to address given event management paranoia about routing the course through ice zones.

And while offshore our races were private affairs. It would be fun to imagine if we had been wired up with cameras live to race control, the media and the public, how it would have been received.

Well, I can't really. Much of it would have been censored for one reason or another, with so many beeps for strong and inappropriate language that the narrative would have been meaningless.

I'm sure there will be a few beeps here and there on the internet feeds for 2017 if the Southern Ocean lives up to its reputation – well at least I hope so.