

## Trade wind vibes up ahead



Photo: Bertrand Fourmond

The trade wind is playing hard-to-get. After passing Madeira early this week, the competitors in the Cap-Martinique are eagerly awaiting the associated downwind conditions to propel them towards the finish line. “The wind is being a bit of a diva. There is a fairly rough residual sea state and the boat is rolling around posting slow speeds,” explain Jérôme Apolda and Stéphane Ayrault aboard Echo Mer. As is the case with the majority of their rivals, they’re having to wrestle with the sargassum, a brown seaweed which is wrapping itself around daggerboards and rudders causing the boats to stall.

For a little over 24 hours, Amaury Dumortier and Geoffroy Thieriez (Terre

d'enfants) have been heading the fleet as they make the most of the power of their Figaro 2. Leading the chase is the pairing from Le Havre, Noël Racine and Ludovic Senéchal (FOP France), who are now around ten miles behind. "They've fallen off the pace over the past few hours because they were missing a headsail," explains Jean-Philippe Cau. The race organiser is closely monitoring the performance posted by Régis Vian (École Jules Verne), who's been sailing an absolute blinder. "He's very impressive in solo format. If he continues like that, he may win it like Alexandre Ozon did two years ago," he enthuses. Having just reached the halfway mark in the course, the leaders might well latch onto the trade wind over the coming hours. The first to benefit from these favourable conditions could well get a decisive edge over the next section of racetrack. According to meteorologist Christian Dumard, the first competitors are expected to make landfall in Fort-de-France from 5 May.



## Verbatim

- **Jérôme Apolda and Stéphane Ayrault (Echo Mer)**

It's been a great day of sailing with some more sustained breeze at last. The sun has warmed us up after a night spent trimming the sheets as precisely as possible and constantly helming to shake off this light patch, which we stumbled into yesterday. Our deficit in relation to the leaders is yo-yoing so we're digging deep in the rough seas, which are tough to negotiate as the waves are bigger due to the breeze.

The small depression along our route looks to be panning out. The strategy involves playing around to the north of the system as the wind curls around because there won't be any trade wind to the south... We're planning to gybe at the end of the day to bend around the curve of the depression to starboard.

- **Jacques Amédéo and Brice Tailliandier (Solidarité Paysans)**

So, where's the trade wind...?

The Cap-Martinique organisation team sold us a race with long sessions slipping along in the trades... But where are they? ; )

For the past two days, we've had to link together a series of gybes according to the fluctuations in the wind, which remains rather fluky. There is a perfect synchronisation of manoeuvres, which means we can confidently get a clear picture of all these gybes.

We have cloudy skies, but we don't have the lines of cumulus and magical sunsets synonymous with the trade wind.

All's well aboard. We're making the most of every moment we have as they are still wonderful, and we're well aware of how lucky we are: the sea is beautiful!

Goodnight one and all,

Jacques and Brice

- **Ludovic Gérard (Pure Ocean)**

It's hot! It swept over us in a sudden wave last night so the socks and fleece jacket are gone now. The smallest amount of manoeuvring during daylight hours virtually turns into a sauna. Well, I'm exaggerating a little there, but things are clearly headed in the right direction, even though we're on a course slightly to the north of the rhumb line.

Quite a lot of time is spent in front of a computer trying to get a general understanding of the wind variations in the east so we can make best use of them. Sometimes it works and other times I stuff it up!

There is a whole group of us watching one another and I can well imagine that there are a lot of other racers, like me, lying in wait for the position report times: 12:00, 16:00 hours, etc... We're like teenagers waiting for a school report after a staff meeting! Have I made progress? How much? Why have I dropped back? Why is always the question but I don't always have the answer!

- **Julien Lebas (Objectif Zero Déchet)**

I haven't been very chatty so far so here's some news from on board. All's well. I'm nicely into the swing of things and I've got into a good routine: downloading GRIB files, analysis, tracking the progress of rivals, trimming the boat, cleaning the keel and rudder (due to a huge amount of sargassum), eating and sleeping. The days are just flying by! We had little wind after Madeira with a rather unpleasant residual swell and multiple sail changes because the wind hasn't been very established! It's amazing to see so much sargassum. It's really hot down below during the day so I'm hydrating myself a lot. The weather is giving us quite a bit of work to do, but it's so nice to be racing across the Atlantic with the other boats posting fairly similar speeds.