

'GryphonSolo2 - 2014 Atlantic Cup' [Billy Black](#) [Click Here to view large photo](#)

GryphonSolo2's Joe Harris reports on the leg 1 victory in the 2014 Atlantic Cup.

I am writing to report the good news that we were able to persevere and win Leg 1 of the 2014 Atlantic Cup!

The last 24 hours was quite interesting so I will tell the tale. After getting out to a great start and flying along for 36 hours from Charleston to Cape Hatteras, the wind shut off and we drifted for a bit and then somehow got re-started slower than Pleiad and Dragon so fell from first place to third place and were at one point 20 miles behind Pleiad and 15 miles behind Dragon..... yikes!

Pat and I were pretty bummed as out as our light air performance kind of sucked and we were wondering how we could get back in the hunt. Luckily the wind picked up and then came on very strong out of the Northeast so were hard on the wind in 20 knots of wind and a very nasty seaway that caused the boat to slam mercilessly. We studied the weather carefully on our downloaded GRIB files and ran our routing program 'Adrena' multiple times to choose the best course to NYC and managed to nail the layline from 80 miles out given the persistent wind shift to the East that lifted us and allowed us to avoid the costly offshore tacks that both Dragon and Pleiad had to make as they were further West and bumped into the Jersey Shore. Maybe they were looking for Schnooky or The Boss or The Donald at one of his casinos? Or the very large Chis Christie offering bridge traffic advice?? Not sure, but in any event, that was the difference so we regained the lead and pounded upwind all day, led by extensive turns on the helm hand steering, as the auto pilot could not handle the sea state.

As we approached Ambrose Light at the entrance to New York harbor around 11:00 PM, Pleiad was about two miles back but was gaining ground in the beam reaching conditions. They closed the gap to about 300 yards as we came screaming into the main shipping channels in the pitch black doing about 14 knots in 22 knots of wind- yeehah, yippe kay yeh mother\$@&*%! With Pleiad tight on our hip, we developed a strategy to turn hard right out of the main shipping channel (break right Maverick- break right!) and hoist our A3 gennaker in the downwind conditions and pick our way through the shoals to the Verrazano Narrows bridge. I think Pleiad was caught a bit by surprise and did not follow and we ended up at the bridge about five miles in front of them. It's nice when a plan works out.

So we were cruising the last six miles from the Verrazano Bridge to the North Cove Marina just past the Statue of Liberty loving life and feeling good. Photographer and friend Billy Black came out to meet us and shoot 'the money shot' of the boat backlit against the Statue of Liberty and Pat and I were posing and grinning. As we approached the finish line still under the A3, we got literally about 20 feet from the line when the wind shut off and the four knot foul current began carrying us backwards toward the bridge.

I nearly wet myself..... this could not be happening..... but it was. We found a vesper of wind and sailed up the line again and were again repelled from crossing the line as the wind quit and the tide took over. Unbelievable. We tried many more times- as the race tracker shows- but it looks like the path of a sailor gone insane.... Which was how we felt. Then Pleiad showed up and joined the fun and luckily they met the same fate and then Dragon joined the party and they were stymied as well. So it looked like maybe we were going to have to wait for the tide to turn and drift across the line as we could not buck the foul current with no wind.

Finally, a breeze sprang up just as I had gone below to commit Seppuku (ritual suicide by disembowelment carried out by samurai- it was the only honorable thing to do), and luckily Pat had the patience to hang with it and we steered well upriver of the finish mark and then floated down current to the mark and pulled a wicked U-turn around the mark and just barely poked the nose over to take the gun. God- what a relief. I let out a huge yell and we dropped the sails and watched with interest as Pleiad and Dragon duked it out in an incredibly close finish that Dragon took by a nose. Pretty amazing after 650 miles of racing that it came down to just seconds. A bizarre finish to an offshore distance race and not one I am anxious to repeat.

So we secured the Leg 1 'W', which I am very happy about, as we worked very hard for it. We are now preparing for offshore Leg 2 from NYC to Newport which will start on Saturday at noon. Check out the action at [Atlantic Cup](#) and [GryphonSolo2](#).

Thanks for all the support and encouraging comments- keep'em coming and I will promise to stop whining about light wind!

by Joe Harris

