

SAILING

My four-hour fight to fix the autopilot



SAM DAVIES
SKIPPER ON ARTEMIS

Exhaustion at sea means tough choices, such as eating or sleeping

THERE are so many monumental choices to make every day in a race like the Transat Jacques Vabre. Early on, we had to choose whether to head into the eye of a storm or stay out of the worst of it as much as we could.

We chose the safer and slightly less brutal option, though we still encountered upwards of 45 knots. This, combined with a fairly long list of damage, has meant we have taken a hit with our position on the race track. But we are still in it and there is a certain satisfaction in that.

Another big decision has to be made when you are faced with what to do first: repair things, eat or sleep. If you leave any one of them too long, things can become very bad, so it is something we are always trying to manage.

Yesterday, repairs were top of the list. Our autopilot did a complete wipeout and refused to work. So, as designated boat electrician, I set to work while Sid [Gavignet] helmed, and after four hours of fault-finding and talking to the team in the UK, I traced the problem to the central pilot 'brains' and set about replacing them. And thank goodness, we have a pilot again.

There is a tradition that

autopilots have names and we feel that it is only right that with a new brain, ours gets a new name – I haven't thought of it yet but will get on to that later. Having lost my voice through a bad cold, I have sympathy with the autopilot but I am hoping, with my voice returning, that the autopilot continues to work. Fingers crossed.

With the 40-plus knot winds behind us, we had our first chance to see a sunrise this morning. Sid and I sat on deck together and realised it was the first time we had been able to pinpoint the difference between night and day. A very big moment on board *Artemis*.

Other key moments have also been marked. There have been no new technical problems (which is very good news), and we are no longer slamming along, so have enjoyed some quite deep and recuperating sleep. Much needed, so we are happy.

But back to our small 60ft world of decision-making: whether to sleep more or eat? The repairs, weather work, helming, and manoeuvres yesterday took priority, which meant little time to do either.

Now I am so tired that I am going to jump straight into bed, even though I am starving hungry and I could murder a big bowl of hot porridge...

I will go to sleep dreaming about that and look forward to it when I get up.

British sailor Sam Davies is writing an exclusive diary for the Telegraph as she races in the Transat Jacques Vabre from Le Havre to Costa Rica on her Open 60 Artemis Ocean Racing. Ride the waves with her at telegraph.co.uk and stay updated on her progress.

