



Rick Tomlinson / Volvo Ocean Race

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By Riath Al-Samarrai

It was a stunning result that not even Richard Mason expected, but the crew onboard Ericsson 3 received a further surprise shortly after finishing leg one in Cape Town this morning.

Just moments after the team crossed the finish line at 06:08 local time they were told by Richard Brissius, Ericsson Racing Team's managing director, that their new keel was ready ahead of schedule and waiting yards away on the dock.

"This was a great result on the water, and a really good one off it," said their navigator Aksel Magdahl. "We always said what matters is how we perform, but now it is good to get the penalty off our back."

That penalty was, of course, the reason why the arrival of a sailing crew consisting of eight race newcomers as the third boat across the finish line off Cape Town was rewarded with 4.0 points instead of the 6.0 a team would usually scoop. Had they not fitted a new keel - the existing one was deemed non-compliant by the International Jury before the race started - they would have continued to be docked one point per in-port race, one for every scoring gate and had two deducted from each leg finish. Now, however, that tax will be lifted and the bill which has already accounted for four points will stop growing.

"We are back competing on equal terms with the other teams and it was a happy moment for us," Magdahl added. "We knew it was going to be produced in this stopover, but we didn't think we would get it until four days before the start. They have done a great job to get it here."

Equally great was a result that skipper Anders Lewander attributed to "great perseverance".

They led the fleet in the critical phase between Alicante and the exit of the Strait of Gibraltar, but soon fell to fifth in light winds.

And then, having recovered to lead from Cape Verde, they suffered a sticky Doldrums crossing in the middle of the field and only reached the scoring gate at Fernando de Noronha in sixth.

Irrespective, they battled back again and in holding a more direct route east when Green Dragon gybed south on day 18, they picked up third place.

"We are very proud of that, for sure," said Lewander. "We were so great in keeping going when we had our dips in the Doldrums. The guys just kept going and this is a great achievement."

"It was nice, though, to know we have a fast boat and people who sail the boat well."

Lewander, whose team is currently sixth on the leaderboard with five points, has now set his sights on a top-three finish when the fleet reaches St Petersburg. "We are going to fight for a podium place," he said. "We will continue to learn and we know we can only get better."

"This is a complex sport and a lot of things add up to a good position. I have the greatest respect for everyone in this race and I know it is going to be tough all the way. It will be a very close race from what we have seen."

Mason has seen enough to feel confident going forward. "What a great group of guys," he said. "It was a hell of a trip - a whole race crammed into one leg."

"The guys did a fantastic job. They fought like hell. They were a very strong team unit and they enjoyed every minute of it."

"To arrive third is great, a bit of a surprise really. Hopefully it is a sign of things to come. No question, if we tidy our game out, it (winning a few legs) is very much a possibility."

To do so they will need the right boat and Thomas Johanson thinks they have that. "We have great boat speed," he said. "We pushed it really quite hard, especially to catch the low after Fernando. When we got it we had worse angles than the others but we were just pushing. We pushed hard and felt fine doing that."

"We picked up only a bit of damage to some sails (their A4 tore a couple of days out from the finish) and damaged a furling mechanism, but the boat held up fine."

Magdahl added: "We got some ideas of our strengths, but it is hard to conclude. We went well compared to some boats in heavy stuff (they managed a 540 mile 24 hour