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Then come along to Weather School. Courses are run throughout the year for pilots, sailors, farmers and anyone who needs to know more about the weather. Or, why not take a look at our books and DVD's at <http://www.weatherweb.net/book.htm>



“High to the north, to the south there’s a low, That means the Channel is in for a blow.”

The accuracy of weather forecasts have undoubtedly increased over the past 50-years. The advent of computer technology enables forecasters, and now enthusiastic pilots, sailors (and just about anyone else who are affected by the weather) to have more confidence in those forecasts.

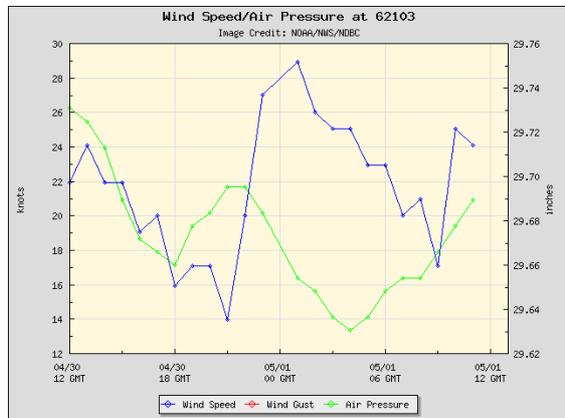
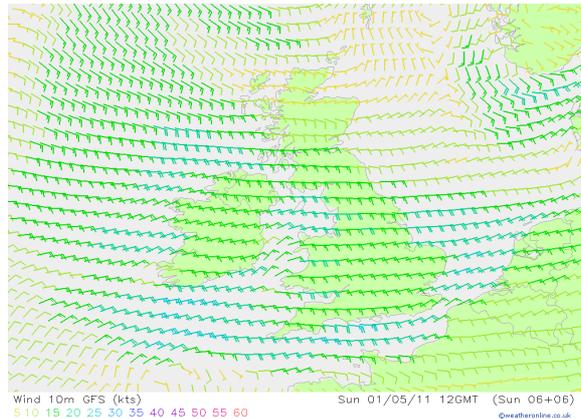
But there are still some occasions when a human forecaster can significantly outperform his computer ‘colleague’.

Last weekend was one of those occasions.

High pressure to the north of the country, and low pressure to the south signals winds from an easterly quadrant. These east winds are bitterly cold in the winter months, but during the rest of the year bring near normal temperatures (although eastern coasts are still cold).

Traditionally we think of winds around high pressure as being generally light. However, when on the southern side of an anticyclone winds are frequently stronger than those forecasts by models, and frequently stronger than those predicted by human forecasters.

Let’s take a look at this weekend. The wind speeds through the English Channel as predicted by the GFS model. 20kts mid-Channel, but then a glance at the actual wind shows 25kt, and an earlier peak of 29kt (the blue line on the graph). The Shipping Forecast for Wight predicted “E-NE 5 to 7”.



So, although the Shipping Forecast attempted to cover itself, the speeds were still underestimated (although to be fair to the Met Office forecaster, speeds close to the southern coasts would have been nearer force 5).

Those of you who have been to Weather School will know that this is one of my ‘things’! The golden rule is if you are on the southern side of an anticyclone (in the Northern hemisphere) always add at least 1 to 2 Forces (5 to 10kt) to the predicted wind speeds.

Better to be safe than sorry!

Simon Keeling