



**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 42
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Front cover:

“Indian File”. John Windibank’s winning photograph in the
1996 photographic competition, Comet Racing category

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Tennyson had a lot to say about "a young man's fancy", but not surprisingly I can't find a reference to an old man's fancy. Well, with spring in the air if not in our steps, and if Tennyson's option is not available, quite a lot of us who have had love affairs with our boats will see them petted and caressed back to full beauty for the coming out season.

Last winter was not a time for the Comet Class Committee to hibernate, it seemed to be a non-stop progression of things to do. We met in early February and sensibly co-opted Stuart Gilder to co-ordinate our stand helpers for the NEC Leisure Exhibition and to generally represent the area. Stuart as always took the problem by the scruff of the neck and shook it into shape and we would like to thank all the many helpers. The exhibition was very enjoyable and Henry Jagers had put together a display of our Photo winners and Andrew provided the boat for us. The London Aly Paly Exhibition really buzzed this year and there where a lot of people looking to buy boats and if they had been available we could have sold a dozen second hand Comets. All the Committee chipped in as usual and Glynn Jung was extolling the virtues of heavy weather Comet sailing on the sea.

Mino

The spectre of the Mino Rig continued through the winter with a fair amount of correspondence flying about on the issue and the Committee took a decision which we hope you will find fair and workable. Mino rigged dinghies are not Comet dinghies, but wishing to encourage sailors who wish to sail with this rig the committee have agreed the guidelines outlined by Norah (page 13) for Minos to participate in our events. Alan has asked me to elaborate on some of the points.

1. The Comet Class events are the two National Championships, the Orbital and Aphelion Trophy events. We do not presume to tell clubs how they should organise their Comet Open events but we have issued guidelines, to inform them of our position on the Mino rigged boats.
2. Mino rigged boats who enter our Championships or Aphelion and Orbital series events, *can* not change their rig during the event.
3. Minos *can* enter Comet events but they are **NOT** eligible to win the National Championship whether they are capable of it or not.
4. Minos who enter Comet events will be provided, by the Comet Class, with their own set of prizes, provided two or more enter the event, and the same entry mementos as other Comet Class entries.

5. Proposals for the AGM may be submitted (Rule 7d) on this or any subject but if a proposal is submitted to allow the Mino rig to compete equally at Comet events a rewriting of the rules will be required.

Noble Marine

Another problem that has cropped up during the year that we have been considering is our remuneration from Noble Marine for Comets insured with them. The majority of the class funds comes via Noble Marine but it seems no one told them that there was more than one Class Association and the Duo Class has received no payments, with all the remuneration coming to us. In spite of our best efforts no one it seems knows what our overpayment was and we have agreed to donate a figure of £100 to the Duo Class in settlement of their shortfall. It would have helped Derek Coleman if the request had been put in writing as verbal agreements do not make for good accounting, but as things stand the Duo Class are happy with the settlement.

Millennium

The class committee also had some preliminary discussions about how the class would like to celebrate the coming millennium. Initial ideas varied from invitation to extended national events and somebody even mentioned a Comet cake but that might have been on another day! Anyway the committee would like lots of ideas and some a bit more original than a Ferris wheel would be nice.

So good luck in the coming season and lets hope its our best so far.

John Windibank. Chairman

(Editor's note: After discussion with John I have typed his exact words on the Mino rig. I am unhappy about the word "can" (used twice, in italics above) because in my dictionary of current English, there are two meanings: "to be able to", and "to be permitted to". The second definition is intended here.)

PERIHELION

This issue of Perihelion has been deliberately delayed until early April to match the deadline for paying subscriptions. If you are reading these words, you have paid, but if not - - - - -

The next issue of Perihelion will be circulated in June 1997. Contributions to me by the end of May please.

Alan Browning, Editor

THE RACING RULES OF SAILING FOR 1997-2000

So, we move towards the Millenium with a new set of racing rules for sailing!

The new rules (NR), effective from April 1997, are certainly reduced in content with much of the current rules' (CR) detail missing but this does not necessarily make them less complex in interpretation. One difficulty of interpretation is the obvious lack of case law in the results of appeals and it will take some time to establish a reference body of such case law. I have seen it reported that a number of current rule appeals have been passed through the new rules without any change in the protest result but this does not necessarily create a precedent.

The original intent of the new rules, published by the IYRU in 1995, included simplification with familiar language, minimising exceptions, fairness and permitting close manoeuvring with a minimum of anxiety. Nobody would argue against these objectives and the rules were also designed to discourage contact, encourage sailing fast and discourage impeding others. I was concerned that the latter would significantly alter the tactical element of our racing although readily accepting the need to avoid any 'bumper-car' mentality.

In reviewing the new rules, the key elements of the intention are provided by what I might call the 'principle' rules of Section B, under the heading "General Limitations", which cover avoiding contact, acquiring right of way and changing course. To understand these 'principle' rules a new definition, Keep Clear, has been added which works in conjunction with the existing one of Room.

Keep Clear:- One boat keeps clear of another if the other can sail her course with no need to take avoiding action and, when the boats are overlapped on the same tack, if the leeward boat could change course without immediately making contact with the windward boat.

The first part is obvious but the second needs explanation. In pressing to see how far the new rules could be taken, a Danish fleet, the Knarrs, chose to keep clear so close to windward of a leeward boat that that boat could not avoid collision, and potential protest, when making any alteration of course at all. Clearly, this was not keeping clear within the spirit of the rules and, hence, the proviso of the second part.

NR14 states that contact shall be avoided if reasonably possible. However, action need not be taken until it is clear the give-way (G-W) boat is not keeping clear or

giving room and the right-of-way (R-O-W) boat shall not be penalised for contact that does not cause damage.

This rule achieves the intention of discouraging contact but it should not be seen as a license for the G-W boat to do nothing and the G-W boat will always be disqualified if there is contact. The R-O-W boat must attempt to avoid contact but only when it is clear the G-W boat is not doing so and, in any case, will not be penalised if there is no damage caused by the contact.

NR15 states that, when a boat acquires R-O-W, she shall initially give the other boat room to keep clear, unless R-O-W was acquired through the other boat's actions.

NR16 states that, when a R-O-W boat changes course., she shall give the other boat room to keep clear.

These two rules achieve the intention of permitting close manoeuvring with a minimum of anxiety and discourage impeding others but., again, should not be seen as a license for a G-W boat to do nothing. The general principle of 'room and opportunity' exists in the current rules but applies for a limited duration and does not relieve the G-W boat of its' obligation to do just that. A G-W boat must always attempt to comply with the rules and the provisos of NR15 and NR16 are purely to ensure it is possible to comply at all, without giving any continuing protection. A G-W boat should make every effort to keep clear of a R-O-W boat and, if unable to do so by virtue of being given insufficient room, then she will be protected by these rules.

It is worth noting that the definition of Room makes use of the word 'promptly', meaning 'done with alacrity', and this should always be the first intention of the G-W boat in meeting its' obligations.

In addition to the 'principle' rules covered above, there are some 'common-sense' rules in Section D aimed at reinforcing the original intentions.

NR20 states that a boat shall keep clear of others while returning to start properly, making penalty turns or moving astern by backing a sail.

NR21 states that a boat shall try to avoid another boat capsized., not in control after capsizing, anchored or aground, or helping a person or vessel in danger.

NR22 states that a boat, not racing, shall try not to interfere with a boat racing and a boat, racing, shall not deliberately interfere with a boat making penalty turns.

All very sensible and, for NR22, it should be noted that a boat making turns should be well clear of boats racing and such boats do not interfere when sailing their proper course.

The rules covered above, while not defining R-O-W in actual racing situations, are critical to a proper understanding of the intentions of the new rules and form the basic framework in which the remaining rules should be understood.

NR10 states, as in the current rules, that a port-tack boat shall keep clear of a starboard-tack boat. Note the limitation placed on the starboard boat by NR16.2 that, on a beat where a port boat is keeping clear, a starboard boat shall not change course if that immediately compels the port boat to change course.

This is similar to CR35 but more specific in that it applies only on the beat, to a boat already keeping clear, and it prevents the R-O-W boat changing course to compel a further, immediate action by the G-W boat. This does not prevent the R-O-W boat changing course where there is no immediate effect on the G-W boat but where there might be some future effect on the G-W boat, subject to NR16.1.

NR11 states, as in the current rules, that a windward boat shall keep clear of a leeward boat while

NR12 states, as in the current rules, that a boat clear astern shall keep clear of a boat clear ahead.

NR13 states, as in the current rules, that a boat, while tacking, shall keep clear of other boats and, as before, when two boats are tacking at the same time, the one on the right is in the right! It is worth noting that, in the absence of a formal definition of tacking, this rule applies from "passing head to wind until on a close-hauled course".

Note also that this rule does not apply to gybing!

Despite representations to the Racing Rules Working Party (RRWP), there is no specific coverage of the act of gybing, and this will require recourse to NR15 and NR16.1, although I believe it to be a correct assumption that a gybing boat will be required to keep clear during that act!

The above four rules cover the requirements of boats sailing their proper course, including tacking, on any leg of the race course.

The next rule covers the requirements of boats sailing either above (effectively, luffing) or below (effectively, bearing away) their proper course on any leg of the race course except the beat. This exception is required because of the difficulty of determining whether a change of course on the beat has been caused by a

windshift, or not, and is partly analogous to the reference to a free leg of the course in CR39.3. NR17 is couched in the terms of what is not allowed as follows:-

NR17.1 states that a boat, establishing a leeward overlap from clear astern within two of her hull-lengths of a windward boat, shall not sail above her proper course during that overlap while the boats are less than that distance apart, unless passing astern of the windward boat.

NR17.2 states that a boat, less than two of her hull-lengths from a boat, on the same tack, that is either a leeward boat or a boat clear astern steering a course to leeward of her, shall not sail below her proper course unless she gybes.

This rule clearly assists the intention of discouraging contact and impeding others but it is not totally prescriptive and the two parts are not entirely compatible. In understanding what is now prohibited, it is also worth considering what is allowed and how this might be interpreted.

For NR17.1, a boat is now allowed to sail above her proper course after establishing a leeward overlap, from clear astern, further than two hull-lengths from the windward boat or when the windward boat itself establishes the overlap. Sailing above a proper course includes sailing up to head to wind and there is no protection, such as the current mast-abeam, for the windward boat. This simply returns the ability of keeping your wind clear to that of long ago and recognises the practical difficulties of enforcing an arbitrary position such as mast-abeam.

Where uncertainty may arise is in the conflicting requirements of allowing a boat to sail above her proper course while still meeting her obligations under NR15 and NR16.1. While the need to allow room to keep clear is incumbent on the leeward boat, the obligation to keep clear is absolute for the windward boat!

For NR17.2, a boat is not restricted in sailing below her proper course in respect of any boat further away than two of her hull-lengths and not at all in respect of a windward boat or a boat, clear astern, steering a course to windward of her.

Having considered the rules relating to boats sailing on the legs of the course, there is still the difficult area of Marks and Obstructions where these rules still apply but may be modified by the two rules of Section C.

NR18 applies for room to pass a mark or obstruction, to be left on the same side(!), when boats are about to pass it until they have passed it. However, it does not apply at start marks, between boats on opposite tacks on a beat or when one will have to tack.

A new definition of Two-Length Zone assists in understanding this rule and is stated in terms of the boat nearer to the mark.

NR18.2 requires the outside boat to give the inside boat room to pass the mark or obstruction. If they remain overlapped when one of them reaches the zone, this rule applies even if the overlap is subsequently broken but not if the outside boat was unable to give room when the overlap began.

If a boat is clear ahead on entering the zone, a boat clear astern shall keep clear even if an overlap is established later.

However, if a boat clear ahead tacks then this rule does not apply and she is subject to NR13.

If there is doubt about establishing or breaking the overlap, it shall be presumed it was not, placing the onus of proof on the boat making the claim.

NR18.3 supersedes the above when boats are on opposite tacks and one of them tacks within the zone. The boat that tacks must not prevent the other from passing the mark or obstruction or cause her to sail above close-hauled and, keep clear if the other becomes overlapped inside.

This rule strengthens the current provision for this situation normally found at the windward mark, and effectively places the responsibility on the boat that tacks to allow the other boat free and unencumbered rights to pass.

NR18.4 requires an inside boat that must gybe, to sail her proper course, to do so no further from the mark or obstruction than needed to sail that course. This is in line with the general concept of not impeding others from sailing the proper course to finish but, in an unfortunate anomaly, the concept has not been extended to a windward mark.

NR18.5, covering a continuing obstruction such as a river bank, modifies the main rule, NR18.2, such that, while passing the obstruction, an outside boat's obligation ends if the overlap is broken and a clear astern boat may establish an inside overlap if there is room to pass between the other boat and the obstruction.

Remember that, for the purposes of NR18, the definition of a boat as clear astern or ahead is independent of tack.

Where there is a requirement for a close-hauled boat to make a substantial course change to avoid, rather than pass, an obstruction by tacking, NR19.1 supersedes NR18.

If the boat cannot tack, and avoid another boat on the same tack, she shall hail for room and give the hailed boat time to respond before tacking herself.

The hailed boat must either:-

tack as soon as possible, in which case the hailing boat must do likewise or immediately reply "you tack" and give room when the hailing boat immediately tacks.

NR19.2 removes this right at start marks, when approaching to start, or marks that the hailed boat can fetch.

Despite representations to the RRWP, rule 19 makes reference to "as soon as possible" and "immediately" which, given the stated requirement to allow time to respond in the first place, should be regarded as synonymous and would, I believe, have been better if stated consistently.

These cover the whole of the new rules on the race course and, clearly, are less complex to read than the current rules. We shall find out whether they are less complex in practice and I'll finish with a table of current rules that are not specifically stated.

	Current rules	New Rules
35. b. 1	assuming course to start	Prohibited by 16.2
35. b. 1	rounding a mark	Prohibited by 16.2
38.1	starting, above close-hauled	Allowed subject to 17.1
38.2	starting, luffing slowly	Allowed subject to 17.1
42. a. 1	starting, windward of course	Allowed
42. a. 11	starting, above close-hauled	Allowed
42. 1. e	gybing, with luffing rights	Prohibited by 18.4
42. 2. b	luffing above close-hauled	Allowed
43. 3. a	room after starting	Allowed
43. 3. b	fails to fetch	No penalty

In covering the new rules, I have assumed a good working knowledge of the current rules and used the draft new rules issued in the Autumn and I do not know of any alterations that may yet take place before they become effective.

If anybody has any comments, queries or corrections to my views I would be very pleased to receive them for consideration and., in particular because of the lack of case law, I would be grateful for any protest queries which arise once racing starts under the new rules.

Keith Lamdin. (Comets 241 and 55)

LOTTERY NUMBER 254

I am one of those members who 'won' the lottery in Perihelion No 37. At long last I have decided to claim my reward.

I bought my Comet dinghy in December 1988 when I was 69 years old in the hope that it would be lighter to launch and recover than the Heron which had served me well for 25 years. I had missed the demonstration by Dinghy Leisure at the club, so when making my choice I relied chiefly on what I read in the brochure. Let me say at once that I have enjoyed sailing in my Comet, and what I now relate concerns difficulties that I have encountered.

The launching instructions tell one to hook up the sail before going on the water. This is possible if the wind is off-shore, but as soon as the boat is on the water one has to sail away leaving the launching trolley on the slipway for someone else to retrieve. Tying up to the jetty may be possible for a short time but other boats quickly come alongside and make getting aboard again over the pointed end very difficult. My solution is to leave the sail wrapped round the mast and paddle to nearby shallow water where one can fix the outhaul and sail away when ready. If, however, the wind is on-shore launching with the sail set is impossible, and to get away from the shallows requires a self-sacrificing friend to stand at least knee-deep in the water, to hold the prow until the sail is set and I am aboard, and then to give an almighty shove away from the shore. We sail on the Thames above Oxford so the alternative method is to paddle over to the opposite bank, but this is not easy in a strong wind and I have often been unable to make it using a praddle.

Similar problems occur when returning to a lee shore. I have tried to release the sail by turning into the wind but before I can get the hooks out of the cringle the head pays off and the boat is sailing again. So now I always run up on the weather bank, furl the sail there and drift or paddle back to the club jetty.

Needless to say I have capsized a few times and I have been greatly encouraged to read that others have had trouble righting and reboarding their Comets. I have now given up trying. If the safety launch is not nearby I swim and push the boat towards the bank until I can get my feet on the bottom. After that it is fairly easy, but I would never go out on deep open water without a safety boat in attendance.

So what do I really want? The new Mino rig attracted me at first. but I suspect it still has all the problems posed by a sleeved sail. I think I should like a Mino mast with a pulley block at the top, and a sail with eyelets in the luff. Then I could lace the sail to the mast, attach a halyard to the peak and hoist or lower it at will. And while we are about it why not add a pair of reefing cringles and a line of reef

points? Of course it would not be a Comet any longer, but I reckon I could potter about in it until I reach 80.

Ted Painting (Comet 254, Medley S.C, Oxford)

(Thanks Ted for your contribution. And for others in the lottery list who have not written in yet, these pages are still open to you. Editor)



Photo competition 1996, 1st prize, Comet fun

Robin Ballam at the Mudeford Tiduals, 1996. Henry asks (page 16) “what is he trying to do ? “ I think you will find the answer if you look at Margaret Hylton’s video of the tiduals at Hampton in 1994, where Robin carried off the veteran’s prize. In it there are close-ups of Robin rounding the gybe mark, and after the gybe you balance the boat - - - I’m right am I not Robin ?

RE-INTRODUCING . . . TAPLOW LAKE S.C.

LIFE BEGINS AT 40?

No, not a new club with a Comet fleet but a re-naming of one well known to Comet sailors who support Open Meetings. After 40 years **the ICI Slough Sailing Club** has changed its name to **Taplow Lake Sailing Club**.

The change of name comes exactly 40 years after a few sailors from ICI plus a nearby resident recognised the potential of a gravel pit which was due to be filled in and managed to get it retained as a lake for dinghy sailing. Initially the pit was still being worked in one corner but relations between workers and sailors were friendly enough. Facilities were spartan, the first 'clubhouse' being an old barn in three sections of which two were used as a changing room and dinghy store with the third storing vintage cars for someone else; these disappeared in circumstances which are unrecorded. The first 'luxury' was a corrugated shed with a trough for use by the men and after complaints by the ladies a small privy appeared at the end of the barn. As to the sailing, there were no wet suits or buoyancy aids even in the winter hypothermia had not been invented!

The first proper clubhouse was an old prefab house erected by members. It was once used for a wedding reception for two members who were seen off in their Enterprise before the afternoon racing and sailed across the lake to a waiting car. The club was then principally an Enterprise club, the Heron chosen at the start never having taken off. We still have a thriving Enterprise fleet and the other adopted classes are Laser, Miracle, Topper and Comet, the latter being the most recent. Pursuit racing has been the basis of our series racing for many years but as an experiment the summer series this year is being run on a handicap basis. Over the years the lake has matured well so that it is difficult to see it as an ex-gravel pit and we now have a new clubhouse of which we are proud plus extended boat pens.

Times have changed in other ways and the ICI employee membership is heavily outnumbered by the non-ICI associate membership. We remain a section of the ICI Slough Recreation Club and are very grateful for the support given over the years by ICI. However, like most clubs, we are keen to build up membership. It is thought that the previous name has deterred some potential members who may not have wanted to be a part of a works club even though the number of works members is now very low. We hope to find we are right.

Our Comet fleet continues to expand (now 12) but slowly and we anticipate that our members, including Alex Reeve, the National Champion, who have been

attending the Open and Championship Meetings will continue to do so. As a passing thought, how many other clubs can claim that one-third of their Comet fleet members compete regularly at Open Meetings and also sail regularly in the series racing at their clubs?

Finally, an early invitation to the first Comet Open under the name of the Taplow Lake Sailing Club on Saturday, 14th June.

Mark Taylor Comet Fleet Captain, Taplow Lake S.C.

COMMITTEE NOTES

Use of the Mino rig at Comet events

The use of the Mino rig has provoked considerable discussion within the class. Your Committee reviewed all the arguments at a recent meeting and has issued the following guidelines:

Although the Mino rig detracts from the concept of one-design racing, the Association would not want to discourage young and lightweight sailors from using the Comet hull.

As there are only a few Mino rigs in use, the Committee agreed that:-

- they may join Comet events, with their own prize structure if more than one starts
- competitors will not be allowed to change rigs during a competition
- Minos will not be eligible for national prizes
- Minos will be eligible for qualifying mementos
- CCA will keep a record of anyone wanting to sail a Mino throughout a series, to ensure that they receive the appropriate memento

Proposals for the 1997 AGM

The Annual General Meeting will take place at the Nationals Championships in August. Proposals to be considered at the AGM must be submitted to the Secretary at least four weeks before the meeting.

Please note that the Secretary has not moved house, but her address has changed:

Mrs Norah Gould,
32, The Dell,
Kingsclere,
Hants RG20 5NL

Open meeting results and reports

Phillip Hossell is now responsible for keeping the open meeting results and working out the results of the Aphelion and Orbital competitions. So please send your results to him (his address is on the inside of the front cover).

There is no change to where you send your meeting report:

Yachts & Yachting, 196, Eastern Esplanade, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 3AB
Telephone: 01702 582254 Fax: 01702 588434

Send your report to Alan Browning if you want it in Perihelion too.

Boat insurance

If you insure your boat through Noble Marine the Comet Class Association receives a commission. Information on Noble Marine is on page 40 and proposal forms are available from the Secretary and Treasurer.

Photography Competition

Details of the 1997 photography competition are given opposite.

Macmillan Mile

Macmillan Cancer Relief are seeking support for their fund-raising scheme to "sail a mile", surf a mile" or "cruise a mile", during the week of 10th - 18th May. This is supported by Sunseeker International Ltd and they are asking RYA Club Members to hold a mile challenge race in that period to raise money by sponsoring or donations.

For details and free promotional pack, ring 0171 887 8270.

Norah Gould Class Secretary

1997 PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Once again - Please send us Your Photos!...

Once again, the Comet Class Association invites its members and friends to submit Comet photos for the annual Photographic Competition. Winner's and runner-up prizes will be awarded in each of two categories: "**Racing**" and "**Fun**". Use your imagination and these could cover anything provided there is some connection with Comets or Comet people! There are cash prizes and you may also have the satisfaction of seeing your work on display or in print.

HOW TO ENTER:

1. Entry is open to members of the Comet Class Association (CCA), their families, and friends. People invited to be on the Judging Panel will not be eligible for the prizes!
2. Each entrant may submit any number of photographs to be judged for each of the categories "**Comet Racing**" and "**Comet Fun**".
3. Photographs must have been taken between 1st September 1996 and 15th September 1997.
4. **Entries must be received by Henry Jagers on or before Monday 22nd September 1997.**
5. Entry is free!
6. Photographs should be submitted as prints (colour or b&w). Please do not mark the photos in any way although annotation by means of 'Post-It' slips would be appreciated and is recommended. Photos must be packed to ensure their receipt in good condition. Negatives or transparencies should not be sent **but should be available on request** at a later date. Entries remain the property of the entrant but the CCA can accept no responsibility for lost or damaged photographs. Reasonable efforts Will be made to return entries that are accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or stamped return label.
7. The CCA shall have the right to use and publish any of the entries without fee and in whatever form it deems appropriate, in Perihelion, at exhibitions, and in any other displays or publications for the benefit of the Comet Class.

PRIZES:

1. The Judging Panel will be appointed by the CCA Chairman.
2. Each category will have a winner and a runner-up.
3. Each winner will receive £ 15 and each runner-up £ 10.
4. Names of winners and runners-up will be published in Perihelion.

ADDRESS FOR ENTRIES: All entries to be sent to:

Henry Jagers, *Kingswood Riggs*, Moira Road,
Shellbrook, Ashby de la Zouch, LE652TU 'phone 01530 563030

● RESULTS OF PHOTO COMPETITION 1996

Thank you to everyone who entered last year's competition. We were pleased to receive many more photos than in the previous year and the judges had much fun and not a little difficulty in picking the winners!

You sent us a good range of subjects and styles. These included some excellent racing shots in both light and very strong conditions, fun shots of Comets apparently getting into all sorts of problems, photos of people receiving prizes or simply enjoying themselves, and some really artistic compositions - even verging the abstract in one case, but with a Comet in there somewhere. Let's have even more from you this year!

The winners were:

Comet Racing

1st John Windibank (yes, our Chairman, but he deserved it, honestly). This is an excellent light weather racing scene to which John gave the title "Indian File". It depicts Derek Coleman leading the race at the Sutton Bingham open meeting. It is, quite simply, a lovely picture (and Derek thinks so too!). It's on the cover.

2nd Sue Antonelli. Sue, a friend of Heidi Dodd, was a spectator at the Glossop Nationals which, as many of us remember to our cost, were wet and windy to say the least! (But a very enjoyable weekend for all that). She sent in a number of very good pictures but we chose this dramatic one because it seemed to sum up the event so well and because I saw some potential in it for publicity purposes. Indeed I hope you will have already seen it used as the basis for our Yachts & Yachting advert.

Comet Fun

1st Margaret Hylton. Thank you Margaret for your continued interest in the class! Your picture of Robin Ballam at the Mudeford Tidal Championships was published in Perihelion last autumn. We liked the photo and we like Robin, but what is he trying to do? (Editor's note: You will find this photo again on page 11 and I have offered an explanation).

2nd Liz Hossell. I'm not sure where this was taken, Arden, perhaps? Although the Comets are obviously racing or at least milling around for the start, the picture was judged in the "Fun" class because...well sometimes you've got to laugh!

I hope many of the entrants, not just the winners, will have seen their photos on display at the 1997 Birmingham and Alexandra Palace shows. Thank you all again, good photos are always needed for both Perihelion and for wider Class publicity.

Henry Jagers.



2nd prize, Comet racing



2nd prize, Comet fun

EDITOR'S NOTES

Have you got your new racing rules to hand? For in this issue we have a 6-page article by Keith Lamdin to help you understand the changes. The new rules are rather different from the old and reading Keith's article is a must for all of us.

There is one article from the "lottery" this time, from Ted Painting telling us about some of his problems. If you would like to reply, through me, I could print your contribution in the next issue.

Discussion on the Mino continues on page 39 with, at my request, more thoughts from Tony Thomas.

On the "Talking to . . ." articles I am going round again. The very first one was with one of our best sailors, Jake Sutton, and who better this time than **Mark Wilkins**, who snatched the Kingsmead open meeting trophy, the Eastern Aphelion trophy and the Orbital trophy in one fell swoop by sailing at his best in the very last race of the 1996 season. How's that for sailing under pressure! The next interview is also planned, with **Keith Lamdin**, I am looking forward to that. Keith was of course the first chairman of the Association, editor of the first 12 issues of Perihelion and National Champion in 1986.

Thinking of topics for future articles, two ideas come to my mind, sailing clothing and views from younger members. Newcomers to the Comet may welcome comments on clothing. For example, I was surprised when all the best people descended on my own club, Frensham Pond, for our first open meeting at the end of June last year. My own inexpert view of the conditions was that the temperature was sufficiently high that only light clothing was necessary, but many sailors were dressed in wet suits and overalls - I wondered why. My interest in hearing from young Comet helms is simply that many of the articles I get are from older people and only Paul Hinde and David Gilder have represented the younger element recently. If the entries at the Glossop Nationals are anything to go by, there **are** more older Comet sailors (there were 12 veterans compared with just 3 juniors).

There were two errors in issue 41 you can correct for me, page 19 was labelled 13 and our Secretary's address is 32, The Dell, Kingsclere. Sorry about those.

Progress on the re-issue of Perihelion articles is given below.

Alan Browning, Editor

RE-ISSUE OF PERIHELION ARTICLES

By the time you read this I will have ready four booklets containing re-issues of certain Perihelion articles, as suggested in issue 41. In the interests of speedy distribution, no re-editing has been done. This means that in some of them some passages will be “dated”, reflecting the particular issue in which they appeared, but the full references are given. To make the articles by Errol Edwards and Keith Lamdin more intelligible I have included Errol’s earlier article and excerpts from Keith’s earlier articles. Requests to me please.

The booklets are:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Booklet 1: “The Comet for really raw beginners” | (4 articles, 26 sides) |
| Booklet 2: “Sailing technique articles” | (13 articles, 38 sides) |
| Booklet 3: “Talking to . . . articles” | (6 articles, 44 sides) |
| Booklet 4: “Fluid flow” | (4 articles, 13 sides) |

Regarding the cost of the booklets, as I print straight from my computer (without commercial photocopying), most of the cost is postage. My “Raw beginner” booklet costs me about £1, including all postage. The “Technique” booklet and the “Talking to . . .” booklets are about 50% thicker and the “Fluid flow” booklet is 50% thinner. A simple scheme seems to me to be:

Single booklets	posted £1	delivered by hand 50p
All four booklets	posted £3	delivered by hand £1-50

(I don’t expect to do any special travelling to “deliver by hand”!)

I plan only to cover my costs and if I inadvertently make any profit it will be passed to the Association. That price will cover not only envelopes and stamps but also paper (which I seem to buy very frequently, and I waste a certain amount doing drafts). This also includes an allowance for the printer toner (every 6 months or so, a £50 expense!).

I am also being encouraged by the Committee to reprint in the same way, for new members and novice sailors, two booklets containing the five “Sailing your Comet” and the four “Racing your Comet” articles by Keith Lamdin. The more professionally produced booklets already planned by the Association will still be circulated to all members in due course.

Alan Browning, Editor

COMET CLASS OPEN MEETINGS



1997

Date	Club	Area	Contact	Telephone
Sat 19 April	Shearwater	WEST	Nic Cross	01373 822258
Sat 26 April	Fishers Green	EAST	Peter Jones	01582 460731
Sat 3 May	Sutton Bingham	WEST	Gordon Parker	01458 223058
Sat 10 May	Chester	NORTH	John Edwards	01829 781234
SUN 11 May	Crawley Mariners	EAST	Diana Thompson	01737 552482
Sat 17 May	Glossop	NORTH	Stuart Gilder	01457 861452

Sat/Sun INLAND CHAMPIONSHIP 24/25 May STAUNTON HAROLD S.C. John Orchard 01283 701285

Sat 7 June	Chipstead	EAST	Roger Norman	01814 628739
Sat 14 June	Taplow Lake	SOUTH	Mark Taylor	01628 602663
Sat 21 June	Frencsham Pond	SOUTH	Geoff Sutton	01420 475918
Sat 28 June	Merthyr Tydfil	WEST	Mark Govier	01222 778459
Sat 19 July	Combs	NORTH	David Hughes	01614 277280
SUN 20 July	Aylesbury	SOUTH	Dave Timpson	01494 563127
Sat 2 August	Mudeford	SOUTH	Peter Reed	01202 477281
Sat 9 August	Cotswold	WEST	Roger Edwards	01454 313306
SUN 17 August	Seafarers	SOUTH	John Glover	01329 665408

Fri-Sun NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP 29-31 August HAMPTON PIER YACHT CLUB Geoff Gambrill 01227 361156

Sat 13 Sept	Littleton	EAST	Martin Vinson	01483 38149
SUN 14 Sept	Arden	NORTH	Clive Marlow	01684 562808
SUN 28 Sept	Pingewood	WEST	Mark Gale	01189 415829
Sat 11 October	Redsmere	NORTH	Steve Heyes	01625 583290
SUN 19 October	Kingsmead	EAST	Geoff Kempton	01735 885782

TRAINING DAYS

Sat 10 May	Crawley Mariners Sailing Club	Diana Thompson	01737 552482
Sat 27 Sept	Pingewood Sailing Club	Mark Gale	01189 415829

Orbital Trophy

Qualification for the Orbital Trophy will require attendance one championship and meetings in at least two of the four areas. Six events to count, ties will be decided on the results at the National or Inland Championships.

Aphelion Trophies

Four Area Trophy events will be held this year
Qualification requires attendance at 3 events within an area.

COMET CLASS ASSOCIATION

APHELION TROPHIES 97

WESTERN AREA

Shearwater
Sutton Bingham
Merthyr Tydfil
Cotswold
Pingewood

Three events are needed to qualify and the best three results from the five available, will count. Ties will be decided by discards or the last head-to-head result.
Prizes will be presented at Pingewood S.C. on 28th September and will be awarded to all Qualifiers

EASTERN AREA

Fishers Green
Crawley Mariners
Chipstead
Littleton
Kingsmead

Three events are needed to qualify and the best three results from the five available, will count. Ties will be decided by discards or the last head-to-head result.
Prizes will be presented at Kingsmead S.C. on 19th October and will be awarded to all Qualifiers

NORTHERN AREA

Chester
Glossop
Combs
Arden
Redsmere

Three events are needed to qualify and the best three results from the five available, will count. Ties will be decided by discards or the last head-to-head result.
Prizes will be presented at Redsmere S.C. on 11th October and will be awarded to all Qualifiers.

SOUTHERN AREA

Taplow Lake
Frensham Pond
Aylesbury
Mudford
Seafarers

Three events are needed to qualify and the best three results from the five available, will count. Ties will be decided by discards or the last head-to-head result.
Prizes will be presented at Seafarers S.C. on 17th August and will be awarded to all Qualifiers

INTRODUCING . . . STAUNTON HAROLD S.C.

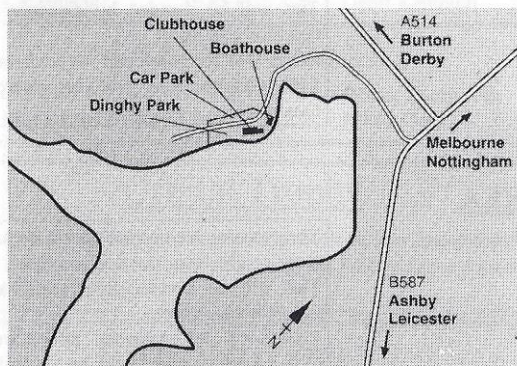
Staunton Harold Sailing Club is proud of its reputation as a friendly, family club. It was founded in 1974 and enjoys the use of 90 acres of sailing water at Staunton Harold reservoir. Enviably located within an area of renowned natural beauty and with the clubhouse providing perfect panoramic views over the entire water, the club is perfectly situated to ensure an enjoyable day's sailing.

The facilities of the clubhouse complement the superb sailing environment. Light snacks and hot meals are served from the well-equipped galley, whilst liquid refreshment is available from the fully stocked bar. There are full changing room and hot shower facilities.

Throughout most of the year, there is leisure sailing and, for the competitive minded sailor, class and handicap racing is organised for the weekends and Wednesday evenings. The club also hosts the popular 'Frostbite' series of races held during November and December. The main dinghy fleets sailed are Laser, Enterprise, GP 14, Fireball, Mirror, Miracle, Solo and Topper. There are at present 6 Comets. There is a very large and easy launching area from the lawns when the reservoir is full and hard sandy beaches if the water level is low, plus two concrete slipways. Rescue boats are stored in the boathouse and are always operational when sailing is in progress.

The club is an RYA recognised teaching establishment.

A varied programme of social events, ranging from barbecues to dinner-dances, rock and roll to folk music, ensures that there is more to sailing than just sailing a boat!



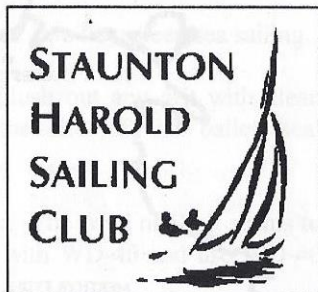
(Grid Reference: Map 128 SK 377241)

INLAND CHAMPIONSHIPS

Saturday & Sunday 24th and 25th May 1997

Staunton Harold S.C. is proud to host the Inland Championships this year and as fleet captain I will try to give you all of the information about this event.

We have 6 Comets at SHSC and hope to attract many more when the word gets around the East Midlands area that this small single-hander is the best thing since sliced bread.



On the Saturday, we share the water with a Solo open meeting and the first of our three races will start at 11.30 am, briefing 11am. The first of the races on the Sunday (just for Comets) will start at 10am and the second race will finish at 1.30 to 2 pm, when SHSC has the use of the water for their 50+ boats fleet racing.

To find us: The Grid Reference is: Map sheet 128, SK 377241 and there is a clear sketch map of the local area on the enclosed meeting advertisement. We are approached through a Severn Trent visitors area, just follow the signs to the club. The clubhouse telephone number is 01332 862067.

Accommodation: We shall be happy to accommodate any tents, caravans or camper-vans on our premises, free of charge, on the Friday or Saturday evenings - please inform me if you intend to arrive on Friday evening because we have two locked gates which need opening. If you ring me I can send you a list of B & B and pub accommodation (Home telephone: 01283 701285).

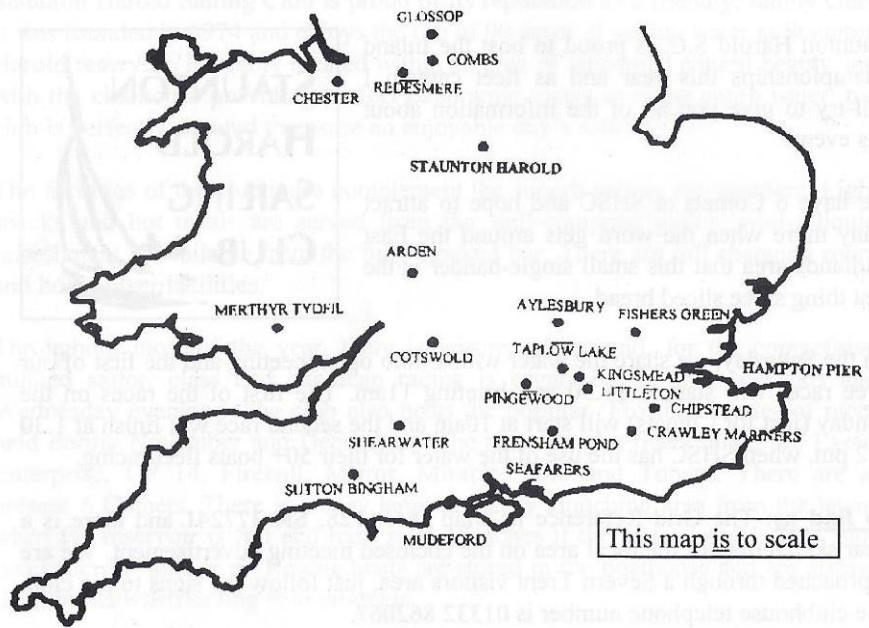
Entry form: There is no entry form for this event. We are planning for 30 - 40 Comets and the entry formalities will be done on the Saturday morning. Please pay the entry fee then. There will be no need to book meals beforehand.

I am looking forward to seeing you all and hope we have fantastic weather conditions for this event.

John Orchard (Comet 619) Tel: 01283 701285

P.S. I am told there are 13 pubs in Melbourne village, only 15 minutes walk away, and also the finest Indian Restaurant in the area. Just the job for sailors!

● OPEN MEETING LOCATIONS



● ZERO MAINTENANCE --- BUT

The Comet really is a low maintenance boat but, as the new sailing season approaches, there are a few simple tasks which will ensure enjoyable sailing throughout the year.

Tools required: a medium size screwdriver and a can of WD-40 or similar fluid.

1. Check the screws are still tight, particularly those securing the rudder fittings to the transom and the 3 blocks on the deck by the mast hole. **DO NOT OVERTIGHTEN.**
2. Check the mast bungs, particularly the hard nylon bung at the bottom of the lower mast, are secure.

3. Check for gel-coat chips and minor knocks. If the gel-coat is missing, cover the damaged area with a PVC tape to keep the water out until you have time to get and use a gel-coat touch up kit.

4. Wash the ropes thoroughly in mild detergent. There is nothing worse than old hard rope to spoil your sailing. New ropes are readily available.

5. Ensure all the blocks still turn freely, particularly if you have been sea sailing.

6. Check the self bailer is operating smoothly. Flush out any grit with clean water. WD-40 applied regularly will extend the life of the bailer seal considerably.

7. Check the rudder wing nut still clamps the rudder. The wing nut bolt seems to collect corrosion inside the rudder blade. Free it with WD-40 and use WD-40 regularly to keep it free.

8. Clean up the boat - it makes you feel good (when it's done). Put a water hose down the mast hole and flush out the debris. The anti-slip can be cleaned with detergent and a nail brush. You can use "T-cut" or similar to restore the shine and lustre to the deck and hull.

9. Finally, you can clean the sail, but not in the washing machine or in the bath (well you can but - - -). The best method is to lay the sail on the patio and rub mild detergent in with a soft brush. Leave it for an hour or so and then thoroughly hose it off. incidentally, if you have covered the top of the sail with mud (when sailing?) don't pull the whole mast through the sail sleeve when de-rigging. Get someone to help you and take the top mast section out from the top of the sail. This avoids the near-impossible task of removing mud from the middle of the sail sleeve.

Have a good year.

For help, advice or repairs call 01494 863082 any (reasonable) time.

Barrie Hylton (Dinghy Leisure Services)

(This is a reprint of the article which Barrie wrote three years ago for Perihelion issue 30. It seemed an appropriate time of year to reprint it to aid members who have joined since then. Editor)

● METEOR TROPHIES ?

It's amazing what can come out of the blue in the "Talking to . . ." interviews. Here is what happened after I thought my chat with Mark Wilkins was over. I report the conversation to show how a trophy idea arose and was thought through and many of the possible snags considered. It still seems a good idea. Here it is.

Mark Wilkins: I don't think that idea in Perihelion 40 (page 14), of a pursuit race for the last race of an open meeting, is a good one. It would spoil my racing. But your idea to exclude people who are in the prizes is a good one. **You could perhaps have a trophy for a category of people who have never finished in the first three in any open meeting.** It could be a special event at open meetings in addition to the normal prizes which are often won by people who do not particularly cherish them. I've got lots of trophies and they invariably end up in the loft, I'd much rather win a bottle of wine. I write down where I come in events in my "captain's log", that's good enough for me.

Alan Browning: To do that you would need records going back a long way, and I haven't got that.

Mark: You don't need that, on the entry form people could tick in a box labelled "I have never finished in the first three overall at a Comet open meeting and wish to participate in the special event".

Alan: I see a flaw, good sailors who have just come into Comets.

Mark: Somebody who is obviously an expert, who for pride reasons doesn't want to participate, could opt out. If they didn't they would probably win it just once, they would probably soon get into the "top 3" anyway.

Alan: All the races would count in the usual way for the special event, not just the last race and the highest placed person in the reduced category at the end of the meeting would get the prize.

Mark: Yes, at an open meeting the middle-of-the-fleet sailor would look around and say "there's 20 people here today, but 8 of them don't count for me, I'm racing against the others". **The purpose of the special event is to encourage Association members to go to open meetings, so only members should be eligible,** and that would reduce the opposition further.

Alan: How about the name “meteors” for those eligible. My encyclopaedia tells me that they are small particles of dust that burn up in the Earth’s atmosphere and some become visible when the Earth passes through the tail of a comet.

Mark: Yes, that seems a good name, something smaller than a comet that doesn’t signify inexperience or novice status. The great thing is that everybody knows from the start who they’re against. If I were in the category I’d like it because it wouldn’t be dependent on what happened in the first and second races, from the start of the day I’d know who I was racing against in the special event.

Alan: You might be happy with a bottle, but many middle-of-the-fleet sailors may have been struggling for years to win something.

Mark: I think there should be a nice trophy for the winner of the main event, then say a bottle of wine each for the 2nd and 3rd overall, and then for winner of the the special “Meteor” competition, a nice plaque or something similar. I don’t think anybody will have a problem with that. A problem might be the same person winning it frequently.

Alan: I think the “Meteors” will be a group who have no cream in it and the same person winning often is unlikely.

Mark: Yes. There is a definite “pecking order” in the main fleet, but taking away the “first 3”, the rest wouldn’t be that consistent. Perhaps you can see what it’s like in retrospect by using the results of past meetings.

Alan: I’ll try. (see below)

Mark: I don’t think there’s a case for specifying that if you win a “Meteor trophy” you cannot win another. If you did that, after a while you’d be giving it to the person who comes last! I know open meetings are run by clubs, but the Comet Association must be involved because of the list of members and list of “first 3” names. It would have to prepare a set of “Meteor” trophies at the start of the season. The same kind of special event could be run over the Orbital results and at the championships too.

(**Alan:** After our chat I appreciated that there might be difficulty in establishing the eligibility of “Meteors” which might have to be resolved by the Committee. For example if very few members attend a meeting, it would be much less difficult to get a 3rd place overall, eg Redditch in ’94 and ’96, Merthyr Tydfil in ’94. For this reason it could be better to have the qualification “never finished in the first three in more than one open meeting”)

List of "first 3" sailors:

(from the "First six at the open meetings" in Perihelion issues 28 onwards)

W.Ablett, H.Back, R.Ballam, A.Best, J.Bradburn, P.Bradey, R.Bryant, K.Bullock, S.Cook, J.Coppenhall, L.Dean, D.Degge, H.Dodd, E.Edwards, J.Edwards, N.Ford, D.Forsdike, N.Gould, M.Govier, P.Govier, B.Hamilton, R.Hamilton, B.Hardy, P.Hayes, S.Heyes, P.Hossell, H.Jaggers, R.Kerry, S.Monks, J.Orchard, A.Reeve, C.Robinson, W.Robson, R.Smallwood, M.Smith, D.Stephens, R.Stevenson, J.Sutton, S.Thompson, M.Vinson, B.Welham, G.Wilkins, M.Wilkins, J.Windibank.

"Winners", in retrospect, of "Meteor" trophies:

(under the assumption that the above list applied since 1993)

K.Appleby (Warwick 96, Chester 96), **M.Baxter** (ICI 94, Chipstead 94, Seafarers 94), **I.Beaumont** (Kingsmead 93), **M.Boyce** (Merthyr Tydfil 96), **A.Brook** (Sutton Bingham 93), **C.Heaton** (Redditch 94, Tamworth 94), **P.Hinde** (Stamford 95), **J.Johnson** (Aylesbury 96), **G.Jones** (Redesmere 93), **S.Laming** (Littleton 96), **P.Laming** (Kingsmead 96), **A.Luxford** (Stamford 93, Seafarers 96), **G.Maile** (Cam 93), **K.Moodey** (Shearwater 93, Fishers Green 96), **N.Powell** (Chipstead 93), **R.Presley** (Cotswold 96), **J.Regnard** (Shearwater 94 and 95), **A.Reindorp** (Steeple Bay 93), **J.Silvey** (Aylesbury 93), **J.Taylor** (Pingewood 93), **D.Todd** (Crawley 95), **G.Wanstall** (Steeple Bay 94), **C.Weston** (Arden 96).

You will note that I have ignored gender in this exercise, I believe at least 3 of the above list are ladies.

Those are the "prizewinners" of 30 open meetings. I cannot specify the "winners" for the other 50 meetings because all of the first six places were "first 3" sailors. The above limited exercise shows that winners of "Meteor" trophies are not likely to be "the same few all the time" and well worth competing for.

Applying the same process to both of the Nationals championships we get:

1993: Nationals: Michael Thompson	Inlands: Ian Beaumont
1994: Nationals: Ian Beaumont	Tidals: (no full results available)
1995: Nationals: Jeff Bryant	Inlands: Tom Hasker
1996: Nationals: Andrew Bowes	Tidals: (no full results available)

Unfortunately, this idea could not be discussed at the recent Committee meeting, but I recently asked our Chairman's about it and he felt that this is not something that we should rush through this year, but it should be discussed at the AGM.

TALKING TO ... MARK WILKINS

Alan Browning: I'm sure I'm not the only one who would like to hear about your sailing background, I gather the Mirror dinghy came into it?

Mark Wilkins: Yes, my father knew somebody who had a sailing boat on the Broads and we used to go there some weekends. Then, after being introduced to sailing at secondary school, at Thamesmead in Pacers, I persuaded my father to buy us a Mirror. That is me and my younger brother Guy, who was 8 or 9 at the time, and I remember a rather reluctant crew!



We had no intention at all of racing, we thought it would be nice to potter around in it. My father also knew somebody who belonged to a sailing club down in Seasalter on the Kent coast and as we have an aunt living there, we joined that club, they had lots of Mirrors there. We were living in Blackheath in those days, about an hour's drive away. As time went by someone there persuaded us to start racing. Then my father bought a caravan which he left at Seasalter, just across the road from the sailing club. During my O-levels I used to do some of my revision there, and I sailed every day, it was great!

We did our first Mirror Nationals in 1974 at Mumbles, and came 144th out of 206 entries. From then on we did the Mirror Nationals every year, and loads of open meetings too. We really got keen on the Mirror.

After we had left Seasalter, which had become a catamaran club, we joined Blue Circle S.C. and during that time I also had a Fireball for a year or so which we sailed, though only racing occasionally. Time went by and for various reasons I stopped sailing the Mirror completely. I sailed a few times with other people crewing and in about 1985 it went into mothballs.

Alan: Did you do any RYA courses?

Mark: No, I'm completely self taught. I went sailing with the school, but they didn't teach us anything, they just put us in a boat. Guy was different, sailing with me as crew, he learn't everything I could teach him, and then he read books and watched other people.

Alan: Where did you first see a Comet and what attracted you to the boat?

Mark: The Comet was not my idea at all. In 1989 my mother and Guy tried a Comet at Chipstead and thought it was great. She bought one (357) and Guy bought one too (353). Mum intended to sail it but Guy and I sailed the Comets all through the Winter at Chipstead, in effect I took over Comet 357. It was really windy that Winter. At Chipstead the wind always seems to blow down the length of the lake and we frequently nose-dived on the runs, but we learnt a lot about sailing the boat. That got me back into sailing really, and into Comets. It was really good, the Comet came along at just the right time for me. In the end my mother felt that the Comet sail was too much for her and she bought a Topper.

At that time though I had other things on my mind, my wife, Tina, and I had bought a house and there were a lot of things to do there, I was into other things. Guy and I went down to the Tiduals at Southampton in 1990, which Guy won, and from then on I started sailing the Comet quite regularly. It was annoying though because Guy always used to beat me. Later on though there came a point where I started beating him, not regularly, but occasionally, and that was quite satisfying.

The difference between the Mirror and the Comet for me is that with the Comet they're all basically the same and they all go the same too. With the Mirror there are two major factors, apart from the skill of the helmsman. There is the amount of money you spend on it and the amount of time you spend tuning it. I enjoy sailing the Comet more than I do the Mirror. I didn't always think like that, I used to think "how can people sail a boat by themselves, with just one sail, it must be dead boring". But I didn't realise the tactics that are there in single-handed sailing. The Comet's such a user-friendly boat isn't it. It's an easy boat to sail, but to get that little bit extra out of it is probably slightly more difficult. But I've noticed that in really light conditions, people who haven't sailed it before often just sit there, dead.

This year I expect to do 10 or 12 Comet open meetings. I'll also keep my Mirror at Chipstead where I intend to do the club series on Saturday afternoons with my children, James and Charlotte, alternating as crew.

Alan: Have you sailed any other classes of boat?

Mark: Not regularly, I've experience of sailing the Enterprise and Topper and Guy had a Laser which I've sailed a few times. I much prefer the Comet to the Laser because it's more responsive in light winds. It's also more like a boat because it has a deeper well. I think that to sail a Laser successfully you need to be young, fit and relatively heavy. I've had both my children out in the Comet with me (together) which would be more difficult in a Laser. Basically the Comet is such a versatile boat.

Alan: Three years ago you wrote an article for us on Comet racing. Have you anything you would like to add to that now?

Mark: Yes, I think I retract the comment that implied that everybody can go equally well in all conditions. It's becoming clear that young, fit people can do better. There were a couple of times last year when I had tight races with Robert Hamilton. He's very keen and was very unlucky last year, there were two occasions when he could have beaten me, it was just bad luck. Hopefully, we can attract younger people into Comets. Young people are often attracted to the Laser, but I think that's a most unsuitable boat. It would be good if we could get some sort of marketing strategy, showing the Comet as being a young person's boat, even if they saw it as a stepping-stone to to the Laser. The Mino rig can help there.

Control calibration

I think in my article I said that I use quite a lot of kicker even in light winds. In the Mirror it's quite the opposite, you'd let the kicker right off in light winds. I think I implied that, having set up the kicker, I don't adjust it much. I do now! I always let the kicker off as soon as I come off the wind. Basically, I let off all the controls, I grab for a handful of ropes, pulling them so that they all fly out. It does seem to make a difference to my boatspeed. To solve the problem of re-setting the control ropes at the downwind mark, ready for the beat, I have put indelible ink marks on the ropes and marked a scale 1 to 20 on the foredeck. Having found the tensions I like for the beat, I remember the numbers, and at the downwind mark I pull in the ropes to those numbers. This avoids trying to fiddle with the controls during the beat, for, especially in a wind, you don't want to be getting back in again to fiddle with the ropes. This calibration is more important with the kicker because with the outhaul and Cunningham you can do a visual check.

Alan: Guy uses a compass, you don't. What do you think about compasses?

Mark: The reason that I don't use a compass is that I'm looking at two things, the wind hawks. I mainly look at the one in front of the boom, but at the one at the top of the mast if I'm on the run or, when it's really light, to show me where the real wind is. Without those I can't sail. I don't use tell-tales much, though I have them. I look at the angles of the other boats too, and as soon as the angles of the other boats change relative to mine I know there's been a wind-shift. It's all done by angles for me, the angles of my wind indicators, the angles of the boats and I'm imagining wind lines on the water. A compass would be something else to look at.

Alan: Not many Comet sailors seem to be able to control the boat well in a blow. Do you agree?

Mark: I think I do agree, you can probably count them on a couple of hands. I wouldn't say that I can do it particularly well, but my main motivation is survival, because of an ear problem. Three years ago I had a really nasty ear infection after a Cam open, which may or may not have been caused by a capsize I had there. A nasty operation left me with cavity in my ear (in the mastoid bone) and basically it is not desirable to get water in my ear, it's got to be open and stay dry. John Windibank, helped me there, he took a plaster cast of the ear canal and made me a silicone plug which perfectly matches my ear (that's the sort of thing John does as a profession). I smear it with a little vaseline and it works brilliantly and I think it would keep the water out. It gives me more confidence but I'm not absolutely confident that it would save me in a capsize. I've missed some periods of sailing because of the ear, it was particularly bad the year before last, I didn't do much sailing at all. The problem is not solved yet, it's OK at the moment, but I may have to have another operation.

Running in a strong wind

Going back to sailing in a blow, the Comet's got enough sail hasn't it. It's very exhilarating when it's almost survival conditions but not quite. There's nothing like a screaming plane, but the most frightening thing is the run isn't it. You get to the point when you can't sit far enough back. Even last year I managed to nose-dive it at one of the races at Cotswold. It wasn't that windy but it nose-dived and filled the whole boat with water. Guy's pretty good in a blow, he's got various methods he uses, I think it's fairly well-known that he has a knot in the mainsheet so that the boom doesn't go out too far. The other problem in a blow is that you slide up and down on the deck, on the broad reaches and runs. When you really take off, and we're talking about survival, it's holding the rudder still and trying to keep your body still as well. Guy actually puts a hand on to hold himself in place. Once you take off on a run you're really at the mercy of the wind. There comes a point where there's nothing further you can do but pray! If you don't stay completely still you can be over just like that, everything happens so fast. (**Alan:** I spent my time in aircraft research and know that at the time of the first World war,

aircraft could go into a "flat spin" and not recover. This frightened people too, but it led to research and designs of aircraft that you could spin and recover. Whether any practical design improvements can be made for a single-sail boat, on a run, in a blow, I don't know). **Mark:** I would imagine the length of the Comet doesn't make it very stable, and when you start sitting at the stern you probably haven't got a lot of boat length in the water. It's exciting when you're on the crest of a wave surfing and the front of the boat, back to the dagger board, is out of the water, that's great, but what I'm talking about is when it's blowing force 4 or 5 and there's a big gust coming - - - I radically oversheet on the runs because I just don't want to capsize. It is interesting that John Windibank said he sheets in and bears away, personally I luff, so that if I were to capsize I would be sitting on the high side and could pull it back up agan.

Gybing in a strong wind

The other frightening thing in a blow is gybing. Certainly, if I'm racing and trying to beat people, I will gybe rather than go about. I know they say that if you're going really fast the gybe is no problem, but I've never had confidence with that. Sometimes, on big lakes, you find, at the gybe mark, a little dead patch where you can gybe, because they tend to put the marks by the side of the lake. If it's an important race, I'll pull loads of sheet in before I gybe so that the boom's quite close in, and as I gybe I'll let it out the other side, letting it run through my hands to cushion the effect. It seems to work for me because I know that then if I do capsize it will be a knock-over, I won't actually fall in the water. Even with a capsize, you've rounded the mark but if you go about you've got to go well past the mark first. There's also the psychological advantage the guy behind is going to get when he sees you haven't had the courage to gybe. If you gybe, the guy behind may well have to bear away to avoid hitting you and he might capsize himself.

It's all relative isn't it. If you went out in a really hefty blow in a Laser and immediately came back in and went out in a Comet, you'd feel quite confident. I only sail on about a dozen days a year so I don't really get the practise. I watched Ben Ainsley sailing his Laser in the Olympics on TV, they were going downwind, gybing all over the place, in what I would call survival conditions, just for tactics! At Sheppey last year, after the last race, it was so windy coming in it took me ages. There was no way I was going to go directly downwind and I reached into the shore, then reached back out again, and again, and again - - - -

Reefing

I remember the first Nationals I did at Ardleigh in 1990, I went out reefed in the last race and I did terribly because the wind dropped off. I decided then that I would never reef again. The boat's like a pig reefed! There was also the last race at the Merthyr Tydfil Inlands in 1993. There was all to play for between Debbie

Degge, Errol Edwards and myself, and they decided to reef. I went with a full sail and it was horrendous before the start, but as the race started there wasn't a lot of wind and I just went away from them.

There was a different problem at the 1991 Nationals at Hampton, the windward mark seemed to be just at the point where the shore stopped protecting you. The wind then was horrendous, and you couldn't bear off. You pulled on the tiller and nothing would happen.

It frightens me, heavy weather. Having said that, when it's not quite so heavy, there's nothing like it, it's so exhilarating. Once the boat takes off, especially on the sea where there are waves, the reaches can be just one long plane to the next mark.

Alan: You're pretty happy sailing the Comet on the sea aren't you?

Mark: Yes, I'm quite experienced with tides, having sailed at Seasalter a lot. There the tide goes out a long way very quickly. I've done a lot of other sailing round the coast there and you get to judge the tide. Richard Smallwood and John Challenger are good with tides but a lot of Comet sailors don't sail on the sea, they don't like it, so when the Nationals are on the sea they're at a distinct disadvantage. Where John Challenger sails, Mudeford, it's particularly strange, tidewise. Also it took me the first race at the Tidals last year to realise that my dagger board was dragging through the mud. The atmospheric pressure was so high that weekend that it was forcing the water down. Normally the dagger boards just clear the mud but not that weekend. In the last race we had to sail with only about half board down on the beats in some places. I'm not making excuses because it was the same for everybody and John beat me in the last race fair and square to win the championship.

Alan: You must have a considerable number of trophies by now. Why do you think you win so often?

Mark: Experience I suppose isn't it. I think it depends on how you feel on the day, it's will power, you just do it. I honestly think winning is a confidence thing. The first Comet meeting I won was at Kingsmead in 1991, since then I've won Kingsmead every year I've been there, 5 times (I missed one because of my ear). Much of the reason I win it is because I know I can. There are lots of people who can win but they just don't know that they can. You've got to know that you can before you go out. At an open meeting, there are really only a few people who might win, I reckon that although at the moment there are only 6 or 8 people that are winning most of the prizes, there are probably twice that number who are perfectly capable of winning. I'm thinking particularly of the younger people, and

once they start to win there's going to be no hope for us is there. Nobody likes to win regularly and then stop winning, but if you're getting a good race, it doesn't really matter if you're winning or not. When you're going well it feels good, it feels right. Normally I find that I am going as fast or faster than everyone else, but at Seafarers last year I was not. Neither time I went to Seafarers did I do well. The first time I was leading but went to the wrong mark and Jake slipped by and won. The same thing sort of happened the second time too, maybe it is a confidence thing. The other problem I have is that my boat leaks! We always have to empty it between races. Sometimes it seems to be a couple of gallons but mostly nothing much at all. There probably wasn't much water in it at Seafareres, but if you think your boat's full of water it doesn't help. It's psychological, if you think negatively then it will go badly.

Alan: What did you feel about that last race at Kingsmead ?

Mark: I knew I had to win it, so I did! I'm not saying it works every time, you try hard. Having said that, one of the reasons I've never won the Nationals is because I try too hard. It's the important one and I get too tense. For the other competitions I don't pressurise myself as much.

Starting

I find the starts are the worst time. John Windibank said that the start is three-quarters of the race, I don't think it is. I find that if you have a good start, you can only go backwards, but if you've got a reasonably long race, and have a bad start, then overtaking people is good psychologically. If something happens or somebody annoys you, and on top of that you get a bad start, you've got something to prove. Quite often you can get back. I'm not saying that starting badly is the thing to do, but it's not a disaster, as long as you go the right way up the beats. There are often opportunities to gain places, especially in tidal waters. For example, after rounding the leeward mark, they might be close-reaching, and it might be worth tight beating to slip past them. I don't think starting is that important, though that's where I find the pressure. I don't like the pre-start manoeuvring because it seems to me that a lot of it is down to chance. Somebody who doesn't know what they're doing can push you over the line. So I go on the conservative side and just try for a reasonable start. Having said that, at that last race at Kingsmead, I knew I had to win and I think I went for a flyer, going at maximum speed as I hit the line. I think the other important thing about starting is to be able to tack to the side of the beat you want to go. There's no point in starting at the left if you want to go up the right, you're going to have to tack across the whole fleet.

Alan: By now you must have a very organised way of transporting your Comet to meetings. Have you any practical tips for us that you have found to be very useful?

Mark: I use a roof-rack. On it I have extra long bars and have some cups of the kind that the Laser people use, so that I can just drop the spars in. Then all you have to do is to tie a couple of straps round. I haven't got a side loader and to do the lifting you need two fairly hefty people, my wife Tina and I can't really lift the Comet, but when you get to a meeting you can always find somebody to help with the lifting. The trouble comes when you get home and have to use the car the next morning. I've developed a system of two slings attached to the roof of the garage. I drive the car in, then, holding nose of the boat up with one hand with the other resting on the car, I put the nose into the front sling. I do the same at the back and drive the car out. The car doesn't have to be exactly at the right place, as long as it's within a foot you can slide the boat around. The theory is that I can put the boat on and off the car by myself like that. For storage in a garage I recommend what we did in our previous house, we rested the boat on two scaffold poles. We used supports designed for joists attached to a wall, one part goes in the brickwork and there's a cup for the joist. With the front pole in place, we would carry the boat in, I'd be at the front, and I would lift the nose onto the pole. Then I'd go to the back, Tina would lift the stern and lock her arms while I would put the other scaffold pole in place. That really does work well but having recently moved house we haven't set that up here yet.

Alan: Have you had any thoughts about supporting the Comet Class Association in other ways, eg helping the Committee?

Mark: At the moment my work is taking up a lot of my time, I'm involved in various projects and often have to travel, and while I wouldn't mind being involved in Association administration, if I did I'd want to do it properly, I wouldn't want to let people down. If somebody wants me to do something I'll do it if I can, but I'm not the sort of person that puts myself forward for things. On that subject, I think it's a pity John is standing down as Chairman, he's done so much for the Association - apart from anything else the John & Norah roadshow will be missed at prizegivings.

Alan: Have you any views on the Mino rig, for example how they should be blended into open meetings?

Mark: Personally, I don't have any objection to Minos taking part in Comet events. They are at a disadvantage in all but the windiest conditions. If a sailor buys two rigs and chooses which to use to suit the conditions, then strictly it's not fair, but to be honest I don't think it would make much difference because anybody who's going to win is probably going to win with a normal rig.

Personally I can't see a problem with it. In 99.9% of the time the Mino will be at a disadvantage, because it hasn't got the power. I think they should be encouraged because it's the way to get more people on the water. Obviously, if a Mino is sold to a youngster today, in 3 year's time they might be sailing a Comet. If we push them out of our racing, they might have the Mino for a few years and go and buy a Laser, Streaker or something. I want to encourage the Mino, it's mainly going to be youngsters and a few older people. In racing, I think there's absolutely no problem when people use a Mino sail and race on equal terms, win prizes, win the Nationals if you like, I've got no problem with that. In my view, for experienced and fit sailors, if they can't sail the boat with the full rig, reefing or using a Mino rig is not going to make much difference. Perhaps the way to do it at the Nationals is for competitors to nominate the rig they are going to use when they enter, and use that rig throughout. Thinking of the measurement rules, if there was a maximum length for the mast and maximum dimensions for the sails, but no minima, then the Mino would be in class. The problem in Mirrors is that everybody wants things bigger because they're underpowered. You can sail a Mirror in anything, you can certainly sail it in winds you wouldn't dream of sailing a Comet, because Mirrors don't move so fast, don't get so twitchy, they sort of drive through. Going back to the Mino, if we don't encourage them they may go and set up their own association, which would be divisive.

Alan: And Tina, you've been listening to all this, do you sail?

Tina Wilkins: No, but I have been out with Mark a couple of times in the Mirror. I'd never sailed before and crewing for him was a disaster, I won't go into details but physical pain came into it! **Mark:** But we usually take the children to Comet meetings and they thoroughly enjoy them. When we went to Paxton Lakes, a two-day meeting, the weather was the hottest week-end you could imagine, it was superb. The water was shallow and the children were in the water much of the time, with Steve Monks' children, and they loved it. Steeple Bay is another nice venue, they'd go crabbing. Mudford too is superb. The Comets are such a friendly class, people talk to one another so easily, There's a family side too, quite a number of families go to meetings.

Alan: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about Mark?

Mark: I don't think that the idea, in Perihelion 40, of a pursuit race for the last race of an open meeting, is a good one. (At this point Mark suggested an extra event at open meetings, a competition specially for the middle-of-the-fleet sailors. This is reported on page 26 in "METEOR TROPHIES ?")

Alan: Well Mark and Tina, it's been nice being with you this afternoon, and Anne and I thank you for your hospitality. We've met your two children briefly too. Thanks very much Mark for giving us a lot to think about!

MORE ON THE MINO GUIDELINES

I asked Tony Thomas ("MINO-riety of one at the Nationals") to comment on the Committee guidelines on the Mino (this issue page 13), on account of his raising the matter in Perihelion 39. He writes:

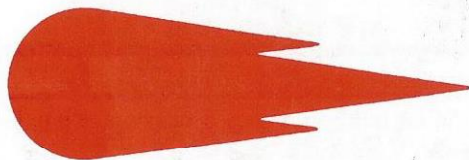
"It's good to see that the Mino rig is being encouraged to the extent that Minos will be able to compete in National events 'officially' in future. It is not so encouraging that they are still 'out of class' and can only have their own competition-within-a-competition.

Although I have learnt since the Nationals that I am not quite a minority of one and there are still a few sailors around who believe in setting appropriate sails for the prevailing conditions, I fear the pressure to stick with strict one-design principles may well prevent the Comet from being the Class which bravely 'broke the macho mould'.

The practical effect of the new regulations is really to confirm the Mino as a separate boat rather than, as I prefer to see it, a Comet with a well-reefed sail; and there is a risk that the next move will be pressure for a separate handicap for ordinary club racing. I would oppose that strongly. My own club lets me race with whichever sail I choose on the standard handicap and merely laughs its collective head off when I've made the wrong choice and been left behind as the breeze dies. They would laugh even louder at any suggestion that my using the Mino rig poses any threat to the sharp-end brigade!

That said, it is, of course, theoretically true that in heavy sea conditions there just might be some advantage to the top sailors in having a Mino and avoiding constant capsizes but I can't see it happening much. What I could see happening is many more contestants in major events if the weaker brethren were to be welcomed warmly, without reservation, to join in and take their chance to mix it with the experts rather than sitting forlornly on the beach nursing their bruises and damaged boats after the first race has ended for them in disaster because they were over-canvassed for their competence level. The Committee may argue that their concession allows that to happen: I would ask which they would prefer: a 'real', albeit lowly, result in the main competition, or a 'consolation prize' among the minnows - sorry, Minos? "

Alan Browning, Editor



Comet Class Association

Affiliated to the Royal Yachting Association