

Comet Nationals – a personal view

Rutland Water has always been, in my mind, unforgiving and for first 2 out of the 3 days of the Comet National Championships it lived up to its reputation. Forget Wind Guru or Wunderground with its 15-18 knots, it was definitely 20 gusting 25-30 especially on the 2nd race of Day 1, when most of the fleet were skittled whilst praying for a rest next aptly to Normanton Church. As if the Race Officer knew what was to come (although I am not sure she did!) those who did survive flew round the triangle-sausage- triangle course with Chris Jones crossing after 23 minutes and Chris Robinson after 45 minutes in Races 1 and 2 respectively!!!

Race 2 nearly saw a disaster in the form of young Isaac Dodds being squashed by the wrongly named passenger ferry, The Rutland Belle. Poor Isaac had been so startled by its repeated horn blasts as it ploughed through the fleet that he Chinese gybed right next to it and was able to identify individual barnacles as it passed within feet of him! We had been warned at the briefing that it had right of way but it showed no attempt to avoid the gaggle of 31 Comets.....terrifying!! Of course Isaac was offered glasses for the remainder of the racing and we all said it could never happen again.

Sunday saw the winds the same and despite trying to push the first mark close to the windward shore there was no escape and those spectators both on the bank and peering out from the church's countless weddings witnessed some spectacular reaching up and down the start line (actually we did that for quite a lot of the time between the 8 races!). 4 races came and went and Chris Jones dropped his guard slightly and went swimming either side of lunch, although his 1st and 2nd meant he enjoyed the Steak Meal that night with a poorly disguised smile! Yours truly managed to fulfil a "bucket wish" to win a Nationals race (actually managed 2 back to back) and celebrated with extra Vienetta although young Chris Hatton and Isaac Dobbs did overdose on the remaining portions. This extra energy certainly was well stored by Chris who got a couple of bullets on the Sunday when the wind had subsided – thank goodness it wasn't like that on Friday and Saturday as I think it may have been a different story when the cups were handed out!.

Chris Robinson had rather sneakily managed to put together a less erratic set of results than myself and Eddie Pope hit a rich vein of form for the last 3 races. One fatal remark (from Chris R) spurred me on after the penultimate race – Chris asked how I got on and I said about 8th – to which he replied that I needed a 6th to beat him overall. I had no idea and so I set off to try and get there – until.....the Rutland Belle appeared on the last beat – parallel to and windward of me but 100m behind and with the safety boat telling me not to tack!!! - I sailed for probably 200m initially on my beat then had to steer on to a close fetch as the captain decided to veer to port. By the time I tacked behind the safety boat and the end of the Belle (I actually said something else on the water!) I couldn't see the rest of the leading fleet as they had all tacked off to starboard. It was then a miracle happened and I got a personalised lift and gust right up to the windward mark to get to 7th. I tried my best to butter Ben Palmer up on the last leg prior to the leeward mark but he wasn't accepting any brown envelope offer so instead I had to rely on a couple of wind changes on the last short stretch to the line to get to 6th and secure 2nd overall on discards from Chris and Eddie.

There was a great atmosphere amongst the fleet both on and off the water and not one protest despite the close racing – well done to everyone! The single handed Comet will obviously never be as popular as those mass produced dinghies like Lasers or Solos but they are unique in that they can be just as competitive 30 years after being designed and built as one its maker Andy Simmons built last year – true durability and class, no wonder the numbers of venues and competitors on the Open Circuit are still going strong with a huge age range, both ladies and gents as well as those better in light winds and those better in heavy winds.....!

Many Thanks to all at Rutland SC

Nigel Austin Comet 875