

Comet Nationals 27-29th May 2017, Sponsored by Noble Marine

There were twenty four entries for the Comet Nationals, sponsored by Noble Marine, at Burghfield Sailing Club over the bank holiday weekend, 27-29th May 2017. The first two days were held in conjunction with the Combined Comet Class Association Inland Championships for the Trios and Duos, also sponsored by Noble Marine. A ten race series was planned.

The first day's racing was in wind gusting up to F4, which was stronger than expected. However, the southerly breeze allowed the Race Officer, Ian Bullock, to set a trapezoid course with two beats, one for the Comet singlehander, and the other for the Trios and Duos. This ensured that the fleets did not mix. Gates were used instead of leeward marks, which provided additional tactical options. The singlehanders started first, ensuring that the fleets were not too far apart at the finish, which minimised the wait between races.

Race 1

Eddie Pope was first to the windward mark, followed by Alan Bennett, while the leaders followed Eddie around the starboard gate boats further back tried the port gate, but there appeared to be no advantage to either side. Nigel Austin started to gain on the beat, but a capsize put him out of contention. Eddie gradually pulled away and was never caught, while Chris Robinson caught Alan to take second.

As race one was rather short, an additional lap was added for the following races.

Race 2

Dave Harris was first to the windward mark, but he was caught on the following legs and there were several changes of lead. Dave had a near collision with Alan Bennett, as he tried to exit the leeward gate on the port side, only to find his way blocked by Alan Bennett trying to exit to starboard. In the confusion Dave capsized and this put him out of contention. Chris Robinson took the lead and he was challenged by Chris Hatton on the third lap and then by Alan on the final lap, but he kept the lead and won, with Alan second. The fleet returned to shore for lunch.



Race 3

Nigel was first to the top mark, followed by Ian Stone. However, Ian capsized on the run allowing Ben Palmer to move up into second. The wind had shifted, which resulted in the port side of the gate being favoured. However, this posed a dilemma for the competitors as this side required a gybe to exit the gate, while the starboard exit avoided the need to gybe in the windy conditions. Nigel and Ben pulled away from the rest of the fleet. Unfortunately they miscounted the number of laps and sailed for the finish a lap early. This allowed Bob Dodds to take the lead, followed by Ian Stone, who had recovered well from his earlier capsize. Nigel and Ben realised their mistake and chased these two up the beat, catching Ian at the windward mark. However, they were unable to pass Bob, who held on to win, with Nigel second.

Race 4

For the last race of the day, the wind had shifted slightly, which allowed the Race Officer to set a longer beat. However, the second beat was now shorter, so all fleets used the first beat, with the Trios starting first. Ian was clear ahead at mark one and he began to pull away. Nigel also pulled clear and began to catch Ian. A poor gybe by Ian at the gate allowed Nigel to get past and he then kept the lead to win, with Ian second.

Although the Race Officer thought about adding an additional race in anticipation of a lack of wind the following day, he decided that the competitors had had enough and racing finished for the day.

At the end of day one Chris Robinson was leading, but by the thinnest of margins as Bob Dodds, who was in second place, was on equal points. However, with only six points separating the top eight places, the Championship was wide open.

The second day of racing started with no wind on the water and the postponement flag went up. Eventually an early lunch was called as the Race Officer was hopeful that the wind would fill in during the afternoon. The wind did not materialise and the Race Officer's optimism waned. However, some of the fleet were still keen, so the fleet launched at 14:45. However, by the time they were on the water, what wind there was had disappeared and the racing was abandoned for the day. The evening was taken up with the AGM and a roast beef dinner, during which a pleasant breeze picked up. The Race Officer brought the start time for the next day's racing forward so that four races could be fitted in, which would recover two of the four lost races of day two.

The wind for the final days sailing was less than was hoped. However the wind direction had changed, which allowed the Race Officer to set a windward, leeward course the length of the lake.

Race 5

Chris Hatton led the fleet up the right hand side of the course, which avoided the islands. However, Alan went left and around the islands and this allowed him to catch Chris by the windward mark. These two pulled away from the rest of the fleet, but Chris was unable to catch Alan. The wind dropped, but then returned, which allowed the race to be completed.

A ninety degree wind shift before race six meant the course had to be reset. The Race Officer kept the windward/leeward configuration as it allowed the course to be adjusted rapidly, but moved to shorter laps.

Race 6

The race got underway and Chris Hatton was ahead of Eddie at the first mark, with Alan not far behind. The wind dropped completely on the run and as the fleet headed up the beat the Race Officer decided to shorten at the top mark. The wind filled in as the first three approached the finish and there wasn't much distance between them. However the final places were unchanged.

There was a further postponement while the Race Officer waited for the wind to settle and Sportography.tv arrived with their drone to take some photos. After six races there were six different winners. Chris Hatton was leading Alan by two points, but there were four others within six points of Chris. In addition race seven would give an additional discard, and this would allow most of the others to discard a worse score than Chris.



Race 7

Race seven started with an individual recall for Chris Robinson after he was pushed over the line. There were several boats very close at the front of the fleet for the first lap. They split into two groups as they passed each side of the leeward gate and by the end of the second beat Chris Hatton was leading Eddie, followed by Bob. Although Chris Hatton was leading for most of the race there were several incidents behind him, including Eddie having to perform two 720s for impeding and then fouling Nigel Austin. Eddie got his revenge on Nigel by taking a different route up the second beat and closed on Chris Hatton. On the next run Eddie passed Chris and Bob Dodds, but he miscounted the number laps and started another beat instead of reaching to the finish. This allowed Chris to win, with Bob second and Eddie third.

There was a further wait for the wind to settle, but by the time it did there was insufficient time for the Race Officer to set a course before the 2pm deadline set in the Sailing Instructions. Therefore, the racing was concluded with only seven of the ten races completed. Chris Hatton's win in the final race gave him the Championship. Eddie's error in that race cost him, as he had the same number of points as Bob, and count back failed to split them. The result of the last race was used, which gave Bob the runner up position.

Further back the Ladies prize was contested by Carol Butcher and Isla Macneal. Isla had a one point lead after the first day, but on the last day the positions were reversed by the end of race six, with Carol ahead of Isla by two points. In the final race both sailed a discard, which gave Carol the Ladies prize. The Newcomer prize was contested by Alan Hatton and Tim Higgs. Alan was ahead by two points after the first day, but his results on the final day put him well ahead at the end.

Chris Robinson



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