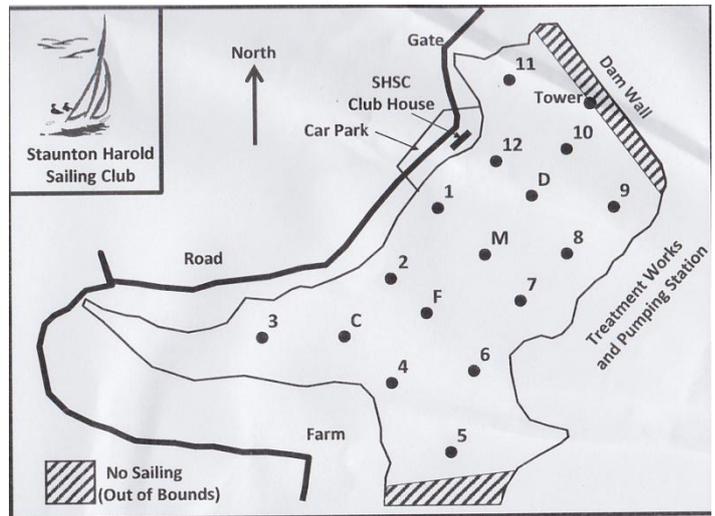


2018 Comet Class Association National Championships at Staunton Harold Sailing Club Saturday 25th – Monday 27th August 2018

The 2018 Comet Class Association National Championships started to take shape on the Friday evening as a couple of visitors dropped their boats off in the dinghy park and Izac Dodds set his tent up with the aid of a torch and tutorage of his Dad!

Day 1 saw the twenty nine competitors from seventeen different clubs assemble to find a fine day with a moderate North Westerly breeze. Bacon rolls and mugs of coffee were consumed while boats were rigged and sailors eyed the lie of the water in particular noting the low water level caused by the long, dry summer. In the car park Andy Simmons had set up a temporary workshop and was busy converting a mast to suit one of the new White Xtra sails which was being used straight out of the bag by Andrew Beaumont.



Race 1.

After the briefing by Race Officer, Howard Jones, the course for race 1 was set: start to mark 6 and then 2(P) 4(P) 7(P) 1(P) 6(S). The line was well set with a slight pin end bias.

Enthusiasm of the sailors to get a good lead led to many boats being over the start line at the hooter and the first of the day's general recalls. The second start was clear for most of the fleet and Nigel Austin took the first mark in the lead with Chris Robinson and John Blundell following. Lap 2 saw John Blundell perform an elegant pirouette and a not so elegant dunking. Chris Hatton took the lead in the last lap beating Nigel Austin into second place and Bob Dodds moved up to take third place.

Further down the fleet various battles for places took place, sometimes too enthusiastically resulting in a number of penalty turns. At the back of the fleet John Sturgeon, Andrew Beaumont, Mary Starkey and Dave Waymont swapped places on the beats but with Andrew eventually pulling away. Not only did he pull away but he caught and passed Helen Leivers and Nigel Fern only to come to some grief virtually on the line as the three of them battled to cross it. H.L. was a little miffed by A.B tacking on top of her but all three crossed the line virtually simultaneously.

John Coppenhall had his share of drama on the last beat of the last lap when, straining to eke every last knot of speed out of the boat, his mainsheet broke but improvised by sailing to the finish by holding onto the boom with his hand!

Race 2.

Rather than recalcitrant early starting sailors, it was the wind that was the problem for OOD Howard – moments before the starting hooter, the wind shifted to Northerly resulting in him having to try many of the reservoir marks to find the right course. Every time he parked the committee boat, the wind shifted again. However Howard held his nerve and wasn't going to be panicked into setting a bad course and after the Comets had played “chase the committee boat” for 20 minutes the wind settled enough for the course to be set. Start to mark 4 and then D(P) 12(P) 7(S) 1(P) 5(S) This race saw very close racing at the front of the fleet with John Blundell, Chris Hatton and Eddie Pope all in the lead at some point and all three close at the finish. Winner was Chris Hatton with Eddie Pope second and John Blundell third.

Race 3.

The wind shifted back to North Westerly for race 3 and course set was start to mark 7 then 1(P) 6(S) 2(P) 4(P) 7(P) After the time delay of race 2 and then a general recall at the start of this race, Howard made sure of no further delays on the second start by flying the black flag. Paul Williamson got a good start at the pin end. On the first lap much shouting could be heard at the downwind mark 6 as the second bunch of leading sailors caught up with the first group who had slowed each other down by a heading match. Nigel Pepperdine had a good race, leading at one point and Paul Williamson, Bob Dodds and Nigel Austin fighting for places. Chris Hatton won with Nigel Pepperdine second and John Blundell in third.



Day 1 ended with a Commodore's reception in the bar prior to the evening meal and quiz. This gave the Comet sailors and Association committee an opportunity to speak with the SHSC Commodore, Elaine Penhaul.

The evening meal was Italian themed and wonderfully prepared and presented by Nigel and Di Pepperdine, Lol Hayward, Amy Forbes and the band of volunteers that Nigel P had persuaded to help.

This was followed by Nigel Fern's quiz with several rounds of tantalising questions. Winners were the Kenmuir-Hogg/Jaggers team.

Day 2 saw a complete change of weather with a strong Southerly wind with leaden skies, forecasts of rain and something of a swell on the water.



Race 4.

Course set was start to mark M and then 5(P) 6(P) 4(S) 12(S) 7(S) M(P) Bob Dodds was first to the windward mark with Chris Hatton second. On the downwind leg to mark 12 boats at the back of the fleet hugged the clubhouse shore and made up considerable ground on the group of sailors ahead leading to many shouts of water at the mark. Helen Leivers asked for how many boats wanted water so she could position herself accordingly but the response was “lots of boats” Despite warning sailors around him in good time that he needed water, John Copenhall (C532) was pushed onto the mark by the number of boats all vying for space.



The wind strength was causing problems for many sailors and Steve Bellamy was caught out with an unexpected jibe that resulted to a blow to the head and the rescue boat confirmed that he was bleeding so not surprisingly he retired to get some first aid. Meanwhile Chris Hatton overtook Bob Dodds to take the winners spot with Bob in second and Nigel Pepperdine in third.

Race 5.

A short break was announced after race 4 to give sailors a comfort break and Howard a chance to tweak the course. Start to mark M then 5(P) 6(P) F(S) 1(S) 10(P) 11(P) D(S) M(P) With the rain that had swept through in race 4 and soaked the fleet and with the wind strengthened for this race, a number of sailors decided to sit this one out so the reduced fleet of 22 boats lined up for the start of a race with plenty of incident.

Peter Mountford had an eventful race initially forgetting about mark 1, almost taking out Richard Barnett as he tried to recover and hitting the mark and various other boats and dutifully carrying out a handful on 720 turns as a result. More was to come as Nigel Austin's mainsheet caught and destroyed his wind vane. Paul Hinde had what he would only describe

as “a port/starboard incident” resulting in either hitting a mark or other boats – his memory trying not to relive the trauma of it all.

Nigel Fern missed out mark M as he beat up to mark 5. Eventually Rhian Bevan told him when he was 50 yards passed the mark (*the author was waiting until he was at mark 5 before telling him*) [What Dave fails to mention is that even though well behind I caught and passed him before the last mark and almost got Rhian as well! –NF]

Chris Hatton was the winner with John Blundell second and Bob Dodds third.

Race 6.

The afternoon race was run prior to club racing which was going on – Howard Jones and team working double over time! The wind that had been forecast to peak at above 30 knots was not in evidence and even was perhaps a little less than the morning. Course set was start to M then 6(P) 1(S) 10(P) 11(P) D(S) M(P) John Blundell was first to the windward mark with Chris Hatton in second. In the mid fleet group Eddie Pope had tight racing with Nigel Austin, Izac Dodds and Peter Mountford.

On the broad reach between marks 1 and 10, Chris Hatton overtook John Blundell to leeward to become the eventual winner with John in second and Nigel Pepperdine in third.

A little further back Izac who was sailing fast throughout the day misjudged the line to the finish, tacked and hit Peter Mountford’s boat. This allowed Nigel Austin ahead of the pair of them to get through and dropped Izac down by several places.

Following race 6 the AGM was held and there were serious concerns that it might not finish before the evening meal had been ruined. However stomachs ruled over sailing technicalities and all eventually emerged to be greeted with the BBQ meal being partly cooked on the BBQ and some in the kitchen oven and eaten in the clubhouse due to the cool evening. Thanks again to Nigel P, Di, Amy and Nigel F for another excellent meal.

Day 3 another wind direction for day 3 with a moderate Westerly breeze, the third wind direction of the event (*or twenty third direction if you count the start of race 2’s wind directions!*) with a slight swell on the water.

Race 7.

The course set was start to 8 then 4(P) 6(P) M(S) D(S) 8(S) John Blundell was ahead at the first mark, Bob Dodds was fighting Nigel Austin keenly as there was a promise of a fridge magnet if he got past him (a follow up from an AGM item) which Bob eventually did and Steve Bellamy, now recovered, was having a tacking battle with Bob on the last two beats. Steve got the better of Bob at mark 4 as Bob bore away on the swell hoping for a quick reach into the mark only to find that he had hit a spot with no wind. Steve got his best finish of the event with third place with Bob having lost a further place to fourth placed finisher Nigel Pepperdine. The race top spots were now the familiar duo of Chris Hatton and John Blundell.

Race 8.

To the dismay of some of the weary sailors, for the last race Howard Jones parked the committee boat by the dam wall and set a long beat. Course set was start to mark 9 then C(P) 4(P) 2(S) 7(P) M(S) D(S) Chris Hatton seemed to sail his own race here as he pulled away and the main battle was for second place between Bob Dodds, John Blundell, Eddie Pope, Paul Williamson and Nigel Pepperdine with John Blundell coming out on top.

Michael Ettershank chose the correct side of the course on the last beat to move up from fifth to take third place – his best finish of the event. Something of a wind shift towards the end of the race left the sailors lower down the order beating from mark 7 to make mark M which had been a close reach. Steve Bellamy compounded this by toppling over at M but still managed a respectable twelfth place. John Coppenhall whose first race was hindered by mechanical failure also suffered in this last race when his traveller snapped two beats from the finish. An interesting observation from the mid fleet was that Steve Gregory, Nigel Fern and Paul Hinde who swapped positions throughout the race and who all finished very close, were using the three different sail types – Standard, Xtra, White Xtra.

Prize giving was held in the clubhouse with Michael Ettershank announcing the results, Nigel Austin finding the appropriate prize and SHSC Vice Commodore Neill Clingan presenting the prizes.

Overall Championship winners were Chris Hatton (1st), John Blundell (2nd), Nigel Pepperdine (3rd), Bob Dodds (4th), Eddie Pope (5th) and Nigel Austin (6th).

Other winners were Paul Williamson (Veteran), Peter Mountford (Ancient Mariner), Rhiain Bevan (First Lady), Izac Dodds (First Youth), Roger Harrison (First Newcomer) and Staunton Harold Sailing Club (First Team).

The Saturday night raffle tickets were drawn and prizes that had been donated by various businesses were duly distributed.

Winner Chris Hatton gave a thank you speech to the club and the many volunteers who helped.

Association Chairman John Sturgeon followed with the Association thanks.

Written by: Dave Waymont

Asides added by Nigel Fern –
'editor's prerogative!'

