

Mudford Comet Open 2018 – A Personal view

The Comet Open is on the first day of Mudford week.

It is one of my favourite venues as it has a good sailing area and is the Open with the most consistent wind. Due to the tides Mudford had an early start this year (first start 10am!), so I left home at 6am and arrived by 7:30. With the hot summer I was expecting more of the same at Mudford and only packed a shorty wetsuit and T shirt. I was surprised to find light rain showers on the drive to Mudford, but it was dry by the time I arrived. On arrival Henry Jagers announced that he was going to use his Mino rig. This was a surprise to me, as I had assumed it would be light winds as it had been for the entire season so far. Once rigged, I paid some attention to the wind and weather and realised that Henry was right as there was quite a bit of wind. I should have paid attention to the weather forecast! I added a sweatshirt and spray top to my shorty wetsuit, and hoped this would be enough to keep me warm. It turned out that this was sufficient, as moving around the boat keeps you warm.

I arrived at the start line for race one just in time for the start – with the sailing time limited by the tide the Race Officer doesn't wait for stragglers! Fortunately, despite no time to plan what I was going to do, I still made a reasonable start that was good enough that I was first at the windward mark. A laser capsized just after the mark and I had to sail behind it before bearing off on the run. This left me close to the shallows and almost running by the lee. I decided this wasn't a good position to be in and gybed, allowing me to sail away from the shallow area. The three boats behind – Ben Palmer, Bob Dodds and Michael Ettershank didn't follow me and this proved to be faster. They caught up, with Ben taking the lead by the leeward mark. We approached the mark close together. Unlike the others I had to gybe around the mark but I managed this without difficulty or losing places. The next leg was a planning reach through moored boats to the gybe mark. It was rather hairy, especially as there were four of us very close together. I lost another place to Bob, who almost nose dived as he passed. The next mark was a gybe mark, set up right in front of the clubhouse for the spectators. To the disappointment of the spectators we all got around unscathed and reached back to begin lap two. I managed to catch Bob on next beat to regain second place and then there were no other changes. After the finish we sailed in for a bacon butty, and found that it was raining! The results were also not as we expected, as it turned out that Tim Higgs had beaten everyone! A brief investigation showed that the Race Officer thought that Tim couldn't possibly be so far behind everyone else and assumed he must be leading, which resulted in him being finished a lap early!!

It was not long before we started race two. I decided that the line was biased to the pin end, so I got set up on starboard tack ready to sail towards the pin. As I approached the line Bob sailed over the top of me. I decided that I had to let him pass as there wasn't much line left before we reached the pin. This proved to be the correct decision; Bob had to slow down to make sure that he didn't get to the pin before the gun and then he drifted to leeward of the mark. He had to gybe around to start, which left clear water for me to start right at the pin end. By the windward mark I was in second place behind Ben and being chased by Michael. There were no changes in place in the first lap but on lap two Michael came up right behind me on the run. I needed to keep ahead of him to ensure I had water at the gybe mark, at which point it was only two short reaches to the finish. As we approached the mark I heard a welcome sound from behind – a loud bang as Michael capsized to windward! (*Not very charitable! – Ed*) This left me in a safe second place.

For race three the pin was still the favoured end of the start line. I lined up behind Bob, and it was déjà vu as Bob drifted below the pin again. So I got a good start and into the lead. However, I ran aground shortly after the start, right in the middle of the harbour! Fortunately, the bottom is soft so the boat didn't stop completely and I was able to pull the board up, tack and carry on. On the run got I caught by Michael, while Ben seemed to have disappeared. Perhaps he had capsized? Michael capsized on the gybe leaving me to take the lead. However, my lead was short lived as I capsized too! This allowed Ben, who had reached off to find a quiet spot to do his gybe, to pass. Michael capsized again, so this left Ben and I clear ahead. I managed to catch Ben on the final beat. Ben reached off on the run again, but it didn't pay off this time. I arrived at the gybe mark in a lull, so I had no problem gybing. This left a short reach to the finish, where I was first. We sailed back to the launching area to find that it has stopped raining!

Overall Ben's two first places gave him the win, but my first in the last race ensured that I took second overall. We changed and, with the exception of Michael and Annette Walter who stayed on for a week's racing, packed the boats up. After such an enjoyable sail I wished I was joining them.

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