

## Comets Defy Storm Hannah at Burghfield Comet Open

Storm Hannah was forecast to coincide with Burghfield's Comet Open on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April. Consequently, there were only eight pre-registrations and only five Comets turned up. The Open was combined with the Solo and Streaker Open.

The wind was F6 gusting F8 so the Race Officer, Dereck Lovegrove, opted for four short races – 30 minutes maximum and set a simple triangular course for the two morning races.

Henry Jagers decided the best tactic was to conserve his strength for the later races when the wind was forecast to drop and did not set sail. The other Comets sailors gauged the conditions by watching the first Solos launch. They sailed away from the lee of the clubhouse and once out in the wind seemed fair to OK, so Bob Dodds, Ben Palmer and Chris Robinson launched. Eddie Pope watched a second wave of Solos launch and one suffered a wipeout just off the beach. This persuaded Eddie that Henry's tactic was the right one and he stayed ashore.

Once out of the lee of the clubhouse the three Comets were hit by a big squall, but this turned out to be the normal wind strength! The wind was much fiercer than it looked from the clubhouse. The Comets tacked downwind to the start line. However, the Committee boat was dragging its anchor and the start had to be delayed. Chris took the opportunity to sail into the lee of an island and put two reefs into his standard sail. The Race Officer solved the anchor dragging problem by mooring to the island. But by now all three rescue boats were busy rescuing the Solos and Streakers and there was no spare boat to set the marks of the course. A fourth boat was deployed, but this too got involved in rescues. Bob followed Chris's example and headed to an island to put in two reefs, but his control lines came adrift and it took a while for him to complete the task. Ben was sailing an Xtra rig and did not have the option to reef, so he headed back to the clubhouse. This left Chris as the only boat (Comet, Solo or Streaker) left on the start line so the Race Officer abandoned the morning racing.

The Race Officer announced that two races would be held after lunch. However, the Solos and Streakers decided enough was enough and went home. This left the three Comets to race. This time the Race Officer set all the marks before the fleet launched. The course was shortened and moved to the quietest part of the lake and three rescue boats were also put on the water. Chris and Bob kept in their two reefs, while Ben continued with the Xtra sail.

The three Comets started close together. Ben capsized half way up the beat trying to avoid Bob who, being on starboard, was right-of-way boat. This left Chris leading Bob at the first mark. On the reach when the first gust came through Chris opted to play safe and luffed and spilled wind, while Bob used it to full effect and planed into the lead. At the gybe mark Bob elected to gybe, but didn't quite make it and capsized, allowing Chris who wore round, to take the lead. The second reach was almost a run and Chris opted to tack downwind and Bob, following a further capsize, opted to do the same. However, Ben took the direct route to the mark and this propelled him into a large lead. On the second and final lap the three stayed up right and they repeated the same downwind tactics so there were no further changes in position.



By now a few "lulls" started to appear. The second race started in a lull, and all three started a little late at the Committee boat end. Chris had the perfect track close to the Committee boat, which forced Bob to drop behind him to avoid being pushed the wrong side of the Committee boat.

The wind rose again and Chris headed left in search of less wind, while the other two headed right. This proved to be the faster side and Ben reached the mark first ahead of Bob. Bob capsized on the first reach letting Chris through. Chris followed Ben on the direct route to the leeward mark, but was unable to close the gap on Ben. Bob capsized at the leeward mark and this time he got tangled in the mainsheet and had to

take off his buoyancy aid to free himself, so he retired. On the final lap Chris would only be able to catch Ben if he capsized. This was most likely to occur on the final run, but Ben sailed this leg in a lull. Chris followed, but the wind built again half way down and he broached and capsized, giving Ben the win by a substantial margin.

The Race Officer offered a final race as a decider, but there was not nothing to decide! Ben's two firsts gave him an unassailable lead, and Chris with two seconds couldn't be caught as there was no one left on the water to catch him. Therefore, the racing finished and the two boats returned to shore for an early tea.

Chris Robinson

