

Rickmansworth Comet Open

Rickmansworth Comet Open was scheduled for Saturday 7th September. For once I left home on time and so arrived in good time at the club. I always like to arrive with plenty of time, so the only person to arrive before me was Bob Dodds, who also likes to arrive early. I found him waiting outside the gate – he had been there since 8am and no one was at the club. This is not that unusual, as some clubs don't realise how early we like to arrive. However, by 9:30 there were still no club members around and other Comet sailors had begun to appear. Bob revealed that the gate was unlocked, so we could go in and see what was happening – as this was also the only way to do a U turn to leave this seemed to be the obvious thing to do. We drove in and found to our surprise that the Commodore was there - he had stayed the night at the club in his campervan. He was also surprised to see us – hadn't the event been cancelled three weeks ago? After some discussion it was determined that the club had intended the Comet Open to be held with the Laser Open. However, when the Laser's dropped out they decided to cancel both events. There was some confusion as to whether the Association had been told as the relevant people in the Club and Association had either been ill, on holiday or hadn't read their email. "As you are here" the Commodore said, "we'll hold the Open anyway!" He made a quick phone call to find a deputy race officer/rescue crew and his wife, who had thought she would be preparing for a club event in the evening, instead got some lunch ready. So by 11:30, only half an hour later than intended, we were ready to sail.

Rickmansworth is not a big lake, although they used have a big International fourteen fleet there until they went to asymmetric spinnakers! It is surrounded by trees, so you would expect the wind to be very shifty and full of holes – like Shearwater or Hawley Lake. However, the breeze was amazingly consistent. Although it shifted quite a bit, this was nothing like the 90-180 degrees you might get at Shearwater and Hawley and there were no big holes in the wind to get stuck in. It was a nice strength too – just enough to have to sit out in the gusts upwind and keep the boat moving downwind. The Race Officer set a course consisting of two beats plus two reaches and a run to connect them together. The start was between two marks on a transit set from a pole at the clubhouse. It all seemed quite clear until we got onto the water when we realised there were three possible poles! However, comparing the two marks to the poles it was possible to work out which one was the right one.

There were six competitors (three standard and three white Xtra rigs) and we all decided that the starboard end of the line was the place to start making it a bit crowded. Bob got to the best spot first so I sat behind him. In my opinion Bob was going to be late at the line – John Sturgeon and Henry Jagers ran down into the gap ahead of Bob ready to cross the line. However, Bob was right – John and Henry were early and had to sail further down the line where they had a coming together while Bob was right on the mark when the gun went with me following behind. Bob quickly got into the lead and I followed him. The wind shifts made the beats difficult and there were plenty of place changes. Henry came past me first, followed by Annette Walter. However, I kept comfortably ahead of Michael Ettershank until the finish. I tacked for the finish line, but got headed and I was concerned I wouldn't get past the mark so headed as high as I could. Unfortunately, this left a gap just big enough for Michael to squeeze through at take fourth place. Henry had caught and passed Bob, but Bob managed to regain the lead by the finish. We all finished within a couple of minutes of each other, so the second race was started immediately. In the second race Michael took an early lead, only to

be caught by Bob, who went on to win, and then Annette and Henry. I slipped down to fifth and had to keep an eye on John, who being on his own in clear wind was always threatening to catch up. Again there were only a couple of minutes between the first and last boat.

The third race was held after lunch. John had to leave early and didn't sail. Bob had already won overall, but decided to sail anyway. However, second place was wide open and could be won by any of the other four boats. The starboard line was the most favoured, so I elected to start slightly towards the pin end to ensure I got clean air at the start. This worked well initially, but unfortunately Michael was close enough and to windward of me to stop me tacking across to the right-hand side of the course. This forced me to sail into the mark on port tack and I got headed approaching the mark and had to duck the starboard boats, which put me into last place. On the second beat the others headed up the right-hand side of the beat, so having nothing to lose I went left. This proved to be spectacularly successful as I got lifted all the way to the mark and into first place. I kept ahead for a lap, but then got becalmed on the run allowing Bob to catch up right behind. He then got past by playing the shifts better than I did on the beat. However, I still had a small lead over Annette and Henry, while Michael had somehow fallen behind. I covered the two of them to the finish to take second place. This was enough to beat Annette to third place overall on count back, while Henry's second and third from the first two races gave him second overall.

We returned to the clubhouse for some tea and prize giving – Rickmansworth had managed to find some prizes. We all had a very enjoyable day and our thanks go to Rickmansworth Sailing Club for putting on the event for us at zero notice – quite a feat.

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