

Nottingham Sailing Club - Comet Open Meeting Sat 31st July 2021

The growing group of Comet sailors at Nottingham Sailing Club had been waiting for this day for quite a few years. We had made the decision to hold our very first open meeting in the summer of 2019 - so long ago! And, finally after 2 postponements/ cancellations, the day had arrived. A group of 11 club Comet helms (including 4 "guest" helms taking over boats either from those on holiday or "spare" boats) welcomed 9 visitors, from all over the country.

The conditions for racing looked good (and better than suggested by the Met Office) with a good westerly wind (10 - 12 mph) over most of our river. There was some current on the river after sharp showers over previous days, meaning care needed to be taken near buoys, but nothing to make racing difficult.

In our club races, where there is normally a variety of large and small boats, there is normally a maximum of 15 boats on a single start line across the River Trent. Due to the amenable conditions, and also the lack of club Albacores, GPs and even Lasers on the start line, it was decided to start all boats at the same time, without dividing into flights.

All took to the water for the first race, timed to start just after 11am. It was a busy scene on the river and a joy to our home Comet fleet to see so many Comets sailing on our bit of river. There was a simple course for the first race: with one buoy upwind (and upstream) and a second buoy downwind (and downstream); a beating and running course on the river. The first incident of the day happened at about 6 minutes before the start, just above the start line: Tom Fletcher, one of the club "guest" Comet helms went for a quick capsize when toe strap fittings broke. Tom quickly righted the boat, and chose to sail the race without toe straps. To be fair, the boat he was using was a recent purchase at a good price by one of our club Comet sailors with the intention of making it a boat for new club members to use / hire. Modifications/repairs weren't entirely complete.

The first race started, with 4 or 5 boats clearing the start line relatively easily. The rest of the boats battled it out for space on the river and some occasional clear air. Good upwind conditions required sitting out most of the times whilst frequent wind changes, together with various mild "wind obstruction" features on the river, gave ever changing conditions. After the first lap, Bob Dodds was leading the race, with Eddie Pope following and Steve Bellamy third. These places were held for almost the next 2 laps. After almost 3 complete laps the race officer team were just ready to signal a "shorten course" signal. At this point there was a change of position at the front of the race: Eddie Pope took the lead from Bob Dodds. The race team decided to not shorten so the whole fleet continued for the full 4 laps given on the course board. Eddie held onto his first position, with Bob finishing in 2nd place. The final lap allowed Sue Jones to overtake Steve Bellamy, giving Sue 3rd place.



After a delicious cooked lunch (thank you, Zeny!) the fleet prepared for the second race. Tom's borrowed Comet had been quickly fixed, with toe strap back working. There was an altered course, with 2 buoys added to the downwind leg, to give a (hopefully) short dog-leg reach section to the course.

Again, at the start, a handful of boats easily cleared the line and started their upwind leg leaving the rest of the fleet to fight for clear air and starboard tack rights. The wind was generally quieter during this race, with some busy buoys giving tough positional changes. Andy Simmons chose this race to test a reef in his White Xtra sail, giving him some speed problems on the lighter wind. With hindsight, the first or last race would have given better test conditions! However, this didn't stop his reefed sail looking good. Results: Eddie Pope won the race with a good performance throughout. Bob Dodds had a particularly strong last lap to come 2nd; Steve Bellamy came third. The closest finish of the race was between Chris Robinson and Sue Jones, with Chris piping Sue by a second for 4th place.



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There was a break for a cup of tea and (for some) a piece of cake before the 3rd race. By this time, first place for the day had already been decided (Eddie Pope), but 2nd place could still have been taken from Bob Dodds (with two 2nd place results). The course for the race was not altered, with a long beat upstream and the downwind leg broken in the middle by a short dog-leg reach. There was also interest added during the starting period from a large group of paddle boarders, who were finishing a 100km trek about half a kilometre below the club start line. The last busy start of the day gave way to a good reach to the top buoy. The wind was stronger at times during this race, giving exciting sailing and more good racing. There were even some planing reaches on the short dog leg for the lucky few. Again, Eddie Pope and Bob Dodds took 1st and 2nd places, with Chris Robinson taking 3rd place. Tom Fletcher had an especially good race in his borrowed Comet to finish fourth, just beating Steve Bellamy by a couple of seconds. Nigel Fern was delighted to have finished the race in 7th position.



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After packing away boats, everyone enjoyed a good selection of home made cakes, washed down with teas, coffees and the occasional alcoholic beverage. The prize giving followed, with thank-you's said by Roger Chilvers (Club Commodore and Comet sailor) on behalf of Nottingham SC and from Eddie Pope on behalf of the visiting helms.

The Nottingham Sailing Club Comet helms would really like to thank all of the visiting helms for attending the first Nottingham Open Meeting, and we hope everyone enjoyed their day. As individuals, we haven't travelled to many open meetings (most of us - none at all), so we were delighted to meet so many friendly Comet sailors.