

# Ogston Comet Open

## Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021

Alternative titles:

“A day of firsts” or “A view from the front the front, the bank and the back!”

Why I hear you cry do you need 2 alternative titles for the same event, read on and all will be explained!

Ogston was my ‘home’ club during the late 1960’s until 1971 and as such it was the FIRST time I had sailed on Oggy for 50 years! It was eerily strange to go back and as you would expect so much has changed but then again so little had changed in reality. Back then the facilities were two red huts that were used for everything and I mean everything. One of those two huts I am reliably informed now forms part of the clubhouse! The Safety boat store, a vast modern building, sits on the site of the original huts. Obviously the water hasn’t changed but I did not remember it.

On arrival I was met by and ‘forced off’ the road by Eddie! It transpired that his road base had died and he was borrowing a spare double stacker to retrieve his Comet. I was ‘forced’ off the road as he could not unhook it to let me through so I had to take to the grass! Needless to say that was the last we saw of him until the prize giving!

The car park was busy with some very long distance travellers, Henry and Peter backed up by Martin Loud (WFSC) and Sue Bull (NSC). This car park is in a sheltered bay and it is very tempting believe that the favourable condition there are what you will receive once out on the lake! Therefore I put the reefing ring on the mast, just in case, but was fairly confident that it would not be needed! Famous last words!

Once out and around the bay it was clear that the calm conditions in the bay was a complete contrast to what we were about to face! I quickly noted the course but where were the marks? Also we had a 3 fleet start, the first fleet were the Challengers, a trimaran for disabled sailors who were holding their Nationals (I think) at Ogston, then there were Ogston Handicap fleet followed by the Comets. The fly in the ointment was the race timing, we were using 5, 4, 1, Go but there was a 2 minute gap between starts – brain fade quickly set in as to when to start my watch! In the end I gave up but noticed there were two Ogston boats hovering around the start line! If in doubt follow someone who might know more than you! It paid off, the three of us were soon out front and before long I was in a strong 2<sup>nd</sup> place (another FIRST). The beat took us to the far end of the lake; a short screaming run / broad reach towards the dam wall, the wind eased as I approached the 2<sup>nd</sup> mark and a successful gybe was completed, another scream back across, another gybe another scream across and then back towards the committee boat. It was here that I met one of the Challengers, both of us on the same tack, and not knowing how manoeuvrable they were I gave way to be on the safe side but in doing

so I lost two places and nearly a third. The gybe at the penultimate mark left me facing to Starboard with sail way out on the Port side. I was going so fast I dare not move as the boat was stable!! As we approached the final mark the Comet in front of me suddenly capsized, the helm disappearing down the starboard side and all I saw was a falling mast! Suffice to say despite attempting to bear way I hit the mast at mid height level. The next few second felt like several minutes as I wrestled the dagger board up out of its slot to free both boats. Once the dagger board was free, obviously the rudder then hit. Fortunately it rotated free but then stuck and had to be pushed back losing more time. By now my initial strong 2<sup>nd</sup> was a very weak 5<sup>th</sup>!



Back up the beat was very wearing as gusts would hit at differing angles and at differing speeds, the boat often taking on a lot of water. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> mark I attempted to gybe but failed and in I went, the boom stayed up and the boat had to be turned to drop it back so that I could right the boat. Eventually I was back in and on my own! The next reach, one of the longest on the course if not the longest, was the fastest I have experienced outside of a Rib plus 40hp Honda engine! Everything was just right, the boat was buzzing and was stable and boy was it fast! Needless to say I did not gybe at the next mark!

At some stage, brain fade stops me from knowing where I went in again, but I was determined to get to the finish. After the last gybe I felt that I was home free with only a short run followed by the beat back to the line. The wind gods had other ideas and threw me in again and then to add salt to the wound decided to allow 845 to remain upright for 20 yards before falling over but not before the boom had rotated through 360 degrees! I am not a strong swimmer and had to be rescued and taken back to the boat. We spent a long time attempting to get the boat upright without damaging the decking or sail due to the excess tension in the rigging due to the boom rotation. All lines were loosened / removed and the boat came upright and another unfortunate 'FIRST' I retired from the race, just as the 2<sup>nd</sup> race was about to start! I did not feel too bad when I saw the number of Comets already lined up on the bank, their helms having decided enough was enough before my debacle.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> race was watched from the bank as we discussed the merits of reefing for Race 1, the consensus being that as no-one seemed keen to reef everyone else did not want to be the first to mention it!!

Andy then gave a master class in reefing my White Xtra in a blow and he made it look easy. I, then, re-rigged the main sheet, kicker and downhaul; all had been removed / loosened by the safety crew.

We then adjourned to the club house for a wonderful pasta bake etc lunch. Even with this inside me I still felt cold from my immersions so I decided to change into my dry suit for the afternoon race.

Feeling a lot warmer and more confident of staying upright I followed my usual practice of dunking the Dry Suit Zip end to check that it was securely closed. I felt a little damp so I gave it a good tug to fully close it.

Earlier I mentioned the wind gods, well they had it in for me again as the wind had dropped considerably and the reef was not needed! Additionally I discovered I was sailing a wounded boat, not caused by the 3 capsizes but by 'yours truly', in rethreading the main block I forgot about the ratchet and fed the main sheet through back to front – deep joy!

Race 3 followed the same course and soon became two separate races, unreefed and reefed! The unreefed boats soon disappeared whilst the 4 reefed boats fell by the wayside. At one stage I was last of all, nothing new there to my regular readers! Just in front of me was Lee Purslow whom some will remember from the Association Championships, where he took the first newbie prize. We swapped places until he fell right away and I closed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> reefed Comet. The gap between us opened and closed over the various legs but I could not get close enough to overtake. Lee managed to close up on the last leg but I was safe in 3<sup>rd</sup> reefed Comet place! On the way in Lee explained that he had had to empty his boat twice during the race, no wonder he fell back!

Needless to say I did not feature in the results but, as always, I thoroughly enjoyed the day.

On Tuesday morning, Monday being completely taken by Grandson, I sorted out my sailing bag and noticed some whiteness around the zip of the dry suit. On closer examination the rubber seal had deteriorated in several places along the length of the zip so had I taken a 4<sup>th</sup> swim I could have been in real trouble! Needless to say, a new dry suit is being delivered and I will be checking the zip on a regular basis!