

Up River Comet Open Sunday 21st of May

I am indebted to Chris Robinson and Eddie Pope for their comments on the Up River Comet Open. Although I was there I was, as usual, too far back to be able to comment on the action!! (Ed.)

Up River Yacht Club is on the River Crouch. With the tide out the river is a trickle a couple of metres wide and only knee deep. However, with the tide in the water depth increases up to about five metres and the width is a few hundred metres across. In addition, the sailing area extends a long way down stream where the river becomes much wider. With the right wind this allows some very long legs – longer than the Baltic Wharf Head of the Harbour Race. As the river is mostly surrounded by marsh the wind is steady too, comparable to the very steady winds found at Mudeford. With such a large tidal range the tides are quite strong, so this makes it very different to the lake/reservoir sailing most Comet sailors are used to.

This year's Up River Open was the day after the inaugural Open at Eyott, which is also on the River Crouch just up river of Up River YC! As all the competitors had sailed at Eyott's Open we had some practice sailing on the tidal waters.



Battling the tide!
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The tides limit the racing time at Up River so to get all the races in before the tide went out the Race Officer set all three courses to be run back-to-back. The first race was to take us down stream against the tide, the second race would take us back as the tide turned and the final race would be in the vicinity of the club house. Like the day before we had a good wind with marginal planning on a broad reach.

The first race had a reaching start against the tide. Therefore, on the first leg the best start had to be near one of the banks. Based on previous Opens I thought the leeward bank would be best and when I watched the Lightning Open start five minutes before us I noticed the top local Lightning helms chose this option. Knowing the tide was against us I felt comfortable sailing close to the start line and consequently I was slightly ahead of the nearby boats at the start. This turned out to be crucial as it allowed me to sail close to the leeward shore out of the tide without getting any dirty wind. The very long first leg allowed me to pull away from the boats behind. Further on we came to a couple of bends and then did a couple of short laps before the finish. This required some decisions on when to cross the river either to get on the

inside of the bend or across to the next mark. I didn't make any significant errors and so maintained my lead until the finish.

I didn't do as well in the second race. I elected to start close to the Committee boat out of the tide, but so did everyone else. I was too far to windward and got pushed out and so I started almost last. In this race we did a short lap before running back up the river to the finish. I managed to make a few places on the lap, but by the time we came to the long run back it was high water and there was no significant tide. Therefore, it wasn't too critical where you sailed and the with a consistent wind everyone sailed a similar speed and there weren't any changes in position.

Bob Dodds got the best start and stayed ahead throughout the race to win.

The start for the third race was the same as the first race, but this time the tide was taking us over the line. Therefore, the best place to start was in the centre. I was aware the tide was taking us over the line and headed back across in the last few moments before the gun. Bob, who was close to me, did the same but was more conservative which gave me the better start. An individual recall was sounded, but no one could hear the numbers. Sailing back to restart against the tide would take forever, so I elected to carry on. Unfortunately, I was one of the ones over along with Bob. We both elected to retire because if we re-started we would be so far behind we would only come last.

With the winners of the first two races out this left the event wide open. Eddie Pope won the last race and together with a third in the first race this gave him the win, just beating Michael Ettershank on count back with two seconds. Looking back at the results there were ties that had to be broken on count back all the way down the fleet, so the racing was very close.

Chris Robinson
Comet 867

Up River

Race 1 - led in style throughout by Chris Robinson in his standard rig. Started at the club line using a light system. A really long beat downstream against the tide, then the course was in a wider part of the river. (Can't remember who was 2nd, but I think it was Ben or Michael, who held this position throughout). Eddie Pope managed to gain an overlap on Andy Dale just before the final mark to pip him for 3rd.

Race 2 - the start was critical - being at the pin end enabled an early tack to the shore out of the tide. Thereafter passing opportunities were limited. Bob Dodds found his form for a comfortable win. (I was too far back to see what else was going on). The course started in the wider part of the river downstream and ended at the club line.

Race 3 - a number of competitors were in a position to win the event. The start on the club line was tricky because the tide had started to go out. Bob and Chris were judged to be over the line, but did not find this out until they had started up the beat. They both retired, because they would have been too far behind after re-starting. Eddie and Ben battled up the first beat, but Eddie did not spot the first mark. By the time he realised he had gone past it and returned

be was back in 4th or 5th. A very long run followed. Ben sailed down the far bank out of the tide, followed by several others. Michael (local knowledge) and a few others sailed down the near bank out of the tide. Eddie sailed down the middle on his own and despite being in more tide appeared to have a speed advantage - the wind could have been steadier and stronger there. By the leeward mark Eddie held a comfortable lead, which he held until the end of the race. Michael maintained his second place. By virtue of his win in race 3 Eddie won the event on count back from Michael. Chris was 3rd overall. It was interesting to see that the standard rig was highly competitive in the fresh conditions.

Eddie Pope



Eddie Pope takes the win.
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