

Cransley Comet Open

Sometimes it takes a while to find the words to describe things/events – Cransley Sailing Club's Comet Open is one such instant. It happened on 25 June 2023 with 7 visitors and 6 home sailors fortified by some wholesome breakfast butties, taking to the water. Unfortunately for some it was literally that for a lot of the day. Having cajoled a couple of club sailors (one sails a Wayfarer and one a Laser) to take part as they were “easy boats to sail”, the wind decided to test this theory to the limit with a building Force 2-3 for Race 1 ending in a Force 4-5 by Race 3 – their antics provided much entertainment for those watching over the course of the day!.

The racing itself was both close and frantic wherever you were in the fleet, with a superb performance from Henry Jagers in the first race pushing Eddie Pope and myself (Nigel Austin) before accepting 3rd. Even the delicious pasta bake lunch could not provide the staying power in Race 2 when 4 retired and 1 decided to observe. The result was a win for yours truly after half a dozen changes of lead with Ben Palmer, with the high wind specialist Chris Robinson coming in 3rd. The course set by the duty officer John Townsend was ideal for testing every element of sailing these wonderful dinghies and they were flying at times – even for me at 94kg! With the fleet reduced to 8 at the start of the 3rd race, there was a chance of glory for Ben, Eddie or myself, however the wind was unrelenting and Eddie was unable to challenge from the off. Ben had a great start and despite getting close at some stages, Ben's nerves of steel held to with Chris 3rd and Eddie 4th. At this stage it should be mentioned that Annette Walter sailed very consistently throughout the day, with the only other 2 to finish all 3 races being David Hodgson and Arran Britton – the Laser and Wayfarer sailors respectively (showing dogged determination despite capsizing over 10 times each over the 3 races).

Exhausted everyone retired to the clubhouse for a welcome afternoon tiffin – and the highly contentious prize giving! Now Cransley is a great family club and rules and racing come 2nd to having fun and a bit of banter, however once everyone started totting up the points in their heads, thoughts of stardom occurred. We had Ben Palmer and myself on the same points after discard and further down the field, David and Arran (with these 2 being arch rivals during club racing for many years!). None of the Cransley sailors had read the Notice of Race or Sailing Instructions and thought that if you were tied on points then the one with the better discard would prevail. Well behind closed doors and upon reading the SI's, it was noticed that Rule A8 had been inserted at some point in our history (witch hunt started immediately), and that Ben was therefore the winner (well done!). At the prize giving this needed to be explained as Arran exploded with uncontrollable joy when he was wrongly announced as having beaten David, only for the race officer to cruelly reverse this (timing was perfect, John!) when Rule A8 was pointed out, the joy was transferred to David – a truly comic moment.

Great sailing and such a great fleet with fun, friendliness and fair play. Also great to see along with all the visitors, Andy Simmons, the Class builder/designer – Godfather of the Fleet really.

Nigel Austin