

Redditch Comet Open – August 19th 2023

The much awaited Redditch Comet Open took place on August 19th delayed from its original date in July due to high winds. I was watching the forecast during the week which indicated that we may have to consider delaying again due to the same conditions. This contrasted with last year which was very hot and little wind. Unfortunately, it wasn't the weather that cancelled my sailing but an injury on the Tuesday before the race so I became a spectator for the event.

Come the day, although very breezy with anything between 10 and 25mph during the day the faithful Comet sailors braved the conditions. Arrow Valley Lake is a triangular lake with a couple of islands and surrounded by trees which bounce the wind causing peculiar wind patterns to challenge sailors used to large open lakes.

The first race started at 11.20am with Eddie Pope (Ogston) taking the lead which he held through the race followed by Ross Crawford (Redditch) in the first lap. With wild gusts abundant, there was plenty of entertainment for those in the club house watching Comets being bowled over like nine pins. One overturned Comet came back up adorned with fishing line and lead weight and Ross was a casualty in the first lap losing several places. With a nice long run between buoy 3 and 4, the wind was channelled between the island and the main shore resulting in an unforgiving jibe which many were succumbed to!

With Eddie in a comfortable lead, Chris Robinson (Burfield) and Dave Turtle (Shustoke) fought it out for second finally taken by Dave. The same was said for Alun Bevan (Methyr Tydfil) and John Coppenhaul (Hunts) who fought for 5th place which was taken by John.

Jacket potato lunch was next and the chat amongst the sailors was about the wind shifts, unexpected gusts and who went in and how many times.

The second and third races were back to back starting at 2.00pm. The wind had died slightly and we saw less capsizes in these two races.

But what was this, Eddie was still at the shoreline re-arranging his rigging with 2 mins to go. Surprisingly he got to the line just in time and although was not first across the line he made up in the first lap to sit in first position for the rest of the race. There was a battle for second place with Chris, Tim Higgs (Burfield) and Dave who finished in that order not far behind Eddie.

The wind dropped for the third race, which for me watching was the best race. This was like two races in one with two groups battling out for positions. Eddie again took an early lead but was strongly challenged by Chris who occasionally nudged ahead and Peter Mountford (Staunton Harrold) who added to the pressure.

John stayed in fourth place throughout the race between the race for the top three and the following group of Comets; Josh Bearshaw (Redditch), Dave, Alun, Ross and Tim who fought for fifth place. Tim succumbed to capsize at the end of the first lap leaving the four to use tactics to their advantage. The group thundered down the run for the last lap and swapping positions through the last three buoys before the finishing line where Josh dipped seconds ahead of Dave and Alun with Ross close behind.

The prize giving concluded the racing with Eddie, Chris and Dave awarded first second and third with Carol Evans (Redditch) given first lady.

I was pleased to see 16 competitors in all and we welcomed 10 travellers. It always good to see new faces at these events and was especially please to see Jacky Stagg and Caroline Doran from Bowmoor and also to Alun Bevan who brought his family up from South Wales to cheer him on.

The day ended with a BBQ for the hardy few before the Comet show headed to Carsington.

Although I could not compete, from my view point it was a good days racing thanks to the duty crew food and bar staff. I look forward to organising Redditch Comet Open 2024 and hope to see you then whatever the weather throws at us.

Roger Harrison