



Comet Class Association

Comet National Championships, Merthyr Tydfil SC

24-26th August 2024

Pete Coop, Eddie Pope, Chris Robinson

An excellent turnout of 29 competitors plus supporters arrived at the stunning rural location of Merthyr Tydfil Sailing Club, for the 2024 Comet National Championship.

This is a location not to be missed. The club is nestled on the shores of a large reservoir in a beautiful off-grid location, high up (over 1,000 feet) in the Brecon Beacons National Park (known in Welsh as Bannau Brycheiniog – or informally as 'the Bannau'). The views are spectacular. All facilities are available thanks to the efforts of the club members, who are excellent hosts. Solar panels and gas containers proved to be adequate substitutes for mains supplies.

We experienced a variety of conditions - wet, dry, overcast, sunny, windy and light - with winds from the West or South West. West winds at this valley setting are very tricky, because this is straight over the narrowest part of the reservoir and there are tall trees and steep slopes producing wind shadows and shifty conditions.

The fleet included 7 ladies and a wide age range spread from young adults (20ish) to ancient mariners (eldest 78). There were 4 ex-national champions competing.

The local support team did a fantastic job from welcoming the sailors, assisting with unloading boats, helping with launch and recovery, rescue services and supporting the external RYA race officer Ken Newing. In addition, they fed all competitors throughout the 3 days and put together 2 great socials. Well done MTSC!

Race 1 Saturday

Winds were light and variable from the West making it a tough challenge to set a course. The first start resulted in a general recall, but that was the only problem start of the event. Ken believes in long start lines (RYA training!). Following a very shifty first beat, Pete Coop and Eddie Pope were changing places at the front throughout the first lap which was a triangle. Unfortunately, while locked in battle the pair of them sailed off to the reaching mark on lap 2, but that was a sausage! By the time they realised their mistake they had slipped back to around 12th place. Several helms had spells in the lead, but as the race progressed Pete managed to get back into first place with Guy Wilkins in 2nd just pipping Eddie on the final beat. The fleet then went ashore for lunch.

Race 2 Saturday

The wind increased to provide a more stable racetrack. Ken wisely decided to go for a windward-leeward course with a spacer mark, which kept us away from the unsettled winds off the shoreline. Pete led for nearly all the race and finished comfortably in 1st, followed by Eddie then George Coop (Pete's son).



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Race 3 Saturday

Ken shortened the first leg for our 3rd course change of the day. Eddie had a great start but was seemingly not aware of this change and sailed past the windward mark by some distance - he only recovered to 4th. Pete made it a clean sweep on day one by winning again, followed by Guy and George.

Pete was therefore leading the event after day one, followed by Eddie. Discards only applied from race 4 on, and George and Guy both had a poor result they needed to drop. It must be said that Pete was made to work really hard for his results, because he was headed at times in all 3 races, and it was a major challenge to cover boats behind in those wind conditions.

Sunday Day 2

Big breeze and rain were forecast. That is what we got, but this time coming from the South West, making it an easier job for Ken to set a course. The windward-leeward format had worked well on Saturday, and he maintained this on Sunday. He also decided to hold 3 back-to-back races in the morning, because the forecast was stronger for the afternoon. Large gusts and wind shifts were the order of the day, resulting in a number of capsizes. A few Comets utilised the reef option which proved to be a good decision.

Race 4 Sunday

This saw a close fight between George and Pete which George won by 1 boat length (got you dad!) A new face appeared on the podium - Andy Dale.

Race 5 Sunday

The wind built and a number of boats decided it was getting too strong, so did not start the last 2 races on Sunday. There was plenty of place changing throughout the fleet, and both Guy and Nigel Austin started really well. However, by the finish Pete has resumed his customary place at the front of the fleet, followed by George then Guy.

Race 6 Sunday

The strongest wind of the regatta saw the fleet reduced to 20 boats, as 9 decided to sit out the final race of the day. By now in addition to very strong gusty conditions we were met with heavy showers. It definitely did not feel like summer with many deciding to change into dry suits! This was exciting sailing with Comets getting on the plane throughout the fleet. Pete again won followed by George, though Nigel in 3rd had led for the earlier part of the race.

With scores of 5 wins and a second Pete Coop had won the regatta with a day to spare.

However, it was game on heading to the last day with 3 boats capable of finishing on the final podium places – George, Guy and Eddie.



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Monday Day 3

The wind had abated dropping down to 7-10 knots from the South West, but veering a bit to the West at times. With occasional sunshine it resulted in a full turnout of the 29 boats. Ken wisely stuck with his windward-leeward format.

Keeping us away from the wind shadows had the desired effect and for the majority of the race the boats kept moving, with big gains to be had on wind shifts combined with spotting fresh pressure.

Race 7 Monday

This refreshingly delivered a new winner to the podium, David Peacock. He expertly played the shifts on one of the later beats to gain a good lead. He was followed home by Pete, then Nigel with Peter Mountford in 4th. George was 7th, but as Guy and Eddie were outside the top four this was sufficient to give him second place overall.

Race 8 Monday

3rd and 4th places overall were still not determined between Guy, Eddie and Andy, so there was a lot of pressure. Eddie executed a perfect start at the pin end of the long line, and led at the first windward mark. However, he could not hold back Pete and Guy who finished in that order ahead of him. This gave Guy 3rd place overall.

Overall Results (Top 6)

1st Pete Coop

2nd George Coop

3rd Guy Wilkins

4th Eddie Pope

5th Andy Dale

6th Nigel Austin

The ladies were very well represented with 7 helms. Charlotte Coop won the ladies regatta trophy finishing 14th overall and beating the other ladies in most of the races. This capped off an excellent weekend's result for the Coop family!



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Ladies results

1st Charlotte Coop

2nd Jacky Stagg

3rd Louise Curry

4th Meg Warren

5th Trish Peacock

6th Helen Leivers

7th Sarah Thomas

Not surprisingly the team prize went to Winsford Flash SC as Pete, George and Charlotte, along with Martin Loud, were all from this club. Eyott SC (Andy, John Hancox Tobia Hancox) were in second place.

Eddie (class chair) and Championship winner Pete thanked Merthyr Tydfil Sailing Club for their hospitality and huge effort in hosting such a successful event.

The Comet continues to be a popular choice in the dinghy market. The class is populated by people who have sailed many other dinghies and decided the Comet is a perfect fit – light, manageable in a wide range of wind conditions, flexible rig with option to reef and a friendly active class association. 3 of the first 4 finishers sailed Comets which were built well over 20 years ago. So the hull longevity is amazing - all you need is good maintenance and a newer sail.

Full List of Prize Winners

National Champion: Pete Coop

Ladies Champion: Charlotte Coop

Ancient Mariner Trophy: Nigel Austin

Veterans Trophy: Chris Robinson

Committee Prize: Will Griffiths