

Solent Sunbeam 85th Anniversary Championships at Itchenor

This is a special year for the Solent Sunbeam Class as it celebrates 85 years since the first boat was launched and 75 years as an adopted Class at Itchenor Sailing Club in Chichester Harbour.

The Solent Sunbeam 85th Anniversary Championships took place over three days in Chichester Harbour from 21st-23rd June in testing conditions. Twenty boats raced including seventeen from Itchenor and three from the Falmouth Division who were brought down by road trailer to support the event.

Winds for the first race were blowing SSW 20 knots gusting 28 knots, just about the limit for these lovely classic keel boats. The conditions in fact proved too much for Query V25 who lost her mast and Mayfly V15 who broke her boom and mast. The strong winds contributed to the loss of Comedy V17's mast in a contact with Fay V24. There was also a port and starboard collision between two brothers, Jonathon and Julian Money helming V18 Polly and V42 Penny respectively. The strong winds took their toll again in the afternoon when three of the ten boats who started were forced to retire.

The following day saw the winds moderate slightly to 15 to 26 knots and on the last day to a more comfortable 10 to 15 knots.

In addition to the exhilarating conditions on the water great fun was had by all ashore with a barbecue and sea shanties on the Wednesday evening and a dinner and prize-giving on the Friday evening.

First and Champion was Danny V26 from the Solent Division sailed by Roger Wickens, crewed by Jacky Wickens, with others making up the third crew member during the series.

Second was Milly V45 from the Falmouth Division sailed by Roger Graffy, Phil Badger and Paul Kerridge.

Third was Dainty V1 from the Solent Division sailed by Peter Taylor, Mike Hollis and David Gifford proving the oldest boat is still very competitive.

The next big event for the Class will be the annual passage race to Cowes ready to compete in the first Classic Keel Boat Regatta to be held there from 22nd-25th July. This will be followed by racing in Cowes Week from 2nd-10th August in which the Class has competed ever since the first Sunbeam was launched in 1923.

Background:

SOLENT SUNBEAM DOUBLE CELEBRATION YEAR

In 1922 three men sat around a table in a cottage in Hamble, Hampshire and decided they would like to have a new keel boat built. They asked the distinguished naval architect, Alfred Westmacott, to design and build it. A year later the first three Sunbeams were launched. A new classic one-design keel boat was born!

This year the Class celebrates its 85th anniversary holding a three- day championships on 18th-20th June. This will entail two races per day with a minimum of twenty of these classic elegant boats on the starting line including several coming especially for the event from the Falmouth division, which is the other home of the Sunbeam.

For the first ten years the Sunbeams' home was at Hamble and then Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. In 1933 the class was adopted by Itchenor Sailing Club. So, as well as celebrating 85 years of Sunbeams, they are celebrating 75 years of racing out of Itchenor in Chichester Harbour; now the only Club with Solent Sunbeams.

It was decided at the beginning that the sail letter would be a V and that all the names would end in a Y. This rule still stands to this day. New boats are built of the same woods including pitch pine, oak, American elm and English elm, all to the original design. The only change has been to allow modern rigs and sails and boat builders now benefit from computer-generated drawings.

Back in 1923 the Sunbeams were raced by gentlemen sailors and their hired hands. Now it is mostly husbands and wives who sail together with the occasional third to help on windier days. The hired hand is long gone!

Today there are twenty-four Sunbeams racing in Itchenor with only one, Judy, lost off Cowes in 1939. Dainty, the first Sunbeam built and launched, still races regularly not only locally but is trailed down to the South of France to compete against much the same generation of bigger classic yachts all built around the same time.

The Class keeps its tradition of racing each year at Cowes Week as well as racing every Saturday, Sunday and Thursday at Itchenor. Thursday evening is rather special when the Class has the Harbour almost to itself and no points are at stake - just a bottle of wine for the winner which is shared around the table at supper. This all goes to show what a friendly bunch the Sunbeamers are!

If you want to know more about these wonderful racing keel boats look up their website www.solentsunbeam.co.uk.

