

BELGIQUE PLATE AND CHOCOLATES

After the fun "Wedding Stakes" race on Friday, excellently organised and run by Tony Glover, and won by the lovingly restored XOD 50 with the first Swallow Gwaihir a lowly 12th, 16 Swallows took to the water on 30 April for the first big event of the year, the Royal Yacht Club de Belgique Plate. We have incessantly complained that we have not had a good breeze to test the new sail plan and the time now arrived with a gentle 13 knots on Saturday morning increasing to 20 knots and more early on Sunday afternoon, ENE with big shifts. The courses were generally windward/leeward but with plenty of variety.

Skua started the way she intended to go on and led the first race from start to finish. Behind her Solitude, Swift, Spectre and Buccaneer swapped the bridesmaid places. The most notable sight was Ginny Fox with her head over the bow of Marengo trying to retrieve her kite.

On Saturday afternoon Race Officer Neil Hart decided he wanted some entertainment and set a course from a special mark near Ella Nore on a depth gauge testing run to Mill Rythe and back via Freddie Brooks. Unfortunately for some, the wind backed 40 degrees immediately after the start which left Swift and Buccaneer, two of the morning stars, in the last two places at the first mark. The leg to Mill Rythe became a shy spinnaker reach with the constant threat of grounding to which several briefly succumbed and then it was Gwaihir's turn to trawl her spinnaker. Three white sail reaches later the wind briefly disappeared and then veered 50 to 60 degrees. The main beneficiary was Kansu who defied the lack of water in the John's Folly channel to go from the back half to second place at East Head, which she held to the finish, while all others were struggling against the ebb. Migrant got it completely wrong and took an early and extended tea break on the Stocker sand.

Many happy but weary crews enjoyed an excellent Club supper of fish pie, waffles and Belgian chocolate sauce before retiring refreshed for the morrow.

Our Sunday Race Officer Tim Hill ensured we could not relax and, after a beat to Wear, we had our first visit of the year to Calvert on a tide high enough to sail over the top of the Winner hump. Skua, with Merlin expert Will Rainey supporting Harry and Prue, was challenged early on but pulled out to secure their third win well before the finish. Marengo finally got her act together to finish second. Skua rubbed it in with a fourth win on Sunday afternoon while Marengo just beat Solitude for second place overall.

Full results at

http://www.itchenorsc.co.uk/results_2011/swallow/Sailwave%20results%20for%20Swallow%20Royal%20Yacht%20Club%20de%20Belgique%20Plate%202011%202-5-2011.htm

Photographs by Demelza Mitchell, over 150 with most boats included, at

http://www.demelzamitchell.co.uk/gallery_418128.html

Don't be put off by all the Skua piccys at the start.

Results awaited on the new sail plan and best sheeting arrangements.
