

## **The Cowes communiqué**

### **Skua dominant in a testing week of big winds and bumpy seas and an exciting six-way struggle to be the best of the rest**

It was an endurance test, both on and off the water, but a very enjoyable one. With the fleet back up to a respectable number (12) boosted by both returnees and first timers there was more purpose and benefit to the annual Cowes pilgrimage. The first weekend had pleasant F3/4 winds and a modicum of sunshine but thereafter F5/6 was the basic fare, often accompanied by heavy showers and on Tuesday by surface-flattening violent rain squalls with mega shifts. With the progressive change in tidal direction for the 12.15 start, the windward starts of the first few days were replaced by eastward offwind starts that delivered some wild three sail reaches to distant marks – mostly in Stokes Bay. Planing furiously for 4 miles is quite an adrenaline rush. Then you had to beat back.

*Skua* gave notice of what was to come with an opening race victoire. Somewhat surprisingly *Darter* got the next one and then *Archon* on Monday before *Skua* banged in four wins only interrupted by a jib halyard failure just before Thursday's start when *Dart* brilliantly took their place. The pathfinder FF's help, but *Skua*'s generally faultless tactical nous and exemplary boat handling were a cut above the chasing pack. And it was quite a pack – tenuously lead for most of the week by *Darter* but in a group of four that then became six as both *Dart* and *Cockersootie* finished the week strongly. The match racing between *Migrant* and *Solitude* was a feature of the latter part of the week when even single place gains were destined to be pivotal. In the end just 7 points covered the 2<sup>nd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> placed boats

1<sup>st</sup> *Skua* (Harry and Prue Roome, Will Rainey) 7 points

2<sup>nd</sup> *Solitude* (Anthony Lunch, Andrew Reid and Richard Thompson) 20 points

3<sup>rd</sup> *Migrant* (Charles Fisher, Richard and Carol Thompson) 21 points

#### **It wouldn't be Cowes Week if:**

- There weren't some odd courses.
- There wasn't some huge harrumph about the promulgation of an SI amendment (thanks to *Migrant* for getting sanity restored and 100 White Group boats re-instated).
- You didn't get some frenetic tacking along Cowes Green that is both exhilarating and occasionally frightening
- You weren't moored in the back of beyond and rolling giddily whilst contemplating the meaning of life before the start.
- Some Swallows were able to remember and respect some basic rules
- The Q flag (penalty accepted) wasn't making a regular appearance
- You weren't able to differentiate between female crew and the local belles by the bruised legs.
- You didn't spend a small fortune but still come away with a smile on your face.

#### **Some tips gleaned from Skua**

- Downwind starts: cruise the line on port with the eclipsed RYS beams defining your course until you reach your chosen starting spot, gybe, hoist - and bingo you are in the lead.

- In the prevailing lumpy conditions you set the boat up quite differently on each tack according to the wave pattern.
- If the spinnaker sheet hasn't moved in the last 10 seconds the crew is being negligent - Prue is just amazing.
- Most had difficulty just noting down and deciphering the course in the 10 minutes before the start – but *Skua* had all the mark bearings and distances on display by then as well.
- Check your jib halyard splice.

### **The dramatis personae**

- *Archon*'s stand-in crew did a brill job for the first three days. Carolyn contributed a 2<sup>nd</sup> and twin bro James a 1<sup>st</sup>. James had not sailed in any boat for three years let alone helming a Swallow on a breezy day in Cowes - and he overtook *Skua*. When did that last happen? James's performance (admittedly aided and abetted by Christine Graves and Chris Creak ("I hadn't realised how wet it was up front in a Swallow")) was frankly somewhat humbling (ie embarrassing).
- Merlin-Rocketeer Will Rainey added yet more talent to team *Skua* for the week and with the top prize already tied up he was duly rewarded with the stick on Saturday – and won. Are we really that bad?
- Charles Prescott has been appointed as the Hon Royal Corinthian YC port taster after a 'substantial' review of their port stocks. It seems a long while ago when such sessions were commonplace on Saturday nights at Itchenor.
- The honour of being the first ever Swallow to *finish* on the Squadron line went to bursary boat *Dart* with Will Kalderon and his light blues band – a victory crafted with guile and executed with devastating precision.
- Jeremy Buckwell celebrated attending Cowes Weeks spanning 50 years – by playing golf!
- John Houghton lead for the first two legs of Saturday's breezy finale sailing just 2up – a good recovery from the keel-crunching crash into the Squadron rocks on Thursday which sidelined crew Sarah for the rest of the week.
- The Squadron does rock. So does the Island. And the Corinthian, and on one or two nights the Yacht Haven did too.

### **And thanks to:**

- Social supremo Charles P and all the party hosts for their most welcome hospitality.
- Villa Rothesay and the Prospect which both produced excellent feasts, as did Corrie's Cabin - the chippie of choice for those who occasionally needed a less liverish option (and to give the wallet a break).
- Lunchbox for the RYS reception on Tuesday evening – complete with the Extreme 40's cavorting below.
- Pity the cruddy weather grounded the Red Arrows but the fireworks were great (mostly courtesy of a single benefactor).
- The whole fleet – for their camaraderie, willingness to assist in breakage solutions and general enthusiasm for a unique event.