

Cowes – more wind than you could shake an ‘X’ at!

Had it really been 52 weeks since Swallows at Cowes had the pleasure of watching *Skua*’s stern cross the Shrape finish line ahead? Little was to change in 2011 from Harry’s domination in 2010. Nevertheless, there were some interesting and noteworthy events and results during the eight days that made up the first Aberdeen Asset Cowes Week (two more to come).

Overall, the 12 boats that presented on Saturday 6 August were to have some good close racing with the final finish on Saturday 13th seeing three boats finish within 6 seconds of each other. Yet again, the racing was mainly sailed in Force 5 winds and above, with slightly shorter courses than last year though the usual great variety tested everyone’s ability to control boats both upwind and downwind in a breeze.

The most noteworthy result was *Dart* finishing 2nd, crewed as the Bursary Boat by three young, not very heavy sailors – putting paid to the belief that weight in a blow is a definite advantage. Using the new rig to ‘de-power’ the main quickly, while keeping the boat flat and moving through the Solent, meant that working the shifts and tides proved more than a match for the ‘regulars’.

Race 1 was ‘déjà vu’ from last year with the fleet sent off Westwards towards Gurnard and the buoys off the Sailing Club. Four boats (*Dart*, *Solitude*, *Migrant* and *Kansu*) were found to have been too keen and started the week with an OCS; *Skua* romped away but was closely followed by a resurgent *Avocet*, a mistaken *Solitude*, and *Cockersootie* around NE Gurnard and thence via Hill Head plateau and Air Canada (curiously absent from courses last year) to laid mark ‘c’ and the Shrape finish.

Race 2 was a running start from the RYS line to West Ryde Middle and from there to windward / leeward legs between the Ryde Bank and Norris Point before the final beat to the Shrape line. Both the ‘X’ fleet and the Sunbeams decided that the 20 knot breeze with forecast 30 knot gusts was too much to race in. (Curiously enough, both classes sailed in worse conditions later in the week.) *Skua* was again at the head of the fleet by the end, but after *Solitude* went too far in towards Norris Point she and *Dart* were to be seen bow to bow heading for the finish recording a dead heat for 2nd place with *Avocet* 4th.

On Monday, the breeze started just West of North and the course was set to Quinell over on the mainland shore in 10–15 knots of breeze. *Skua* and *Solitude* arrived 1st and 2nd with *Kansu* and *Echo* not too far behind. *Skua* promptly set a course following the Redwings to Royal Southern, followed by *Solitude* whose crew was carrying out running repairs. The rest of the fleet correctly identified the next mark as being Royal Thames, which left *Skua* and *Solitude* struggling to get round it under spinnaker while the rest of the fleet sailed gleefully by. When a rain shower came through, the fleet found itself back in the realm of 20–30 knots of breeze as it beat up from Hamble Yacht Services to Coronation (a mark well known to anyone who competed in the previous year’s Vernon Trophy before the Nationals at the Royal Southern).

It was at this stage of the race that *Cockersootie* showed a very impressive turn of speed simply sailing away from the fleet to round Coronation first, with *Skua* and

Solitude close behind and *Migrant*, *Avocet* and *Dart* chasing. *Cockersootie*'s lead lasted until the run from East Knoll down to Fastnet Insurance when she made her bid for 'broach of the week' following a gybe. It was a title she was to hold for only two days. So it was *Skua* in for another 1st, with *Cockersootie* and *Solitude* in a nip and tuck battle for 2nd. A bit too much nip and not enough tuck as *Solitude* on Port clipped *Cockersootie*'s stern with the penalty ensuring that she would finish 3rd.

Further back, *Kansu* was to suffer a broken mast to put her out of the racing for the week – or so everyone at first assumed. However, the boat was towed back to Itchenor on the Tuesday and the 'last' mast owned by the Class was stepped and the boat sailed back to be ready to race again on Wednesday. A brilliant effort!

Tuesday brought the lightest winds of the week with a gentle Westerly breeze providing the boats with a beat down to City Main off Gurnard, then over to Quinell, followed by a small triangle of Air Canada, West Knoll and Williams Shipping, and then a larger one ending at East Bramble before the beat to the Shrape finish line. By the time the first Flying Fifteen (*Men Behaving Badly* – a boat that puts Harry to shame in terms of its ability to win) got to Williams Shipping there were still some Black Group starts under way but other than the great view there were no clashes.

For once it was not *Skua* in the lead but *Migrant* which headed the fleet back in with a lead of over 6 minutes, with *Skua*, *Solitude*, *Avocet* and *Dart* (recovering from being over the line at the start) all creeping painfully over the finish as the tide built and the wind dropped.

Race 5 on Wednesday was yet another windy affair with the courses set as close to the Island shore as possible to provide the most sheltered conditions. Despite there being more wind than on Sunday, both the 'X' fleet and the Sunbeams came out to race. A running start saw the Swallows down to the Ryde Bank with beats back in towards the Island shore. It was on the last run that *Solitude* was to be seen rolling spectacularly to windward. Chris David sitting on the leeward side of the boat fell across the cockpit knocking Richard Thompson and himself out of the boat on the windward side. Chris was swept away from *Solitude* while Richard held on while Andrew Reid, the man left in the boat, managed to get the spinnaker down. Chris was recovered by the leading Redwing *Quail* and deposited back upwind of *Solitude* as Andrew recovered Richard over the stern. Not quite enough to win the 'broach of the week' prize. At the front of the fleet, it was *Skua* and *Cockersootie* (not short of her own broaching problems) who came 1st and 2nd with *Avocet*, *Whimbrel* and *Dart* featuring in the next places.

Thursday brought even more wind and after the Class Dinner at the Villa Rothsay the night before only nine boats presented themselves at the starting line. *Harrier* quickly decided that the beer tent and the Test Match had attractions. The Xs had their big early morning start on the RYS line with Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal firing the starting gun but the Sonars, Mermaids and Sunbeams spent the day ashore while all the other White Group fleets started with reduced numbers. The course was close to the Island shore running out to the Ryde Bank and then beats back into the shore, reminiscent of the previous day. This time *Solitude* decided that the only way to win 'broach of the week' was to surf down a wave, bury the nose in

the next wave and lie down to leeward filling up rapidly. The situation was recovered quickly but the only course of action was to reach off towards Fishbourne to bail out while the rest of the fleet continued on to North East Ryde Middle.

Meanwhile, on what was the windiest day of the week, the very light crew of *Dart* sailed their boat into 2nd place behind *Skua* well ahead of *Kansu*, *Migrant* and *Cockersootie*.

One could see how *Dart* improved each day and Friday was to be no exception. With the wind dropping down to below 10 knots initially and climbing only to 15 by the end of the race, a great start saw her well down to the West and Salt Mead with the White Group finishing on the RYS. Good use of the tide coming back to Elephant and then judging when to head over to East Lepe eventually saw *Dart* finish 1st under spinnaker followed by *Kansu*, with *Cockersootie* 3rd and *Skua* 4th. The final spinnaker run brought all the boats up the Island shore from the West, with *Avocet* unlucky to find the rocks in her quest to finish well up the fleet.

And so to the final race of the week. Last year while *Skua* had swept all before her just as she did this year, four boats were in the reckoning for 2nd place. This year, the race for 2nd and 3rd was to be between *Dart* and *Cockersootie* with $\frac{1}{2}$ a point separating them before the off. A run down to Motherbank against the ebb tide seemed to take an interminable amount of time even though the race was a short 11 miles (as opposed to the 14+ miles for the other races). A beat back to Peters & May 2 and a run to South East Ryde Middle found *Dart* and *Cockersootie* toe to toe at the front of the fleet. *Dart* managed to eke out a small lead and proceeded to cover classically taking *Cockersootie* out to the Starboard lay line into the finish. *Skua* had managed to recover to 3rd place on the final beat and the three boats finished within 6 seconds of each other with *Dart* taking her second 1st place to beat *Cockersootie* by $\frac{1}{2}$ a point ending up 2nd overall. *Skua* was 3rd on the day but 1st overall.

Musings

Does the performance of the *Dart* team mean that to beat Harry we all need to be searching round for a crew the sum of whose ages is less than half that of the 'standard' Swallow crew?

We hope to see Beccy Kalderon and her *Dart* team back in Swallows again soon.

It was good to have *Spindrift* make the trip down from Aldeburgh.

Can anyone remember when Cowes meant balmy days waiting for the Sea Breeze to appear so that one had the great sight of spinnakers coming from the West and East at the same time?

While some might think the Carvery at the Villa Rothsay is more winter than summer fare, by the time we got to Wednesday a large meat roast was ideal. Especially following the Pimms in the garden. Shame that not everyone dressed up for the occasion.

John Houghton seems to be getting the hang of the new sails. *Avocet* was to be seen at the front of the fleet most days. A dark horse for the Norman Moore?

Peter Snell summed up why Cowes week is still so worthwhile. It was his first Cowes Week for 25 years, he told us on Wednesday night, but he would be back next year as the racing was so good. Long legs which are still subject to tidal influence but which are not blighted by such influence meant that everyone was still interested in the race when they got to the last mark. There were places to be made up and lost and the real 'buzz' in Cowes afterwards made it a great sailing event.

Should Prue put her foot down more often to stop Harry drinking (shandy) at the 'Sail for Gold' bar on the parade at night? Or next year should the whole class demand that pictures of the 'Baywatch' theme night at the Shepherds Wharf nightclub be available for blackmail purposes?