

Solo Fleet Review – Autumn 2007

This year has seen the size of the fleet grow considerably with a tally of 26 to date and still rising, despite the loss of a few regular competitors. Hugh Tubbs and Justin Harris bade us farewell, Harold Cranch decided to take a year off, but will be back in 2008. Emily Steed gave birth to her first child, Harrison Robert on 23rd September and was understandably excused for the season (no excuse next year though). We welcomed a number of new members at the start of the season, Roger Pope with his Severn Sailboats composite, has had a good first season but needs to do something about his truancy record next season, Toby Spittle bought Malcolm Bell's old Winder and promptly showed him that it was capable of finishing in front of his new Speed and Julian Meek has had a good first season in Rob Hyde's old but perfectly maintained, wooden Gosling.

Fourteen Solos took part in the Spring Handicap series in which 43 different boats competed to varying extent. Andrew Borne and Peter Edwards were two more Solo sailors to compete in the series, but due to a backlog of work at the Gosling boat yard, were out together in a Tasar and as a result of some of their antics, ended up runners up for this year's Capsize Belt. At the front it was Alister Morley's new Solo and Geof Gilson's Yawl which fought for overall honours in the series, with Morley coming off best by one point in the final analysis.

The Solo fleet had grown some more by the start of the Summer Series, with the arrival of David Greening and a Winder finished in a colour most suitable for someone in touch with their feminine side. On his own at the front was Alister Morley, who failed to finish in first place only once in seven appearances. Just behind him, Chris Cleaves was not having it all his own way, regularly fighting it out with, but usually getting the better of, David Greening and Peter Hammond. Also Malcolm Bell and Andrew Borne were ready to pick up places when one of these made a mistake and Billy Jago was always in contention on the occasions that he was able to take part.

With Alister Morley putting all of his energy into a house building project this year, he has not had the time to compete on the open circuit, so we have seen a lot more of his green rowing boat heading for Smalls Cove in the last few minutes before the start. Alister & Chubby's regular heads to head have produced a weekly clash of youthful talent versus fox-like cunning, the best examples of which were fought out in strong winds during the Spring Open. This three day event could have gone either way until Morley made a fatal error at the last gybe mark in the final race. Having been forced to allow an overlap to Chubby as they approached the bouy, Alister capsized on a gust as he rounded up to windward. Despite getting back into the race, almost without getting his feet wet and fighting back to within ten seconds at the finish line, it was enough to concede the race and overall victory to the old fox. It was Cleaves again in the poorly attended October open meeting, but this time Morley was beaten into fourth place by David Greening and Peter Hammond.

34 Solos entered our Regatta this summer and this time the locals did not have it all their own way, with Mark Maskell from Fisher's Green taking overall victory from Chris Cleaves and Peter Hammond. Alister Morley added a magnificent 23 points to his card following a spectacular error of judgement on which side of the estuary to take in order to beat the tide. Adding an OCS in the last race meant that he could not discard this result and the best he could manage was 6th overall.

The occasional defection of sailors from the yawl fleet in the summer, turned into a stampede as the Autumn series got under way. The sight of yet another new addition to the fleet being unpacked and rigged in the creek car park has become almost a standard feature of Saturday morning pre-race preparation. First it was John Brockwell's very tidy Severn Composite, next up was Paul Ellis with a brand new Speed, not to be left out Charles Thompson then appeared with a nearly new Winder and finally Ian (Scud) Stewart appeared with a beautiful wooden boat, built in the last century by Dave Gibbens. Scud's boat lay for years in a barn as an unfinished project and has only now been fitted out and rigged for sailing. Once he's settled down in the class, it will be interesting to compare the performance of the best of the 70's Solo wooden craftsmanship, with today's plastic clones.

Following, the annual prizegiving, Mrs Cleaves must be a very happy woman this autumn, having had to put up with boxes full of silverware to polish for some years, quite a lot of it is now living in a hastily built extension to Alister's new Salcombe home which is nearing completion. The Capsize belt slipped from the grasp of the Solo fleet into the hands of this year's deserving winners Karen & Norman Brown. Trevor Williams was presented with the Endeavour Trophy in recognition of his improvement throughout his second season, it was also good to see Trevor out practicing hard last week-end in preparation for his bid for the Capsize Belt next season.

There is some exciting racing still to come, if the festive spirit does not generate high levels of absenteeism, the Festive Series should see a record crop of Solos taking part.