

Noble Marine Laser Radial Spring Qualifier at Stokes Bay SC, 19–20 March

By Hannah Snellgrove

With shifting winds appearing to have been a common theme for this year's Laser Spring Qualifiers so far, the third and final one at Stokes Bay did nothing to buck the trend with an offshore north-easterly wind greeting the 68 Laser Radial competitors who arrived on the chilly Saturday morning ready and raring to go racing.

With fewer than 80 boats, the fleet were, once again, sailed as one rather than split into flights. With huge shifts and pressure differences (8–15kts) across the course, it was 'snakes and ladders' racing in every sense. Consistency proved to be the name of the game. There were some sailors who mastered the tricky conditions and consistently found more ladders than snakes, whilst for others it seemed that the opposite was true!

After an initial false start on a pin biased line, the fleet was off. The pin bias transpired not to be as fruitful as first appeared, with the pressure not quite reaching the boats closest to that end of the line and the far left proving to be a fairly difficult, shadowy place to get out of. Those who took a little of the pin bias advantage, but pieced together the pressure and shifts, were successful in reaching the windward mark in front. Despite huge comebacks from some sailors who were a long way down the fleet and had worked their way into the right-hand shift and pressure up the second beat, Ali Young took the first bullet of the weekend, chased by Jon Emmett with Iago Davies in third.

Young and Emmett proved their class by finishing first and second respectively once again in the second race of the day, with youth sailor Stephanie Wingeatt hot on their heels in third. It was Stokes Bay sailor Chloe Barr who claimed third place in the final race of the day, with the two frontrunners consolidating their position at the top of the leader board but with a reversal of fortunes as Emmett took the bullet and Young added a second to her score line.

Discarding this second place, Young was the overnight leader counting two first places, with Emmett trailing by just one point in overall second and youth sailor Daisy Collingridge, a new face at the front of the fleet, in overall third having posted a highly creditable sixth and fourth in the last two races of the day. With almost all of the top bunch, except for Young and Emmett, having some high-scoring discards already on the board, it was all to play for on day two.

Sunday dawned even chillier, with a similar breeze – slightly less strong but certainly no less shifty. A combination of the shifting winds and the tide rushing from right to left looking upwind meant for some hard-fought starts, and sailors having to make difficult time and distance judgements.

Success again came from piecing together the bands of pressure and trying to be on lifted tack whilst doing so! Young was back on top form in race four, taking the bullet from Lewis Smith and Ellie Cumpsty.

In race five, it was Hannah Snellgrove who led to the top mark from Emmett, having started near the committee boat. A tussle then ensued between the two top boats, with Emmett playing the shifts better on the left-hand side of second beat to lead from Snellgrove at the second windward mark, before Snellgrove edged past on the final downwind to take line honours, chased hard by Emmett, with Jamie Calder close behind in third.

The battle for the regatta win came down to the final race, with both Young and Emmett having an eighth place discard, Young was on five points and Emmett on seven. After a pre-start scuffle, both started near the pin end and were able to tack across towards the right. Sailors that went further left again struggled to come back. Meanwhile, Collingridge played some big pressure bands on the right-hand side of the course to put herself into the top group with Young and Emmett.

Emmett took the gun from George Povall, Smith, Collingridge and Young, which would have been enough for Emmett to take the overall event win, but, unfortunately, a premature start under the dreaded black flag meant that Emmett and Collingridge added letters to their scores, with Young, therefore, emerging victorious. Discarding

the black flag disqualification, Emmett completed the event as runner up, with a consistent series from Povall, counting only top tens, securing her the final podium position overall.

Thanks must go to the Stokes Bay Sailing Club volunteers and helpers, who made the competitors feel very welcome, and also to the race management team for getting the races off so deftly in challenging conditions.

Results:

1 Ali Young, 8pts

2 Jon Emmett, 15pts

3 Georgina Povall, 23pts

Full results at:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=84&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/stokesbayrad.16nh.html>