

## **Noble Marine Laser Standard Spring Qualifier at Stokes Bay SC, 19–20 March**

**By Jack Wetherell**

With a cold north-easterly forecast for the weekend, it was great to see 39 standards on the start line for the final Laser Spring Qualifier at Stokes Bay SC. Traditionally, the Stokes Bay Qualifier has been raced using a triangle/sausage course, but this year Ken Falcon announced at the event briefing that we would be able to race the trapezoidal courses often used for the international events. Thank you to all the volunteers at Stokes Bay. Without them setting up and altering everything, the course would be too difficult and we would have had to revert back to the dreaded triangle!

Race 1 got away after a general recall. With the wind blowing in the forecasted direction at about 7–10knts, there were lots of shifts and big pressure differences at times. James Gray made the best of the opportunities available to lead around the windward mark closely followed by Jack and Henry Wetherell. Gray did an excellent job of defending down the first run and the second beat but, eventually, both Wetherells came through on the final downwind making use of extra pressure down the left side. Jack Wetherell took the victory followed by Henry and then Gray. Jack Cookson sailed well throughout the race to finish fourth with Oliver Davenport rounding out the top five.

Moving in to Race 2 and the tidal flow had begun to build inshore moving left to right as the boats raced upwind. There was very similar wind direction, but it was still shifty and patchy. Cookson sailed excellently throughout the race to take the win. Anthony Parke got the second beat spot on to finish second followed home by Alex Mills Barton, Micky Beckett and Joseph Mullan.

The final race on Saturday started with a square line. Hamish Eckstein charged up the beat to lead round the windward mark with Gray in hot pursuit. At the gate, Gray and Mills Barton selected to go right gate with Jack Wetherell and Eckstein going left. At the first cross, Jack Wetherell was in the lead with Mills Barton second. After

several place changes upwind and down it was Jack Wetherell who scored the bullet. Mills Barton was second, Blowers third, Cookson fourth and Eckstein fifth.

Sunday morning had near identical conditions to Saturday, but with the earlier start time of 9.55, the fleet would be racing on a different state of tide. The line was set with a lot of pin bias tempting a lot of people towards that end. But, making the most of the right-hand side with a long tack port due to the tide rushing from right to left, it was Andrew Le Grice who made the fleet look stupid by rounding the windward mark with a massive lead. Le Grice looked comfortable masterfully picking the shifts whilst taking the tide in to account. He held on for a memorable win. Henry Wetherell finished second in the race after being one of the best from middle left on the first beat. He was followed home by Parke, Mills Barton and Davenport.

After the first race, the wind had shifted slightly to the right reducing the line bias. Harry Blowers got the best start out of the starboard end and was quickly on to port leading the fleet out to the right. As the fleet got closer to the shore the shift frequency increased and it was Jack Wetherell who made the best decisions with Gray to lead around the windward mark. Jack Wetherell held on for the win with Henry Wetherell making good gains on the final downwind to finish second. Beckett was third, Blowers fourth and Cookson fifth.

The final race of the weekend started in the lightest breeze and a relatively slack tide. A real game of snakes and ladders unfolded on the first beat but, eventually, with the final shift and a bit of extra pressure, Alistair Goodwin led around the top mark with Gray and Beckett close behind. At the leeward gate, Goodwin held the lead with Jack Wetherell moving up to second on the downwind. In the lighter breeze, pressure was going to be king. Blowers and Cookson played the beat very well to move in to the top five. Goodwin sailed the final run very well to hold on for the win. Behind him the next six boats were neck and neck, Mills Barton stayed in the pressure all the way down to come home in second place, Blowers was third, Gray fourth and Cookson fifth.

Cookson's consistency over the weekend came out on top with him winning his first Laser Qualifier. Jack Wetherell got the better of his brother Henry, this time to round

out the podium. Alex Mills Barton showed his class after some time out of the boat to finish fourth with Micky Beckett finishing fifth.

Results:

- 1 Jack Cookson, 19pts
- 2 Jack Wetherell, 22pts
- 3 Henry Wetherell, 23pts

Full results at:

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