

## **Noble Marine Laser Radial Autumn Qualifier, HISC, 14–15 October**

**By Ben Elvin**

The second Autumn Qualifier, a combined event with the Standards and 4.7s, attracted a fleet of 77 Radials to Hayling Island SC for an unseasonably warm weekend of racing. With three fleets to race and six races scheduled, the RO got things underway very promptly, raising the D Flag before 11am and allowing the fleets onto the water earlier than usual. Unfortunately, on the way out the majority of sailors failed to spot where the Committee Boat was and started heading out to sea before eventually being sent in the right direction by the safety fleet leading to a slight delay.

As dark clouds loomed towards the Solent, Race 1 got underway in Hayling Bay, after a single general recall, with the majority of boats favouring the starboard end of the line. Those who could tacked off to the right, hoping to find more than the 5–7knts of breeze that currently covered the course. The strong contenders from the pin followed suit, tacking above and inside the fleet, with Clemmie Thompson, Hannah Snellgrove and visiting Dutch sailor Mirthe Akkerman finding clear lanes after strong starts. As the starboard layline approached, and without any sign of the expected right-hand shift appearing, it was Ben Elvin, having won the Committee Boat end at the start, who tacked first to converge with Clemmie Thompson, with Thompson passing a couple of boat lengths ahead. Unfortunately, as Thompson tacked back to cover, there was an unfortunate mishap and a loud splash which seemed to take a while to recover from, and it was Akkerman and Snellgrove who, therefore, led around the first mark and set off back down the inner loop, closely followed by youth sailor Mila Monaghan who had also had a strong first beat.

The lack of any significant shifts on the first beat meant a very congested windward mark rounding for the majority of the fleet, with difficult decisions to be made about how to get clear air downwind and how far wide of the rhumb line was reasonable. By the gate, Snellgrove had overhauled Akkerman and set off back to the right-hand side of the course, with the majority of the fleet following suit. Snellgrove held her nerve up a patchy second beat, never panicking when boats far to the left or right of her found temporary patches of pressure, and extended to take the win, with Akkerman in second and Monaghan in third.

The story for Race 2 was a left trend in the breeze and the winning strategy turned out to be to start near the pin, hold and then tack above the fleet. It was Master sailor and Olympic coach Jon Emmett who pulled it off perfectly, going further than Snellgrove and benefitting more as the wind wound left. Thompson, determined to make up for her mishap in Race 1, arrived just behind Akkerman and in front of the leading bulk of the fleet. It all remained square at the front on the first downwind, with only Elvin pulling through the bunch to close up with Ackermann and Thompson. On the second beat, Snellgrove attacked Emmett by heading left and picked up some shifts to close the gap, eventually catching and passing on the final downwind. Further back, Thompson and Ackermann were holding

off Elvin in a three-boat battle for third which was eventually taken by Thompson who opted to go low on the final reach.

The final race of the day started with a general recall (luckily for Thompson and Snellgrove who had been battling for the pin and had ended up rafted on it). Unperturbed by this, Snellgrove attacked it again at the second attempt, and with nobody else willing to take the risk, she popped out and quickly took a lead over the fleet. The wind was winding left again and, with a long port tack, Snellgrove was placed perfectly to execute a long roll over the fleet to the starboard layline. Also coming in strong from the left were Chloe Barr and Master sailor Rob Cage, followed by Arthur Brown who was quietly building a strong series. On the first downwind, Snellgrove initially appeared to be in trouble as she struggled to find the breeze and the chasing pack closed up, but after heading to the right and finding some pressure, she pulled back and had recovered her lead by the gate. The second beat turned out to be all about the right, with Brown and Emmett hitting it hard to move into second and third, overhauling the group of Barr, Cage and Elvin, who were trading tacks in the middle of the course and missed the advantage. Snellgrove took the win comfortably, followed by Emmett and Brown.

Overnight leader was Hannah Snellgrove with a string of bullets, but it turned out that Sunday was not going to be as simple!

The forecast stronger breeze failed to materialise on Sunday, and with the time pressure of a 2pm cut off, the RO went straight to black. This didn't seem to hold the fleet back too much, and after enough were excluded, the race got underway with Mirthe Akkerman finding a way through the 4.7 fleet to hit the left-hand corner and lead into the top mark. Youth sailors Tom Pollard and Piers Luxford also showed strongly having started slightly further up the line. A very congested beat took a few scalps, with Snellgrove and Emmett struggling to break free and having to make up places. Akkerman held on comfortably for the win from Pollard and Luxford.

For Race 5, the fleet seemed to have a lot of trouble starting, with four general recalls claiming a total of 15 sailors, including some of the sailors who were in contention for the overall prize – Monaghan, Snellgrove, Emmett and Akkerman. With the reduced fleet eventually getting away, it was Arthur Brown and Matt Beck who capitalised, arriving at the top mark with a decent gap and fighting it out between themselves until the top of the second beat, when Elvin had managed to close the gap slightly and put them under pressure for the final downwind. The final run was a very light affair, with Elvin opting to try and find more wind on the right away from Beck and Brown, who were still tussling it out under the watchful eyes of the jury. Brown eventually took the win.

With many sailors already carrying a black flag or a big score the final race would prove to be critical. A melee on the pin end allowed Ackermann to pop out, but the winners came from the right-hand side. With several of the contenders caught up in the mess, it was an opportunity for others to shine, with Piers Luxford coming to the fore once again, and notable performances from Yann Bracegirdle

and Mila Monaghan to take second and third respectively. The only escapee from the pin, Ackermann, worked hard to take fourth.

Despite getting a black flag in the final race and the situation being out of his hands, it was Arthur Brown who took the overall win following big scores from Emmett and Snellgrove. Ultimately, Brown had put together the most impressive and consistent series across all six races, limiting the disasters to only his final black flag, which all the other contenders failed to manage.

Results:

- 1 Arthur Brown (28pts)
- 2 Mirthe Akkerman (32pts)
- 3 Jon Emmett (33pts)

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=97&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/hiscrad.2017nh.html>