

Standard Fleet Report by Rupert Bedell

As forecast, it was a good degree colder when the sun came up on Saturday Morning but it was one of those brilliant crisp, bright winter mornings which leaves you with a spring in your step, and thankfully didn't change all weekend.

As soon as I woke, I had the usual pangs of guilt that come with the prospect of a day's sailing whilst leaving your family at home, but having negotiated some free time, I was determined to bank it. I quickly fixed breakfast for the kids, changed the baby, stuck some washing on - and promptly legged it.

Despite seriously considering driving to a car park and having a sleep for 48 hours instead, I did make it to the club. I'd only managed to sail once in the previous 12 months so as I peeled the mouldy, frozen cover off my boat and viewed the swamped contents within, I began to wonder would it still float?

Elsewhere the usual crowd began to rock up, with a few new faces too. Forty-one standards had made the effort, which was a great result for a late November event and testament to all the fine work put in by Gareth Edwards in the lead up. Bizarrely, the reservoir resembled a giant stadium with water levels lower than I'd ever seen in 12 years sailing at Queen Mary. Standing on the shore, we were looking down about forty feet to the water down below. How on earth would the wind get down there?

Catching up with some old friends over briefing, I was struck by a couple of thoughts:

- Laser Masters don't seem to age
- Generally speaking they are fitter, healthier and happier than your average person over 35 years
- Perhaps the secret to eternal youth is doing something which keeps you fit, healthy and focused whilst enjoying the company of like-minded others?

Anyway, fast forward an hour to the first blast of icy water to the face, and I very nearly turned the boat around and went for that car park kip after all. Twelve months out makes you pretty-soft and the thought of a coffee and a rare, uninterrupted perusal of the morning papers was almost overwhelming. Thankfully we were straight into the starting sequence and I felt an old, vaguely familiar feeling return: adrenaline.

As I've come to expect at Masters events, the racing was tight across the fleet, with little room for error, but with respect and friendship in evidence across the fleet at all times. It's a unique fleet, where guys have been racing each other for upwards of 20 years, but despite some fierce rivalries, it's a model for enduring good sportsmanship. If it was a ball sport, it would be International Rugby Union.

On day one local favourite Orlando Gledhill made the early moves, winning race 1 and 2; in the second instance stealing victory from a startlingly resurgent Neil Peters. As is now standard practice for the sailor dubbed 'Captain Disaster', Neil's boat had decamped at high speed from his trailer en-route to the regatta setting one of his trolley wheels on fire. Having been physically on fire earlier in the day, he was now metaphorically on fire, setting a blistering upwind pace which prompted one observer (me) to demand a drug test.

Elsewhere Anger O’Gorman was travelling fast but hitting everything in sight, thus spoiling his race card entirely. Alan Davis was sporting a dashing electric pink scarf-thing, which appeared to distract him in the early rounds as he took three races to get going, by which point Orlando had a firm grip on the championship which he wouldn’t relinquish.

Andy Le Grice showed his permanent class with a couple of top 3 results on his return to Masters sailing, and Mark Lyttle would have also been in the mix after day one, but for an unfortunate OCS in race two. Chris Ellyatt was rock-solid consistent inside the top 10, with Tim Keighly and Paul ‘all the way from Cornwall’ Scullion also finishing well up the fleet.

The wind had stayed pretty-solid all day, the sort of day when you’re hiking and planning most of the way around, but never more than that. There were of course plenty of windshifts, but it was generally oscillating within the same 15-degree spectrum, and there were big gains to be made somehow get ‘in phase’. It was, by reservoir standards, a pretty solid day.

My boat handling was as you might expect after a year out and my boat got a thorough wash, but my enthusiasm for sailing was definitely back. Mind, body and mainsheet were at war all day, but despite feeling like I’d been on a fast spin in the washing machine when I got home, I couldn’t wait for Sunday morning to get back out there.

Saturday afternoon was packed with onshore activities, ranging from an excellent talk by 2012 Radial Olympic Champion Lilja Xu, to an impromptu jazz session courtesy of Tony ‘The Lips’ Woods later on.

Day two delivered much of the same; more blistering sunshine, chilly temperatures and tight racing. Orlando closed out the regatta in expert fashion, despite the close attention of Alan Davis in all three races this time. Jim Fifield, Anger O’Gorman and Mike Hicks all had outstanding individual results, and Neil Peters generally kept up his surprising pace.

Gledhill took the title convincingly, and Davis recovering to take second, followed by Le Grice, Lyttle and Elliot making up the top 5.

I managed to stay upright and avoid any collisions and posted a slightly better set of results which left me 12th overall. Most importantly for me, I’d generally been able to stay in the mix where the racing was tightest (and where my mates were), so I was quietly pleased with this.

A superbly organised event by Queen Mary, with outstanding and generous sponsorship from Laser Performance and Southeast sailboats. The cold and the steep launching were just a footnote in the end, and driving home on Sunday afternoon, I could swear I felt five years younger.

Full results may be found [here](#).



Next stop, April 2018 – Parkstone YC!