

Noble Marine Laser Radial Autumn Qualifier, Pwllheli Sailing Club, 15–16 October

By Clementine Thompson

The final Laser Autumn Qualifier was held at Pwllheli SC. Sailors arrived on Saturday to a fresh southerly wind and choppy waters. Luckily, as the downpour that was forecast came through early in the morning, we stayed dry while rigging. With a short reach out to the race course, the racing began promptly.

The 51 Radials were a bit too eager in the first start because the fleet went early leading to a general recall. The Race Officer went straight to a black flag and the sailors got away cleanly on the second attempt. Ben Elvin made the most of the shy fleet and port-hand bias by executing a fantastic port-hand flyer and taking an early lead in the race. As the course had a long tack port, Dan Whiteley benefitted from being positioned inside the fleet and came into the windward mark first. For the rest of the race, the competition was tight at the top, with boat speed downwind being the key to getting to the front. Jon Emmet sailed fast, leading the fleet into the finish. However, an unfortunately placed lobster pot meant the first two boats didn't cross the true finish line. Emmett refinished in sixth place whilst Monika Mikkola from Finland scored DNF. The top three boats were Dan Whiteley, Ben Elvin and Ellie Cumpsty.

Soon after the final boat finished, the warning flag was flying for Race 2. The race course was similar to the first race, with a port-bias line and a weakening tide flowing right to left. The wind had dropped slightly to a crisp 14knts, with steep chop making upwind sailing more challenging. Dan Whiteley sailed well to be first around the windward mark. On the downwind leg, the waves and tide were both taking you right, so going fast by the lee on starboard was important. The racing was tight, but Emmett's downwind boat speed granted him a well earned first place. He was careful to finish correctly this time, closely followed by Whiteley then Cumpsty.

The wind had generally been 190 degrees, but just before the gun in Race 3, it shifted further left and the fleet went early in the struggle to cross the line. Thankfully, the Race Officer flew an AP to prevent a lot of black flags. The Radials bobbed around while the mark layers altered the course for the Standards, then reset the Radial start line and windward mark. Despite the resetting of the course, it was still a long tack port. It paid to use small headers on port to sail the starboard tack. Clem Thompson was first around the windward mark, with Elvin and Mikkola close behind. Mikkola utilized her fast downwind technique to be leading by the gate marks. The second beat had similar conditions, with the wind tracking further left, leaving some boats struggling to come in from the right of the course. Mikkola held onto her lead for the remainder of the race, and she was followed by Whiteley, Emmett and then Thompson.

After three solid races and a marathon walk up the beach, we derigged wearily. The warm showers felt great after a long day!

On Sunday there were strong winds and the water was dotted with white horses. We waited to rig and change as the Race Officer postponed for one, then two hours. While the sailors waited on shore, the safety boats and Race Committee donned their warmest kit and ventured out to lay a course. The plan was for the Standards to race first, on a simple windward/leeward course, followed by the Radials if the conditions were manageable. The Standards sailors were fully rigged and changed, but as conditions didn't subside, racing was, disappointingly, cancelled for the day.

With a first and two seconds, Dan Whitelely was the winner of the event, followed by Jon Emmett and Ben Elvin. Now that all of this year's six Qualifiers have been held, Jon Emmett is at the top of the Radial ladder, Georgina Povall is in second and Ben Whaley in third.

Thanks to Pwllheli Sailing Club at Plas Heli for hosting – the event was great and it was a shame we couldn't race on Sunday!

Results:

1 Dan Whitelely, 3pts

2 Jon Emmett, 4pts

3 Ben Elvin, 6pts

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=89&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/pwllhelira.d.2016nh.html>