

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

By Harry Blowers

28 Laser Standard sailors made the journey to North Wales for the last Qualifier of the year, held at Pwllheli SC. Tensions were high as this was set to be the decider of the 2016 ladder.

On Saturday the sailors were greeted by about 13knts and an offset swell after a short sail out to the course. In the first race, the fleet seemed to favour the pin end of the line with all the players fighting it out including Michael Beckett, Jack Wetherell and Jack Cookson. It was the left side of the course that seemed to pay on the first upwind with a winding left breeze that punished anyone who tacked onto port too early off of the start line. It was Michael Beckett who rounded the first mark ahead, after committing early to the port layline, closely followed by Jack Wetherell, Jack Cookson, Sam Whaley, Matt Whitfield and Harry Blowers. The top three extended their lead on the first reach by a considerable margin and Sam Whaley was sucked back into the chasing pack. The leaders continued to hold their positions on the downwind leg with Beckett still leading by the bottom; the mover on the downwind was Thomas Scott who worked his way up the field and into fifth by the bottom mark. Up the second beat, Beckett and Wetherell played a positional game because they were far enough ahead to only need to focus on each other. Beckett, Wetherell and Cookson rounded the final upwind mark comfortably ahead and their positions held all the way to the finish, behind them, however, the race was still on. Blowers started the final downwind in fourth closely followed by Scott, Whaley, Whitfield and Alistair Goodwin. Scott demonstrated some impressive downwind pace in the big swell to move forward and claim fourth place followed by Whitfield and Goodwin in fifth and sixth.

The second race of the day was an interesting one, with some big shifts and pressure changes taking place after the five-minute gun. These changes left the sailors with hard decisions to make regarding where to start. The wind shifted left with about two minutes to go before the start and then shifted far right again with 45 seconds to go. Beckett started right at the starboard end of the line and Joe Mullan had a good start to punch forward on the boats around him slightly further down the line. The pressure on the race course dropped during the first half of the first upwind with the majority of the fleet working their way out to the left-hand side of the course. Wetherell and Whaley were both in good positions halfway up but ventured too far out to the right, and when the pressure filled in hard from the left, it was Beckett who got to it first and led at the top mark followed by Cookson and Mullan. For the rest of the race, the breeze stabilized and Beckett was able to translate his lead into another win with Cookson sailing fast to maintain second with Mullan coming in third.

The final race of the day started with even more excitement because Jack Wetherell capsized too windward whilst trying to squeeze around the pin end leaving him with work to do after getting his boat upright. The breeze once again dialled left quite considerably at the top of the course allowing Beckett to, once again, lead the fleet at the first mark in similar fashion to race one, with Tom Scott

chasing hard in second and Sam Whaley close behind in third. Others rounding in the top ten included Ben Flower, who worked the port layline well and showed the fleet that the MK1 sail can still be fast if sailed correctly. On the downwind, Scott and Whaley battled and swapped places numerous times, but by the bottom, Beckett had extended his lead, Scott had reclaimed second, Whaley was in third and Blowers had worked his way up to fourth. The Race Committee attempted to align the course for the second upwind after the shift to the left on the first beat which meant the race was far from over with plenty of opportunities to make gains. An incident at the final upwind mark of the day between Whaley and Scott left Scott performing a 720 turn before racing downwind which allowed Blowers to slip into third. Beckett claimed his third win of the day leaving him with a perfect scorecard heading into the second day. Whaley sailed well to claim second in the race and Blowers held off the rest of the pack to take a third place after a close final run into the leeward mark before the finish.

Wet and windy weather greeted the sailors to the club the next morning. After a few hours under postponement, the Laser Standard sailors were all rigged and changed ready to go when the wind picked up to 30knts. Racing was cancelled for the day handing Michael Beckett his first win in a Laser Standard Qualifier, and a second place overall for Jack Cookson put him in a very good mood for the drive home as he leapfrogged Jack Wetherell for the first place on the overall UK Standard ladder!

Results:

- 1 Michael Beckett, 2pts
- 2 Jack Cookson, 5pts
- 3 Jack Wetherell, 7pts

Full results:

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