

Noble Marine Laser Standard Spring Qualifier, Stokes Bay SC, 18–19 March

By Jack Wetherell

A total of 43 Laser Standards attended the annual Stokes Bay Qualifier. In the morning briefing, PRO Ken Falcon notified the fleet that he would be intending to use course two. This is a new course configuration which was brought in after the South Shields event last Autumn. Course two is similar to a truncated triangle and it was brought in as a replacement to the traditional triangle/sausage. With the truncated triangle, even if a race has to be shortened after one lap, it ensures there is a downwind leg. Ken explained he could not use the trapezoid course due to sailing area restrictions.

After a short delay on shore, the fleet were released and greeted with superb sailing conditions – 15–20knts from SSW. With the famous strong Solent current almost in line with the breeze, it was going to be a long slog to shallower water on the right-hand side. Elliot Hanson executed a brilliant start just down from the starboard end and was able to tack onto port quickly, Michael Beckett and Lorenzo Chiavarini were in hot pursuit and at the windward mark they rounded in that order. Hanson was able to extend away quickly on the first lap, whilst Beckett and Chiavarini were now in a three-way fight for second with Nick Thompson. By the finish line, it was Hanson taking the race win followed by Beckett, with Thompson moving in to third.

Race two served up a different tidal picture. It was very close to the turn with some heading right for the shallower water, which will have turned earlier, and others heading left hoping the deeper water had also turned, which would now be stronger. Jack Wetherell got the best start from the pin group and charged for the port layline, whilst Nick Thompson and local hero Nick Harrison started at the starboard end and charged to the right. But by the windward mark, it was Hanson who again led around after picking the port lay perfectly, whilst Wetherell over stood. Thompson managed to get around inside the top ten, but the fleet were now sure the left-hand side was best. Throughout the race, it was a battle between Hanson, Wetherell and Thompson. Thompson was flying upwind and managed to create a healthy lead with Hanson second and Wetherell third. But, unfortunately for Nick, he made an error on the final downwind leg heading over to the wrong mark, this enabled Hanson to slip through for the win with Wetherell second. Beckett also managed to get through with Thompson coming home fourth.

For the final race of the day, the wind had moved slightly further left creating some big pin-end line bias. Hanson, Thompson and Haydn Griffiths made the best starts. At the windward mark, it was Thompson who led with Wetherell rounding second and Hanson third. Thompson sailed away from the fleet to win the race. Hanson capped off a great day's sailing with second and Lorenzo Chiavarini sailed well to move up to third place.

There were some weary faces in the bar after racing watching the rugby; a mixture of difficult conditions and the three-lap course creating some excellent Laser racing.

Sunday looked to provide a very similar test, but once the sailors had rigged for racing the wind increased and before the fleet could launch it was already averaging above 25knts. Unfortunately, it never dropped and racing was cancelled for the day.

Elliot Hanson was the deserving winner of the final Spring Qualifier with Thompson second and Beckett third. Sam Whaley was the first U21 sailor finishing in sixth place.

Results:

- 1 Elliot Hanson, 2pts
- 2 Nick Thompson, 4pts
- 3 Michael Beckett, 5pts

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=95&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/stbaystd.17nh.html>