

Noble Marine Laser Standard Autumn Qualifier, Sunderland YC, 23–24 September

By Sam Whaley

The first of the Autumn 2017 Noble Marine Laser Qualifiers got underway this weekend at Sunderland YC. The unusually small fleet of 26 Standard sailors were greeted by sunshine and a nice 15knts while launching. Surprisingly, this quickly decreased on the sail out leaving between 5–8knts at the start of Race 1.

Fresh from the senior World Championships in Croatia, Michael Beckett took an early lead and never looked back to win the first race. Jake Farren-Price showed great downwind speed to take second, while Milo Gill-Taylor secured a well-deserved third place in his first Standard Qualifier race.

In Race 2, conditions were very similar and Jack Wetherell made the most from the pin-end to take the lead, followed by Beckett. With those two battling for the lead, there was another battle for third place and Jamie Calder managed to string together a solid upwind and downwind to take third.

Sam Whaley led round the windward mark in Race 3 and looked to be comfortably extending from the fleet, before Wetherell unleashed some impressive speed downwind to level it at the leeward mark. An epic battle proceeded between Wetherell, Whaley and Beckett, who was close behind. Large waves made the last downwind particularly thrilling with big gains made if you could surf the waves and Wetherell did enough to secure the win, followed by Whaley in second and Beckett third.

Day two dawned with similar conditions to Saturday, despite some forecasts suggesting up to 20knts! In Race 4, Whaley got off to a cracking start by smashing the pin-end start along with Joe Mullan. Unfortunately, Joe was black flagged but still led around the windward mark, before engaging in a fierce battle downwind with Beckett and Whaley. Beckett managed to pull a few boat lengths away on the next upwind, while Wetherell joined the battle between Whaley and Mullan. On the final downwind, Beckett maintained his lead to win the race, while Wetherell and Whaley had an awesome speed battle with Whaley sneaking on the inside to take second and leaving Wetherell to settle for third.

With the tide increasing in strength significantly, pushing everyone downwind, and a light 6–9knts, the start to Race 5 was very shambolic with what seemed to be half the fleet missing the layline for the heavily biased pin end. Whaley had another great start and port tacked the fleet to have a healthy lead at the windward mark which he maintained on the downwind, followed by Beckett and Wetherell. However, with the tide ever changing Whaley got caught out on the second upwind by over standing the port layline slightly, which allowed Beckett to take the lead and Wetherell second. Despite everyone's best attempts and under the watchful eye of the jury to prevent 'over-eagerness', these

positions stayed the same on the final downwind leg allowing Beckett to win the race, followed by Wetherell and then Whaley.

For the final showdown/race, the wind picked up significantly to 10–15knts and white horses were sighted, much to the delight of the heavier sailors in the fleet. Wetherell made the most of a good pin-end start to take an early lead, followed by Beckett and Whaley. Despite some match racing manoeuvres by Wetherell on Beckett and then Beckett on Whaley, those three rounded the windward mark in first, second and third. Beckett was caught napping on the first reach to be overtaken by Whaley, with Wetherell leading onto the downwind. Whaley and Beckett had a small battle on the downwind, with Beckett emerging victorious and following Wetherell round the leeward mark in second. Up the second beat, the positions largely remained the same, with Alistair Goodwin and Jake Farren-Price pushing Whaley for third place. Wetherell wrapped up the final downwind of the weekend in style to win the race, with Beckett finishing second and Whaley third.

Overall, Michael Beckett took the win by just a single point from Jack Wetherell, with Sam Whaley taking third overall. First Youth was Milo Gill-Taylor in seventh place. A big thank you to Ken, Dot, the race team and everyone at Sunderland YC who made the event possible. I think this has to be the best Qualifier I have ever done!

Results:

- 1 Michael Beckett (7pts)
- 2 Jack Wetherell (8pts)
- 3 Sam Whaley (17pts)

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=96&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/sunderlandstd.17nh.html>