

Noble Marine Laser Radial Spring Qualifier at WPNSA, 18–19 February

By Clementine Thompson

The Laser fleet were welcomed to Portland with clear skies and sunshine. We rigged up in t-shirts and looked forward to a peachy day's racing.

With an impressive entry of 84 Radials, Ken Falcon, our Race Officer, was undecided as to whether to split the fleet into two smaller groups for racing. Naturally, we had a 'Ken vote' and the majority decided to stay as one huge fleet. This led to some exciting racing.

After a short postponement, we launched and headed out to the race course. Initially, the Committee Boat was anchored in Portland Harbour. However, the solid 6–8knt breeze we sailed out in quickly eased off and became very patchy. After some follow-my-leader with the committee boat in the harbour, we soon sailed out into Weymouth Bay seeking more consistent breeze.

In the bay, the breeze was around 6knts from 125 degrees – not quite the southerly 10knts we expected but steady and good to race in. Once the Standards were away, the Radials lined up to start. As usual, we were a bit too eager, needing two general recalls (one on a black flag) before a clean start. With a very pin-bias line, the strategy was to tack onto port as quickly as possible. The boats that tacked early and had a clean lane stayed on port for most of the beat as it was the long tack. The wind was pretty steady so those who started well at the pin and sailed fast rounded the top mark in the front bunch. For the inner loop downwind, the leaders held high around the mark, then came into the gate at a fast by-the-lee angle.

By now the wind had dropped a little and we were sailing in around 4knts. The Race Committee shortened the course and we finished with a short reach from the leeward gate. Ali Young took the race win with Jon Emmett in second.

After the last Radial finished, we hung around the start line in the dwindling pressure. The air felt cooler and there was an ominous grey fog in the distance. It didn't look

hopeful until a stronger period of pressure came through and boats started to sail rather than drift near the start line. Suddenly the orange flag was flying and we prepared for the second race of the day. The course seemed similar with a pin bias line, but there were more oscillations to get in phase with. The 84-boat fleet made for some pretty exciting gate roundings, where there was a lot to gain or lose depending on your position in the group. Overall, Ali Young showed her consistency as she led overnight with a bullet and a fourth place.

On Sunday, we had a moderate westerly breeze and sunshine – great sailing conditions for the middle of February! We launched on time and the racing was quickly underway. The start line was fairly pin biased, and most of the Radial fleet were towards the pin fighting for a good position. It was crowded and there were a few black flags during the day. On our beats, the left paid considerably, perhaps due to less mixing of the air making the wind bend around Portland more significant. Ben Whaley clearly read the conditions well, securing the win in the first two races. Ali Young was close behind, with two second places to add to her score.

The breeze stayed consistent all day; we were sailing slightly hiking upwind and doing some turns in the low-chop downwind. By the third race, the fleet was very aware of the gain feature on the left, so nearly all the boats started towards the pin, held off the line on starboard, then tacked onto port near the layline. This style of racing put a lot of emphasis on a good start and boat speed. Ali Young took the final race win, comfortably winning the Qualifier with only six points. In second place was Matilda Nicholls, who counted a very consistent score. Ben Whaley completed the podium, with Jon Emmett in fourth and on equal points with Whaley.

Results:

- 1 Ali Young, 6pts
- 2 Matilda Nicholls, 19pts
- 3 Ben Whaley, 21pts

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=93&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/radwpnsa1.2017nh.html>