

Write up by James Penn

In arduous, windy and certainly very fast conditions, Sea-Pie of Cultra took all the honours in the 73rd Manx Sailing & Cruising Club's Round the Island Race last Sunday.

With its eight-man crew skippered by Ed Pearce and assisted by Iain Fenna, Sea-Pie arrived back in Ramsey just after 6pm having averaged 6.5 knots - just 10 hours and eight minutes after starting.

Conditions at 8am on Sunday were much better than anticipated earlier in the week - 14 knots of north westerly breeze, albeit gusting and shifty. Talada, a Hunter Horizon 30 from Kirkcudbright, was over the line first followed by Sea-Pie. The third boat, Good Rum, a Bavaria 36 from Maryport skippered by Anthony Jarvis, misjudged its approach to the start and had to tack a couple of times to get over the line.

Intriguingly, for the first time in living memory the traditional shotgun start was absent this time, the starting officer relying on a horn instead. Onlookers' eardrums were grateful.

'It was less breezy than forecast and after a couple of tacks at the Point of Ayre we eased the sheets off Blue Point and straight-lined it down to the Calf,' said Fenna. 'We put the kite up at the Calf. Around Langness we opted for the number 2 jib which turned out to be right. We saw plenty of seals and seabirds but no dolphins. It was just a really quick race. We made straight lines on the shortest route rather than tacking a lot. It was the quickest I've done it out of ten or so times, and I've done it on bigger boats previously.'

Perhaps the biggest highlight for Fenna was having three teenagers on board, his son Robert, Ed Pearce's son George, and Lettie Hyett.

'It was a great day to be at sea, just breeze and sunshine and a great crew. Very pleasant.'

Sea-Pie has won the race a number of times in the past, always previously skippered by its owner Jerry Colman who wasn't able to be with it on this occasion.

'Maybe we were a bit more cautious on sail selection than Jerry would have been,' said Fenna. 'Ed's got loads of experience of the boat and that helped. It's a real shame that Jerry wasn't able to be there on such a nice sail.'

Doing the race for his second time, crew member Connor Murray said, 'We had a great day out and we were fast. It was good steady wind all the way.'

Crew member Jade Leach added, 'It was a very lucky race in terms of the weather and wind. Many thanks to Jerry for the opportunity.'

Also on board was Andy Naylor, a friend of Fenna's from London. 'As a new boy I'd had all the horror stories beforehand - how late, how long, how light, how much of a beat it would be, whether it would turn into a 24-hour trip - but I was pleasantly surprised. You end up having a good time! Conditions were perfect, weren't they?'

The wind picked up on Sunday evening, and Talada, which arrived back at 10pm, had to battle later on. 'It was survival tactics in the last couple of hours. It was awesome - four seasons in a day,' said skipper George Nevin. 'We saw sun and white water.'

'It was a long last couple of hours - the rest of it was alright,' said crew member Keith Armstrong-Clark as a rainstorm descended on them in Ramsey Harbour. 'Who organised the bloody weather?'

Many thanks to Kuba Szymanski of Ramsey Shipping Services for sponsoring the race. Kuba has himself previously competed in the race but was competing in another Round the Island Race at the time – the Isle of Wight's. Also to race officers Andrew Dean and Yogi Quayle, and to Niamh Poole for organising the supper on Saturday night and refreshments for the returning sailors on Sunday.