

Write-up by James Penn

The 71st IOM Copiers Round the Island Race went ahead in very challenging conditions on Saturday, with the honours split fairly evenly between the only two finishers.

Lilee won the Ramsey Courier Cup for first on elapsed time and the Golden Jubilee Trophy for overall winner on a National Handicap (NHC) basis, while Seapie of Cultra won the Ramsey Town Cup for first finisher on a Class 1 IRP handicapped boat, the IOM Breweries Cup for Division 1, Class A, and the Maddrell Trophy.

Of the six entrants, five made the Ramsey start line at 9.30am on Saturday in blustery and strong westerly winds, with boats sporting number 2 jibs and reefs in the main. Lilee had a good start, as did Dr May-Shiu Chan in Nichola Jane, with Colman uncharacteristically a minute behind at the line after being hit by a strong gust on the approach from the Queens Pier.

On the east coast, or leeward side of the Island, the sea state was fine, and the boats all made rapid progress up to the Point of Ayre. However, once they got round the Point the situation changed – the west coast, or windward side, was altogether different. The wind speed was Force 6, gusting occasional 7, and big waves had built up, making progress difficult.

‘It was a hard day, long – proper rough off the Point of Ayre,’ said James Walker, skipper of Lilee. ‘The boat held together fairly well and the crew did brilliantly. We knew it was going to be tough and were a bit battered and bruised. The west coast was hard going – we definitely saw 30 knots of wind. Once we got round the Calf and into calmer water it was good.’

Lilee then put its S3 kite up – its smallest, and one Walker had never had up before. Putting the spinnaker up in such conditions was brave and proved problematic, shortly afterwards the boat experienced a ‘Chinese jibe’ –potentially extremely dangerous – just south of Port St Mary.

‘In the swell we hit a wave wrong and got a gust at the same time. The boat made over to windward and we ran out of rudder. I didn’t think it could happen on this boat – it’s too well ballasted. A lot of people on the Chasms saw it and it took ten minutes to sort out. I was trying to push for nine hours so it wrecked that. I’d have been miffed if we’d lost the race due to that.

‘After that we put an asymmetric spinnaker up instead, and flew, sailing a big angle on it. There was one jibe off Langness and then it was all the way up to Clay Head, when it got too tight for the spinnaker. It was really good fun – we only broke a few things!’

Jerry Colman, skipper of Seapie, also found it challenging on the west coast. ‘It was tough from the Point of Ayre to Jurby, hard on the wind, with lots of water over the side,’ he said.

'We were struggling to keep up with Lilee, a little stick on the horizon, and saw the others dropping behind. We managed to stick it out. Things got a bit easier with a slight change in the wind, and it was a fast reach down to the Chickens. Once round there we made good speed up to Douglas. The wind then became a bit gusty and shifty, but we knew we were going to be home soon. At Maughold it went calm but we finished in just over ten hours.

'I was pleased with the crew putting up with it and sailing the boat as well as they did. I was pretty much ready to go back at Blue Point but the crew said 'No.'

Lilee finished about 6.30pm while Seapie got back to Ramsey just over an hour later. Nichola Jane and Neville Desmond's Tagus returned to Ramsey, while Ben Mitchell's Skyfall retired at Peel.

Crewing for Walker in Lilee were James and Clare Allison, James Howitt, Tracy Broom, Dean Cooper and Chris Ray.

'It was rough and ready and spicy most of the way round,' said James Allison. 'But a good laugh and we recovered well from our mistakes.'

Many thanks to Mark Corrin of IOM Copiers for sponsoring the race. Also to Niamh Poole for organising the food and an excellent barbecue on the Friday, and to the Racing Committee of Brian Quayle, Keith Poole and Andrew Dean.