

Manx Sailing and Cruising Club

Watling Streetworks Injebreck February Series 4th Feb 2024

Tom Watterson edges out the Seniors

With Peter and Max Cope absent, allegedly 21st birthday partied out from the night before, the field was wide open for new challengers to reach for glory in the first 2 races of the Watling Streetworks February Series. The ferry was cancelled and the forecast said 25 knots gusting 42 Westerly from 1000 onwards, building slightly. The 0900 forecast however was only 15 knots and not so gusty and so it was when the increased fleet of 9 dinghies assembled at the dinghy park. It was good to see Lettie Hyett giving it a go in the Laser 4.7 although sister Roo had checked the forecast and decided to go kayaking instead. A rigging issue prevented Lettie from making the first race but she courageously made it to the start of the second race despite the forthcoming carnage. Dad Jason persevered with the Laser Standard while Andrew Dean and Bob Love completed the Laser fleet in their Radials. Collectively they did demonstrate that the Laser can be a bit dynamically unstable going downwind in big gusts.

Tom Watterson and Will Osbourn took to the water again in their RS Aero 5's and Simon Cain joined in with the same Aero hull with the bigger 7 m2 rig. Top of the sail area table came Dave Batchelor in the Hadron H2 and your correspondent in the 10.6 m2 Finn. Smaller sail areas tended to be beneficial in the conditions as it turned out.

When a forecast is given at hourly intervals it makes sense to assume a steady rate of change in wind speed over the intervening gaps so by 0930 a steady wind of 20 knots with gusts maybe to 30 might be expected. This duly arrived, with a bit of attenuation due to the hills, and by 1000 the full effect was up and running. A few pre-start capsizes mostly amongst the Lasers highlighted the risky areas. With strong Westerlies at Injebreck, the gusts tend to back or veer quite violently and at around 5 seconds before the 1000 start with everyone lined up there was a 90 degree shift where I was from across the lake (beam reach, easy sailing) to a dead beat (wind from straight ahead, you go backwards) and this caught your correspondent napping and reversing close to an inverted Laser with accompanying Dean engaged in righting operations on one side and trees on the other side. By the time this was sorted the H2 was well away chased by the RS Aero 5s and then the rest of the fleet.

It didn't take too long to get going after sorting the mess out and soon the fleet was spread out around the lake. There were few moments when all the boats were upright. The gybe at no 3 mark caught a few out but more often it was a case of getting spiralled or somersaulted downwind in the big gusts or just getting blown over going upwind even with the sail eased right off and flogging.

After a couple of laps and having almost submarined the Finn on the reach across the bottom of the lake your correspondent decided to can it and retreat to the nearby dinghy park. I was then able to observe proceedings more intently without having to worry about my own survival. I could see for instance that although the H2 was leading, Watterson in the Aero 5 was very close and with the handicapping system favouring the smaller boat with less sail area, probably ahead on corrected time. A lot depended on how much time was spent righting boats after a capsize and here the nimble

and athletic youths had an edge over some of the more senior sailors. So just these 2 boats completed 3 laps in this race with the others enjoying the brief rest afforded by a capsize.

There was a move to cancel the second race but the remaining boats stayed on station around the start line while Lettie headed down from the dinghy park. Bob Love and Simon Cain pulled out eventually but 6 boats finished with 4 including Lettie completing 3 laps.

On analysis, Tom took both races showing great skills and not a little moral fibre. The fleet is now getting good in this sort of weather and it's great to see it happening. On a side note I heard today from Simon Pressly who is racing in the Laser Masters World Championships in Adelaide, that they are contending with winds of 25 knots gusting to 30 down there so you need to get the skills.

I can't sign off without thanking our sponsor Doug Watling, OOD Keith Poole, the patrol boat crew of Peter Hoosen-Owen and James Bishop, who again did not have to assist any of the capsizes but were always there standing by. Or mentioning the superb display of snowdrops in the garden across the road from the dinghy park, sometimes it's worth taking a break from the sailing.

Jerry Colman