Write up by Jerry Colman

After Saturday's gales and the evening's Burns Night festivities at MS&CC and IOMYC, a somewhat diminished fleet of 9 boats took to the water on Sunday 25th January for the last two races of the January series. These took place under clouded skies and with a very shifty and gusty, allegedly South Easterly breeze. It is normal to point sailing dinghies into the wind when hoisting or handing (dropping) sail so on arrival your correspondent arranged the Finn on a South Easterly heading and hoisted the flapping mainsail. Moments later the flapping stopped, not because the wind had paused but because it was now blowing quite hard in the opposite direction, threatening to blow the boat off its trolley. Other sailors were experiencing similar problems and there were doubts all round the dinghy park as to whether sailing would be possible in these conditions. However, after a short hesitation, the Finn was launched (safer on the water than in the boat park) and the rest followed up the lake towards the start line.

The Race Officer set a course down then up the lake, leaving marks to port as indicated by red numerals on the hi-tech course display unit on the starting hut. The breeze on the start line was generally Easterly but with occasional pauses between Westerly, Northerly and Southerly gusts of varying strength. This went to nothing about 15 seconds before the start gun leaving the fleet rather line shy according to the spectators ashore. Being rather heavier than the rest due to the combination of a stoutly constructed boat and some recent over-indulgence on the part of your correspondence the Finn maintained speed for a little longer than the others and achieved a more favourable start than most. The first leg saw many changes in the lead boat as helms sought to navigate through the shifts and win a favourable inside track round the first mark. Tom Watterson (RS Aero &) made the best job of this but the rest were close behind. Heading back up the lake to the second mark some notable gains were made with the Enterprise (Phil Hardisty and Joe Whitelegg) working up through the fleet to take a strong position taking the handicap into account. Constantin Keding (Laser Radial) from King William's college also made good progress, probably drawing on his experience sailing on the German lakes back home.

Progress was a bit slow as competitors found themselves on the wrong sides of shifts and in at least one case the wrong way up following an unexpected gust. The Teras of Finbar McSevny and Charlie Watterson struggled for speed and after 20 minutes had not quite completed one lap so were finished at the 1 lap stage while the rest continued to complete a second lap. This didn't help them on handicap as the rest of us were learning about the conditions and maybe the breeze was a bit kinder, so they finished propping the fleet up while the Lasers of Jason and Tullie Hyett bracketed Dave Batchelor (Supernova, a little back after an upset). Tom Waterson held onto his lead on the water and so took the honours.

For the second race the Race Officer set a course the other way round the lake but unfortunately some did not notice that the display panel had turned green meaning marks to be left to starboard. Getting that straight at the first mark let the Finn get clean away to lead at least for the first 2 laps. Our increased understanding of the conditions contributed to half the fleet achieving 3 laps (2 laps for the slower Lasers and the Teras) but results at the top followed form with the Enterprise taking first place followed by Tom Watterson and Batchelor. Your correspondent could have done better than 4th but let go of the tiller in a gust and wasted time and positions going round in very tight circles before thankfully recovering while still upright.

The January Series goes to Joe and Eric Whiteleg and Phil Hardisty in the Enterprise with a tally of all firsts and seconds, followed by Tom Watterson and Jason Hyett. Your correspondent somehow managed to come in 4th despite missing a couple of races.

Thanks to sponsor Doug Watling, patrol boat crew Ralph Kee and Martin Jackson and Race Officer Brian Quayle and his crew at the battery.