

RECORD TURNOUT AT MASTERS INLANDS

- **Start line controversy**
- **Davis wins standards by huge margin**
- **Steve Smith records maiden victory in Racial**
- **Mk 1 vs Mk 2 – The great debate**

Pow! A record 82 boats turned out for the first event in the 2016 Masters Super Series, with a significant showing of 54 in the standard fleet. The decision to hold the event at a club with a large local fleet was vindicated with 21 home boats supporting the standard fleet alone. Even a boat from Ireland turned up, with Sean Craig making his now annual trip.

STANDARD RIG REPORT

The pre-match debate centred around how the new Mk2 sails would perform, which were being used by 30% of the fleet. The forecast predicted 10-20 knots across the weekend, and conditions pretty much followed that to the letter. Of the contenders, bookies' favourite Alan Davis was out to avenge his 2nd place last year in the absence of defending champ Orlando Gledhill. However, former world champion Steve Cockerill had made the surprise decision to switch to Standard rig for the regatta, adding a little spice to proceedings.

Race 1 started in highly controversial fashion. A trapezoid course was set up with a slight pin line bias, but 4 minutes before the ultimate start, the wind shifted preventing sailors from being able to cross the line on starboard. A frantic dash to the massively favoured pin ensued, but due to a lull many sailors were unable to make it. Among them was local hothead Roger O'Gorman who called for the race to be abandoned and refused to start on a point of principle. Of the sailors that salvaged their start, boat whisperer Steve Cockerill was able to take advantage and line honours home ahead of James Baxter of the home club and Tim Keighley in 3rd. Notably Alan Davis was also in the mix finishing 4th. Was it luck or good judgement in spotting the issue early that the top sailors still ended up the top? Either way, the shift has left the course skewed and the beats mainly fetched, so making up ground after a bad start was difficult. Pile-ups at marks were common given the fleet size, and the race took its toll on some fancied riders. O'Gorman, Tony Woods (QM) and former 90's superstar Stuart Hudson (Keyhaven) were among the high profile casualties outside the top 25.

For race 2 the wind increased to 15 knots, but once again a late pre-start shift made the pin heavily favourable. O'Gorman and Rupert Bedell from the home club raced clear of the fleet, but with O'Gorman's mental fragility kicking in before the end of the first beat, Bedell built a solid lead around the first mark and was followed by another local in Chris Ellyatt. That order remained until the final beat when Alan Davis (who had been quietly working his way up the fleet and was in 6th) pulled a move out of The Matrix and reappeared 20 boat-lengths in front of the fleet, much to the bemusement of Bedell. O'Gorman was also making up place in 'fast-angry' mode, and squeezed by Bedell to take 2nd on the finishing line. Further back Steve Cockerill encountered traffic and was unable to make inroads on the one-sided beats, finishing 11th.



Boats pile up at the pin in race 1



Bedell leads from Ellyatt in Race 2



Sergio Messina (Chipstead) was in good form on day 1, leading from Tim Law (QM)

After an attempt to fix the course for race 3, the wind moved again, and the beat was back to a long tack as the fleet started. Another pile-up at the windward mark ensued as boats arrived 4 abreast, but Davis proved canny again to be in the top pack. After a terrible set of results in the morning, Mike Hicks (QM) was leading until a bizarre upwind capsize late in the race. Who should capitalize? Mr Reliable himself (Davis) pounced to take the win, followed by gang of QM boats in Hicks, Woods and O’Gorman. Cockerill had got into a right mess this time, and couldn’t improve on a 24th place owing to the fetched beats and general traffic in front of him.



Traffic was tight in every race

At the halfway point, Davis appeared to have an unassailable lead of 23 pts from Bedell and Ellyatt who were tied second. However further back there were some big discards to go which would bring sailors like O’Gorman right back into contention.

Sunday dawned to brighter skies and fresher winds, this time from the South East which meant generally steadier conditions. The Race Committee reverted to a triangle course which made resetting in the event of a shift, and despite the odd curry fuelled hangover, 54 boats took back to the water in fresh spirits.

Although steadier in pressure, the wind was oscillating regularly and the line bias generally became apparent within 2 minutes of the start. This time it was Tim Law's chance to read the conditions correctly and he raced into a commanding lead. Cockerill appeared to read a transit off the line and started up high, and subsequently got into a dog-fight with O'Gorman in the chasing pack. Ominously, Davis was lurking around the top 6, and in another fine overtaking move, took the lead on beat 3 and finished ahead of Cockerill and O'Gorman. Law got on the wrong side of the shift phasing and dropped to 4th ahead of Bedell in 5th.



The new champion was in imperious form

With the discard now in place, things tightened up but Davis had a firm grip on proceedings. Bedell attacked the pin-end on the start line and took a shift to cross the fleet and lead around mark 1, followed again by Chris Ellyatt. Having led in the same order the previous day, they exchanged banter down the first reach along the lines of "this time we're not being caught!", even if they didn't fully believe it. The wind built to 18 knots, but Bedell was looking comfortable until that man (you guessed it) appeared in his rear view mirrors on the final beat with a view to making it 4 bullets in a row. History did not repeat itself this time however, and Bedell held on to record his best win to date, with Davis, Stuart Hudson and Peter Young (Weir Wood) in the pack that followed, with Ellyatt finishing 5th. O'Gorman had fluffed his lines at the crucial moment finishing 14th and Cockerill recorded a 9th which ended his challenge. Tim Law got caught up at a gybe mark and ultimately retired, so any sense of challenge to Alan Davis had disappeared.

With the regatta won, it now became a place of the race for 2nd place with several contenders in place. The wind cranked up to 20 knots and it was arses fully-out time. Again Bedell attacked the pin successfully and couldn't believe his fortune when the first beat was a carbon copy of the previous race and he rounded in the lead, and charged off down the reach. However, his regatta came to an abrupt and spectacular finish right there as his bottom section sheared completely at deck level. Game over for him. Having been at or near the front all weekend, this time Chris Ellyatt wasn't going

to be denied, and put the foot down to race away and win by a margin, recording his best result to date in the Masters Series. Tony Woods followed in 2nd, with Stuart Hudson and Mike Hicks putting the finishing touches to a fine days sailing in 4th & 5th. For once Davis wasn't there and recorded a 6th (his discard) in a 54 boat fleet. Not too shabby at all.

In the final reckoning, Davis was 20 points clear in first, but the story of the day was Chris Ellyatt finished an outstanding 2nd, with Woods 3rd and Bedell 4th overall despite his DNF in the final race. In total Queen Mary SC had 6 finishers in the top 10 reflecting once again the smashing quality at the UK's Premier Laser Racing Club (according to the folks at Queen Mary). In the following order, it was Hudson (5th), Cockerill (6th), O'Gorman (7th), Hicks (8th and top Grand Master), Keighey (9th) and Law (10th). David Binding made a welcome return to the standard fleet finishing top Great Grand Master in 13th.

Finally, the debate on the Mk2 sails? In reality difficult to tell given the significance of the windshifts. To this observer, there didn't appear to be a significant speed difference on any leg, although some in the fleet would argue differently. But perhaps it's all in the mind?

RADIAL RIG REPORT

Race 1: As the klaxon sounded the fleet simultaneously rolled onto port tack along the start-line. The backing light southerly air providing a favoured port end of the line and a one sided first leg. The leaders found stronger and more backed pressure on the left side of the course and it was Steve Smith (Chew Valley) who was well clear of the fleet at mark two. A downwind puff brought the fleet back up to the leader and now Richard Smith (Waveney and Oulten) took a turn at the front from Steve, with Ann Keates (Parkstone) and Ian Gregory (Frensham Pond) now hot on their heels. Steve tagged with Richard at the windward mark to lead the procession home.

Race 2: A building and shifty breeze got us all hiking hard and tacking on the shifts. Niall Peelo (Island) was in sparkling form and looked to be in control of the race. However, a shifty final beat, with a particularly fierce left shift in the final 100 yards, was sailed to perfection by Ian Gregory and he took a sizeable lead into the final downwind leg. Gregory held on to take line honours from Steve Smith.

Race 3: A small front blew through between races, bringing chilly rain and temporarily veering the wind around to WSW. Out came the warm beanie hats (always keep one tucked away somewhere!). Not long before the race got underway the wind returned to its original SSW direction and made for a one sided first leg and processional race course; it was going to be one of those days! Those that avoided a tangle at the port end of the start-line were able to tack off after the gun. What followed was a thigh burner of a 'footing' contest to the mark! Steve Smith and Ian Gregory sailed clear of the fleet and it was these two that looked best placed at the end of day 1.

Day 2: Race 4: Moderate breezes and sunshine greeted competitors as Race 4 got underway. The favoured end was again at the port end, and those that got in phase with the two major oscillating shifts of the first leg came out on top at the windward mark. The wind began to freshen and the final downwind legs were champagne sailing for all! In a repeat of Race 3 it was Smith and Gregory that again got well away to lead the fleet home.

Race 5: With the winds now fresh, but not yet strong, it was the stronger and heavier sailors that came to the fore. A veer just following the start allowed mid line starters to roll those at the pin

end. Richard Smith demonstrated excellent boat speed in these wind conditions to win by a comfortable margin from Niall Peelo and Graham Cook (Hayling). Steve Smith (5) finished ahead of Ian Gregory (7) to secure the championship win.

Race 6: Gusts of 20 knots now swept the race course and it was exciting sailing! The downwind legs were a breathless thrill, with burning arms, legs and lungs right through to the finish. Richard Smith again showed superb speed and boat handling in fresh winds to take his second bullet. A great result for Rob Cage (Thames) in second, with Andy Byrne (King George) defending superbly to hold third place in a photo finish with Smith.