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December 2010 Newsletter

Well most of us have packed up our boats for the winter; some however have not but more on this later, so lets reflect on our season.

This year has been a good one for us; there has been increased energy in the Class both at clubs and Open meetings which bodes well for the future.

The Championship season

This was a qualifying year for entry into next year's World Championships and we kicked off with a great event at Derwent in chilly and variable conditions. David McKee and Chris Hewkin made an almost clean sweep and went home armed with buckets of champagne. There was a substantial southern invasion north to Loch Ard for the Scottish event which was won by Steve Goacher and Phil Evans with one day lost without wind.

Bewl Valley were hosts for the Inland championships and did a fantastic job as always even supplying strawberries and cream in the middle of the night!. There were light winds on the first day and a bit more blow on the second and another victory for Goacher and Evans.

We had an extra event at Ullswater as a qualifying event, after a great weekends sailing in a variety of conditions Graham Vials and Chris Turner edged the event from a hard charging Goacher and Evans. Our final regional event was the at the Olympic venue at Weymouth hosting for the second time the Southern Championships. The sailing was held in Weymouth bay the strong winds providing great sailing and a win for McKee and Hewkin their second championship this year; surely a pairing to look out for at the worlds! During the series some of the usual suspects and new faces all one races, among them Alan Bax, Russell Peters, Simon Kneller, Henry Craven-Smith and Gill Browning.

Nationals

The Nationals at Parkstone were a great success mainly due to the combination of of good weather, a great location and excellent organization. Steve Goacher and Phil Evans retained the Championship with a day to spare, the week saw racing in a broad range of wind conditions. Mike Hart, Charles Apthorp, Russell Peters and Brett Dingwall all won races.

The championships series owes much of its success to the huge number of people competing; overall, 109 helms competed and the entry at the Nationals was the biggest in many years. We are seeing a number of new faces in the fleet some, Graham Vials has teamed up with Chris Turner [Ovington boats] and we now have three boat builders putting together campaigns for next year. Also of note new to the class is Russell Peters, having bought Barry Parkins old boat, demonstrating the wide appeal of the class and the quality of the racing.

The high number of race winners attests to the closeness of the racing at the top but a lot of people have their own personal challenges and the racing was, as usual, close throughout the fleet. It was also nice to meet up with fellow sailors

from time to time and enjoy a pleasant social side.

There were no real surprises on the gear front. Ovington hulls dominate but Charles Apthorp's new hull from Composite Craft was on the pace throughout. Goacher and P&B sails were used by almost all the competitors but North, Speed and Hyde sails have appeared and are showing promise. Masts other than Selden were in short supply. With P&B and Phil Evans fitting most of the boats there is little variation in this department either. Consequently, the fleet enjoys one design racing, or as near to it as can probably be achieved.

Club Racing

Reports from our Clubs sometimes hard to come by but we are really happy to report in these pages or on the website any good reports on flying fifteen sailing. Some of our clubs such as Chew Valley, Dovestone, Datchet, and Parkstone have all reported good or increasing fleet turnouts. For many others such as Royal Windermere the numbers are holding up well. A common experience appears to be the success of mid-week evening racing.

What makes for a successful fleet in one place and not at another is not clear but the Fleet captain has a pivotal role, however Dovestone have come up with a way of sharing the load, which we will report in a later issue. What has happened at your club? Get your word processor fired up and send us an article or race report.

Other Events

The European Championships consumed competitors time and energy, but had some great sailing in a fabulous location. Visitor numbers were apparently static or fell at the traditional "weeks". Cowes Week, Fed Week and Poole Week were well supported by their home fleets but Falmouth entries fell badly, which is a shame as this is a great event to do and has a real holiday feel to it. The Birkett Trophy at Ullswater attracted its usual compliment of visiting fifteens. These summer events are very enjoyable and well worth a shot and for those of you in Scotland we have an invitation to sail at the Brewin Dolphin Scottish series. This has taken a fair bit of negotiation by members in the Clyde but the invite is a great achievement and enables us to show case the class at this premier sailing event.

Communication

The switch from paper based to electronic communications has not been easy and some have mourned the passing of the news letters and year book. We are actively working to include all the information from the year book on the website but please bear with us with regard to some of the historical data this will be there soon. The website, found at www.flying15.org.uk, is now functioning well and all the news and events can be found there. We will however (following a recent fleet captains meeting) be developing this email form of communication and this will give regular updates to you all; further development of the website will take place and contribution is open to anyone your contact is Peter Bannister on peterbannistermice@btinternet.com.

The use of the website and electronic communications is the way forward saving us time and money as we don't have to spend time assembling and posting material, however it does lead to a feeling of detachment by some of our members, hence the e-news format. We hope that this be used as a vehicle for fifteen sailors everywhere to contribute their own experiences and results.

An excellent example of the power of communication bringing interest into the Class at club level is the website and blog set up at Datchet - have a look at <http://datchetman-theflyingfifteenblog.blogspot.com>. News is made on and off the water, so please get writing.

We need to pay tribute to the work of our Publicity Officer, Mike Thompson, who has put BIFFA branding forward and given the wider sailing public a much clearer picture of the busy calendar of events we enjoy throughout the British Isles.

Technical Development

As many of you are no doubt aware there have been some suggested development sail trails and we have seen a couple of suits of the suggested sails around the country at various clubs. The current suggestions are for a jib of higher aspect ratio and a mainsail with a much fuller roach and shorter foot. The sail has a long top batten and the trial sails are made of Mylar. There was no planned change to the mast or boom but the foot of the sail is loose so simpler boom design could be adopted.

Trials to date in the UK have been encouraging, most people find the boat easier to sail because it depowers itself in gusts. The change is particularly beneficial for lighter crews. A larger spinnaker was tried but quickly abandoned because the boat was overpowered in gusts on a reach.

The sails are still being trialled around the clubs with feedback logged on the BIFFA website (Flying 15 tab then Development FF). There is a very well written and detailed report on one trial by Martin and Alison Stainsby on the Hayling website, <http://www.hisc.co.uk/locker/fifteen/>. As the sails are still doing the rounds there may well be opportunity for you to see them at your club, they have also been tried in Australia and New Zealand with favorable reports.

The change, if recommended, has to be subjected to a ballot of members so there is a little way to go yet. It may be up to two years before they are adopted.

The nation may be increasingly heavy but racing small boat weights are doing the reverse. There is some interest in reducing the weight of a Flying Fifteen. Most boats have been built underweight for some time and have had correctors added so it ought to be possible to slowly reduce the weight of the boat without rendering older boats uncompetitive. Your views on this would be of definite interest.

Next year

The highlight of next year will be the Flying Fifteen World Championships at Hayling Island between 22ND and 28th July. Up to 120 boats are expected to take part. The Championships will be immediately preceded by the UK National Championships on 15th to 20th July, giving you a chance to compete against visiting sailors from other fleets from around the world. Full details are available on the Hayling Island Sailing Club website, http://www.hisc.co.uk/ffworlds2011/f15worlds_news.htm. The rules for qualification are at http://www.flying15.org.uk/documents/ff_BIFFAworldsQual.pdf and we are currently awaiting notification from FFI on entry numbers but it is expected that a minimum of 33-35 spaces may be available for UK sailors with further allocation possible subject to international take up of places .

There will also be the usual Championship round with events at Poole, Bassenthwaite, Grafham and the Holy Loch, a pleasant mix of sea and lake sailing. We are actively working to include some coaching sessions at these events. Details will be published on the Association website.

If each club (of the 32) who sent a boat to our championship series from last year managed to send one more boat to one or more of the events next year this would make a huge difference to the numbers attending our championships. So, make 2011 bring a friend year and help them get going at Championship sailing, it might be the most fun you've had in a boat and every one is welcome. A "buddy" system was used at the nationals last year and worked well, so we will hope to replicate this at future events.

Don't forget to visit the fifteen stand at the RYA Volvo Dinghy Show at Alexandra Palace, 5-6th March. Two boats will be on display, a new Ovington Mk 10 and Flying Fifteen 3521 which first won the World Championship in 1995 and is still absolutely competitive. The aim of the stand is to show the latest boat but also highlight the durability of the boats making them good value and very accessible second hand. Meet fellow Fifteen sailors and Officers of the Association.

New officers were elected to the Association last year: Sue Bannister (Hayling Island) took over the Presidency and Simon Kneller (Grafham) was elected Vice President. Gill Browning has taken over the organisation of the Championship programme. Keith Jameson remains as the Association secretary. Contact details for all of them are on www.flying15.org.uk. Please contact them with ideas, your views, news or anything else.

We would like to wish you the very best possible Christmas and New Year. Let's hope for a great year of hard, enjoyable, exhilarating and fair sailing in 2011; continuing camaraderie and laughter in the dinghy park; good fortune to everyone; and prosperity of the FF everywhere. The future is bright, the future is "Flying Fifteen"