

2016 Fecamp Triangle Mini-Series Report

A great long 3 race weekend was successfully completed

SORC's 2016 offshore series kicked off with the Fecamp Triangle mini-series, comprising races from Cowes to Shoreham, then joining the Sussex Yacht Club Royal Escape race to Fecamp before returning to the Solent.

Cowes - Shoreham

Race officer Dave Giddings, assisted by Rupert Holmes, started the fleet from the JOG line at 0800 and they set off on a beat down the Eastern Solent. Although the majority of boats got a good start, the fleet soon spread out as the skippers tried to make the most of the favourable tide and tack on the wind shifts.

Once past the Forts, most boats chose to tack into the deep channel out of the Solent for favourable tide, pulling ahead of those who had stuck close to the island shore, hoping that the strong cross-tide would lift them to Owers. Once at Owers, the 3600 fleet stood on for a bit; Mzungu tacked shy of the mark, while Exocet tacked to lay it. Behind, Fastrak, Jester and Roxanne opted to stand on, figuring that they had to try something different, but the early tack proved best as the wind veered, lifting all the boats to lay the finish.

At the front of the fleet, Game On was flying and pulled out a commanding lead over the four chasing 3600s. Unfortunately, Ian had missed the amendment to the SIs announcing a change of finish mark, after our diligent RO checked and found the original mark to be off station. Too late, Ian realised that something was wrong and changed course, but his mistake was to cost him victory. Ninjod was first to finish, closely followed by Bellino.

With the tide turning foul just before the first boats finished, the race was hard on the small boats, with victory going to Paul Brant on Ninjod, with Rob Craigie's Bellino second and Deb Fish's Exocet third, just 21s behind on corrected time. Charles Emmett's British Beagle won class 2. The boats then faced the fun of navigating the large commercial lock to reach their berths in Shoreham, and the adventure continued with a water taxi and bus or 2M walk required to get to the yacht club for dinner...

Royal Escape Race

The SORC fleet were in for a rude awakening at 0330 on Friday morning to get the 0400 lock out of Shoreham for the start. Most headed to the large commercial lock, while David Cowell led a pack of 3200s through the much more friendly small craft lock, thus avoiding the mahem that resulted when the large French trimaran got caught on the submerged wooden pontoon in the lock.

After a short delay, the race got underway with a short leg to the East before turning South to Fecamp via Greenwich light vessel. With a NNEly wind, Oi Oi got a cracking start at the windward pin end of the line, a boat length ahead of Exocet. Game On was just behind and overtook to lead the fleet around the turning mark.

With the wind at about 16 kts, Exocet was first to launch her code zero. The larger Sunfast 3600s went for reaching spinnakers, with Fastrak first to declare his hand and hoist. After his victory the previous day, Ninjod had a bit of a nightmare with not one but two spinnakers

wrapping on the hoist, and a sheet going under the boat for good measure. The boats enjoyed a fast reach to Greenwich Lt Vessel, under a mixture of code zeros and spinnakers, with Game On the first to round, with Fastrak hot on his heels. Nigel made the mistake of playing with the settings on his autopilot, which caused it to stop working, leaving Nigel having to drop his spinnaker without a pilot in almost 20 knots. Nigel blew the tack and the halyard and gathered the spinnaker as rapidly as he could, but ended up having to retrieve part of it from the sea.

Further back, Exocet rounded just ahead of Jester, the two evenly matched boats each pressuring the other to go faster. After Greenwich the wind built and headed, with a strong East going tide further increasing the wind strength, and before long most boats had to change to white sails. Sailing Jester, David Cowell furled his new code zero only to realise he needed a heavier headsail, tiring himself out and losing ground in the process of wrestling with the sails on the foredeck.

Other boats were having their own duels - Roxanne battling to overtake Highland Daughter (sailing 2h), and British Beagle desperately trying to shake off the smaller Elmarleen, who stuck on Charles's tail as if joined by elastic. After a while, the wind eased and boats began to change back to code zeros and kites, with Exocet spurred into peeling to her A3 by the appearance of a coloured sail on the boat behind which turned out to be an orange jib. Meanwhile Concerto was spurred into action by a text from fellow Contessa sailor Alice to get a move on. Wayne Mortiboys, on the Sunfast 3200 Red Rooster arrived grinning from ear to ear having enjoyed the fast crossing in his new boat. Near Fecamp, the wind eased after the first boats had finished, once again making the race hard on the small boats. The fleet celebrated their arrival in Fecamp with a few beers before a superb dinner in a nearby restaurant.

The Royal Escape prize giving was a grand affair, with a table stacked with trophies and copious quantities of wine and beer. Paul Brant assumed the role of chief cheerleader, with the volume gradually increasing to a peak when SORC members won prizes. SORC's Tony Rowe took second place in the double-handed class. In IRC1, Game On took third place, whilst in IRC2, Exocet took first place and Mzungu third, showing once again that solo sailors can hold their own against fully crewed boats on the rare occasions when they get to race together. In the solo class, Game On won, with Bellino second and Exocet third. Their efforts were also enough for SORC to win the team trophy for the first time, a terrific achievement against the fully crewed boats, and RSYC Commodore, Steve Vyse, decided to award SORC a jeroboam of champagne, for sharing at a future SORC party.

Fecamp to Solent

The fleet had another early start, leaving the dock at 0500 for a 0600 start with the aim of getting the small boats home before forecast strong winds. Rob Craigie did a cracking job as Competitor Start Boat for an offwind start. With the wind gusting 23 kts before the start, the boats were charging around at high speed, and only Jester, British Beagle and Exocet were near the line at the start. The fleet set off on a close reach home, with the five Sunfast 3600s gradually pulling away, and Roxanne, Exocet, Jester and Red Rooster stuck together like glue behind them, and Mzungu opting for a more windward course.

The race looked like being a simple drag race home, but the wind slowly headed and decreased, as forecast. Fastrak had pulled out a commanding lead, with Game On also going well until the leeward D2 shroud came detached from the spreader, leaving Ian unable to tack and forced to retire. Exocet changed to her light headsail, allowing Red Rooster to overtake,

much to Wayne's delight. As the fleet sailed into lighter and lighter air, Mzungu managed to stay in strong winds, allowing Tony to go from 2M behind to 2M in front of his competitors, almost catching Bellino and Mr Lucky. The boats that spotted this and tacked East did best, finally splitting the 'gang of four' mid-sized boats, and large gaps developed.

Fastrak's commanding lead built further, and Nigel took line honours and the overall victory, with Ninjod next to finish, taking second on handicap. Mzungu took third on handicap, with British Beagle winning class 2 and Concerto, Elmarleen and Dehlerious all finishing within 10 minutes of each other at around 2330.

After a superb and highly competitive long weekend of racing, mere seconds separated the top few boats. Rob Craigie's Bellino was the overall winner of the Fecamp Triangle on 9 points, with Deb Fish's Exocet second with 10 points and Nigel Colley's Fastrak third with 11 points. Well done to all on completing a challenging three races, and we look forward to the next SORC race, the 600 mile Solo Round the Rock, which kicks off on 2nd July...