

# 2016 PONTOS RIOW Weekend Race Report

## North U Training, the RIOW Race, and a round the cans - a busy 3 days for SORC!

SORC's annual Round the Isle of Wight weekend provided stiff competition and some highly challenging solo yacht racing, all in glorious sunshine. RIOW proved to be a marathon game of Snakes and Ladders, with conditions conspiring to reshuffle the pack several times during the race, while Sunday's inshore race proved to be a real test of boat handling on a tight course in challenging conditions.

### North U Training Day

The weekend started with another fantastic coaching day from the experts at North Sails who set some windward-leeward laps, practice starts and practice races. With short legs it was tough hoisting, gybing and dropping spinnakers with so many boats all around, but all got a great workout and picked up lots of tips over a beer at the debriefing in Shepherd Wharf's great new event centre.

### RIOW Race sponsored by Pontos Winches

After a pleasant evening in the Anchor, the fleet of SORC sailors were up early to check the weather, grab a bite to eat and start the fun of getting 20+ boats, rafted four deep, out of the marina in time for an 0800 start for the race clockwise around the Isle of Wight. A record 33 boats started the race, with four French entrants - Jaasap, Sous Mama Boule, Maeva and Lia Nona - and an Australian with Mister Lucky - adding an international dimension. With a 3 knot tide taking boats across the line, most boats motored far up tide before timing their runs for the line in a light Easterly breeze. Unfortunately the combined class 2 and 3 start was a bit too exciting, with a high-pitched call of 'starboard' was shortly followed by a sickening crunch. Another competitor had collided with Panache, being sailed by the experienced Alice Butcher in just her third solo race - we hope both boats are repaired and back on the water soon.

Class 1 got a clean start 15 minutes later, with Bellino amongst the first to cross the line, and the race was on. Cowes to the Forts was a tactical beat with the tide, with skippers trying to pick a course in the strongest tide, whilst playing the wind shifts and picking the areas of stronger breeze. Once past the Forts the bear away allowed most to hoist their code zeros, as the leaders in class one overtook the leaders in class 2. The Open 50 Pegasus finally got to the front, and all hoisted spinnakers at Bembridge Ledge for the run to St Catherine's Point. With strong foul tide, Exocet, Bellino, Fastrak, and Ding Dong gybed inshore for weaker tide, but the chasing pack continued offshore, where the stronger breeze more than overcame the stronger adverse tide. All was looking good offshore until the wind switched off at St Cats, and the inshore boats benefitted from the by now stronger favorable tide, and started to catch up in an expensive game of Pooh sticks. The wind went forward and many changed to zeros or white sails, while a few, including Juliette, continued offshore under spinnaker in an attempt to sail around the hole. Before long the wind filled in again, and spinnakers were rehoisted for an exhilarating run in winds of up to 20 kts. Luckily, after all our practice, most spinnakers were hoisted, gybed and dropped without incident.

With a strong ebb tide, most opted for an early drop at the Needles, and then came the call of whether to cut inside the wreck or not. Some did; some didn't; and one or two were swept sideways into the Varvassi by the strong tide. With a strong tide running out of the Needles, most hugged the island shore, initially making good progress reaching in a very gusty wind. Pegasus used his power to overcome the tide, but the rest of the leading boats, including Anticipation, Game On, Akarana and Jester got stuck, unable to sail faster than the tide, allowing Exocet and Juliette and then the later boats to catch up. It was painful struggling against the tide, most going backwards at times. Some plugged on under white sails in the gusty and fluctuating wind, others hoisted code zeros, and yet others hoisted spinnakers.

Akarana made an early decision to hoist a kite and head over to the mainland shore, followed by Anticipation, Roxanne and Jester. On the island shore, Bellino broke free under asymmetric spinnaker, and later boats broke free by sailing further offshore where yet again the stronger wind overcame the stronger foul tide. Meanwhile those on the mainland shore were slowly gaining a lead over those on the island shore until the wind headed, leaving the boats on the mainland shore facing a long beat to Cowes. The weather had one final twist in store on the final approach to Cowes when the wind headed yet further, forcing the leaders on the island shore to tack the last mile to the finish, with time gained and lost by reading the wind shift and tacking accordingly.

Eventual winner, George Isted, sailing the Contessa 32 Concerto reported:

*"It was Concerto's 4th time to take part in the SORC RIOW and having spent a considerable amount of time on the Friday night doing navigational and tidal prep instead of going to the pub I felt pretty confident for the day ahead. Concerto had a good start and was one of the first few to cross the line and with Fred on Maeva being my prime competitor I was keeping an close eye on his progress and position.*

*Hand steering was necessary for most of the way to Bembridge Ledge due to the rapidly fluctuating wind and Concerto was positioned to make maximum use of the tide with the minimum number of tacks (tacking overlapping headsails are slow). Concerto was to the north of much of the fleet as we approached the BL buoy giving me more favourable tide and the opportunity to launch the kite much earlier and leading the Class 2's on the water - although not for long. On the very slow drift with occasional sailing between the Culver down and Dunnose Point I was left as one of the back markers watching as those further offshore picked up more wind (or tide).*

*Once the wind filled in Concerto was sailing fast and we sped past St Cat's. Most of the fleet ahead had gone for a more inshore route which would have been the right decision if there an hour or two earlier but because of the delay there was much better tide further offshore. Wayne on Red Rooster seemed to agree and I took a huge amount of distance out of the boats ahead rounding the Needles with Maeva not far ahead. Dropping the kite was exciting as it blew up to 25kts or so as I approached the Needles, I watched as others had similar fun.*

*It took me a while to head East and get out of the tide and those ahead made a break for it again as I slogged against the tide until in the shallower water on the Island side but on closing on the Hurst Narrows I could see half the fleet bunched up on the Island shore going nowhere fast. An area that I had identified the previous night (and from personal experience) as not a good spot in a southerly. The wind angle was such that I could get the new A0 up and slowly sailed around 10-15 boats by staying out in the tide but with enough wind to make 1.5kts even through the worst of the tide. With the wind increasing and heading I swapped back to the Genoa and beat to the finish, swapping tacks with a number of boats that should have been far ahead of Concerto.*

*Winning was not expected but I knew I was in with a decent chance given that it was a slow rounding and the tidal benefit of having a slower boat. None the less, I worked my socks off all day and still have a smile on my face two days later. How to retain it next year, that's the challenge!"*

Overall, the results were dominated by the smaller class two boats, with George Isted in Concerto sailing magnificently to win both class two and overall, with Paul Reymond on Oi Oi second and Frederic Waniart on Maeva third overall. In class one, Graham Deegan sailed his modified 1720 Akarana to victory ahead of Deb Fish's Exocet, with David Cowell's Jester in third. Ross Hobson's Pegasus won the Watermark Cup for line honours, George won the Anticipation Cup for victory in IRC, and Paul Reymond was the well deserved winner of the Rookie prize - we hope to see you racing in SORC again soon Paul! Thanks to the sponsorship of Pontos, there were some fantastic prizes on offer, with three tired SORC sailors struggling to carry them along Cowes High Street until they found a shopping trolley...

#### **Inshore Series Race 4**

After a late and very pleasant evening in the Island Sailing Club, a depleted fleet of 10 yachts set off from Shepherd's Wharf in 13 kts only to have the wind build to 24 knots by the start, causing some rapid pre-start headsail changes. Fortunately all started cleanly and set off on a 2M beat to Destination Cowes, followed by a 5M run to Cowes Radio, before a 2M beat to Party, a 2M run to CraftInsure, then a final beat to the finish at Gurnard. With strong winds and the Solent full of boats, this was a very challenging course for solo sailors.

Eventual winner, Nigel Colley on the Pontos winch powered Fastrak, saw the race like this...

*"Fastrak's Redemption Day as we won the race overall to show a return of form. Sailed in 15 to 20 knots of breeze, but a more feisty 24 knots at the start. Some boats started with a reef and smaller headsails. On Fastrak we started with full main and full No. 2. With the flood tide and an easterly start my final approach to the line was a little early which made necessary a quick tack around and a dishevelled start, but to leeward in relatively clear air, as most of the fleet was bunched at the pin windward end of the line. Using my clear air and putting the nose down for speed, I quickly adopted P2 in the fleet behind Game On, and with Bellino and Mister Lucky, my fellow 3600's, buried in dirty air in the pack. Ian Hoddle on Game On held the advantage to the windward mark at Destination Cowes, just past Osbourne Bay, closely followed by Fastrak and Bellino.*

*A tack round the mark was followed by a race to get the spinnakers up for the first downwind leg against the tide to Cowes Radio, just off Beaulieu somewhere! All 3 leading Sun Fast 3600's successfully hoisted and enjoyed the downwind sleigh ride in 15 to 20 knots of breeze. Game On was first to gybe West with Bellino and Fastrak holding on further towards the Bramble Bank. Then Bellino went followed by Fastrak a few minutes later. Whilst the 3600's were having their gybing duel, Deb Fish on the smaller 3200 Exocet did a good job staying in contact by sailing deeper with her symmetric kite. Game On's gybe was a little early, whilst Bellino had a temporary issue with fouled sheets after her gybe which allowed Fastrak to sail to the mark at a slightly hotter angle to take the lead. An early cautious drop from Fastrak and a late hurried drop from Game On allowed the chasing pack of Bellino, Exocet and the J105's Jester and Juliette, to close the gap.*

*But Fastrak was quick to head up on to the second windward leg to Party, near Gurnard Ledge, and made the leg without tacking but requiring a few windward stuffs at the very end. All the boats behind had to tack for the mark. Bearing away around the mark for the second shorter downwind leg to Craft Insure it was quickly up with the A4 on port gybe along the Island shore, not because the wind had built but because I had no opportunity to tack the A2 after the first downwind leg!!! Fastrak judged the gybe back out into the remains of the flood tide for a good lay line to the mark and increased her lead.*

*For the final beat back to the finish at Gurnard it was a case of beating up the middle of the Solent keeping a loose cover on the boats behind. Initially the tide was still flooding but it quickly became apparent that the ebb tide had cut in earlier than anticipated. Rather than hit the Island shore with possibly stronger foul tide and shiftier wind I kept out, whilst also maintaining a loose cover on the chasing boats, not wanting any of them to slip through! My final tack to the finish ended up being a couple of boat lengths behind the line and the foul tide was ripping. I had to go all the way into the beach in order to tack back and make it across the line. With every minute the tide was getting stronger which effectively cut out my opposition, all who had a much harder time getting across the finish line, and so landed overall victory to Fastrak to keep us in contention for a podium result in the Inshore Series despite the poor RIOW result!!!!*

With the building tide, the handicap results reflected the finishing position, with Nigel Colley's Fastrak sailing well to take victory, completing the course in 2h42 minutes, Rob Craigie's Bellino taking second, and Ian Hoddle's Game On finishing third. Visiting Frenchman Ludovic Melnyk did well to overcome the strong Solent tides to sail Sous Mama Boule to win class 2. A special mention must go to John Skipper, sailing the Maxi 1050 Magewind of Roke in Class 3 (for boats without an IRC rating) who showed great persistence in finishing against the strong tide, over three hours after Fastrak!

With four of the eight races in the Pontos Inshore Series sailed, the series is still wide open with four different winners in four races reflecting the ever higher standard of racing. Thanks to Pontos for their sponsorship, Kirsteen and Dave for doing another sterling job as ROs, Chris for sorting up teen trophies, and a special thank you to Simon Mitchell as Race Director for organising berthing and social events and coping so well with many last minute entries.