



**Eastern Solent weekend  
Solo rookie John Fowler's  
view**

It seems to have rained for 6 months so surely we deserved a little sunshine at the end of April. I had eventually got round to getting the sails measured and applying for a race certificate as I had thought of entering a SORC race for some time. I completed the form and had a friendly call from Race Director Paul Reymond to check that I was not completely deranged, and I was in.

I was warmly welcomed to Shephard's Marina on a breezy Friday evening by Paul. John Skipper arrived shortly after and skilfully moored sideways in a tight spot, sensibly ignoring an irate motor-boat owner. We were soon off to the pub and this dispelled any thought that single handed sailing might be anti-social. Dave Bright, owner of the hot looking A31 Kitty, arrived at the tapas bar and we had a great evening as I contemplated the diversity of the boats entered in the weekend races. I had worried that my boat was entirely unsuitable but much of the challenge is getting to the start line with all the additional jobs and responsibilities. It seems to me that anyone who can sail a boat around a blustery course alone has succeeded in what for me was a considerable challenge.

There was a reasonable easterly breeze the next morning as we made a cautious start from Egypt Point. No one wanted the tide to carry them over the start. This was Eauvation's first proper race, my first single handed race and the first time I had had my race mainsail out of the bag. The sail was too nice as soon after the start, I was alarmed to see no other boat ahead of me. I always fear I have the wrong course. No amount of yelling at the absent navigator produced a response from below. Fortunately, Magewind soon sailed past followed by Felix sailing fast and free and showing the way.

The course took us upwind over to Browndown then past Horse Sand Fort. After St Helens we were able to broad reach to Bembridge Ledge. No spinnakers appeared and I decided I didn't want to make a fool of myself and on reflection, it was too tight. Class 1 Mustigo overtook me just before Bembridge Ledge and we gybed round just metres apart. Another broad reach took us to the finish off Stokes Bay East and then into Gosport Marina. At the friendly prize-giving on board the well-appointed Nymphs, Jerry (Sunfast 3200) won 1<sup>st</sup> place for Class 1 and Christoph (Felix X332) accepted the first place prize for class 2 and overall. Then a meal at Haslar Marina where I made lots of new friends and gleaned pearls of wisdom from sailing legend Jerry Freeman, who I had met before although he had forgotten.

It has been the wettest most of us can remember, but it seemed another 3 months worth of rain fell that night. Many slept through it. Sunday morning was cold, wet and windy. It was now from the west. What was I doing here?

Out of the marina, I noticed that several boats had wisely put 2 reefs in for the start and I decided this was a good idea. Regrettably, I found only one set of reef points. How stupid is that? Another rookie error.

The start off Gillkicker Point was into the tide and a gusty wind. Most of us struggled to get to the start line and the RO postponed until all vessels were present. I had a horrible time getting past the starting buoy with a flogging lazy sheet getting dragged into the opposite fairlead jamming them both. No amount of yelling produced a solution so I had to get on and sort it out myself. Short tacking inshore to avoid the tide seemed to be the trick but I was losing lots of ground with each tack. Magewind was well in control and powered away despite sailing out into the foul tide.

There was a long run to the leeward mark at Dean Tail. Everyone was cautious and no spinnakers appeared. Every time I went to get the bag up on deck, another cold gust extinguished any enthusiasm. Then a reach to Sparkes just off Hayling Island and a long beat back to the finish off Norris. With a falling wind, I shook out the reef losing ground to Nymphs. The lead boats headed towards the Island side, Nymphs stayed to the north so I stayed in the middle with a favourable tide and the expected shift to the SW had arrived as I passed the fort. It followed with lots more gusts and the usual Norris Nadders. From the finish, I reached in towards Hamble with 22-28 knots of wind. Back to the mooring, my dinghy was almost awash with rainwater so even more clearing up to do. I eventually got home; tired, bruised and elated. I'll be back.

Congratulations to John Skipper for his win on Sunday. Many thanks to Dave our Race Officer for setting excellent courses and respect to all who race boats single handed.