



*Strangford Lough Yacht Club*

**SONATA BRITISH NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2008**  
**EVENT DIARY OR "SOME RECOLLECTIONS BY A PARTICIPANT"**

**Sat 16 Aug 08**

The first visiting competitors were due to arrive at SLYC this morning. It was a horrible day, low cloud, heavy rain & blowing east or south-easterly 6 or 7. Another club on Strangford Lough had scheduled its annual regatta today; it was abandoned.

Blue Tack had actually arrived last night and this morning a large camper van arrived towing High & Dry. They have arranged to park their van outside the SLYC clubhouse for the week. "Is it always like this here" one of them asks, "you should see it on a bad day" I reply. There is no question of launching the early arrivals today; the club is too exposed in strong easterlies.

This evening the BBC national news carries reports of extensive flooding in Northern Ireland; despite this the remaining visitors manage to navigate their way through Belfast without needing to launch their boats and arrive at SLYC by 2000hrs.

**Sun 17 Aug 08**

The weather has improved today, there is even some sun this morning.

The visitors' boats are launched by crane.

For the benefit of the visitors a practice race is set this afternoon, using club race marks off Trasnagh Island. It gives the visitors an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of Strangford Lough and its islands. The conditions have freshened again this afternoon, a northerly force 4. Meanwhile scrutiniser Ian Bogie and measurer Brian McKee do their work.

**Mon 18 Aug 08**

The first day of the Championship dawns, grey and threatening.

The various volunteers arrive, including Race officer PJ Gault who briefs the competitors at 1000hrs. The committee boat is a handsome converted fishing boat, Stack Polly, skippered by her owner Alan Marten.

The first race, a windward-leeward, starts on time. The conditions are SSE 4 or 5. There is a clean start. By the first mark a pattern that will become familiar during the week has established itself, with Blue Tack, helmed by Dave Boatman, leading. Shortly after the start the rain that has threatened starts in earnest and the wind freshens further. Blue Tack sails on to win the race, Mr McGregor with Niall Eames at the helm is second.

The rain persists as the race officer resets the course for the second race. Competitors are getting cold and wet; this is after all high summer in Northern Ireland. Soggy sandwiches are eaten and a few boats opt to change to the no2 genoa. Again there is a clean start in the second race. The fresh winds and rain ensure this race is a test of endurance for all boats, but the masochists among us enjoy the harsh conditions. Possibly the foredeck man on each boat, fully exposed to the rain and spray, enjoy it less than the helms, sheltered as they are to some extent by the bodies in front of them. Once again Blue Tack, in a class by herself, sails on to win; Mr McGregor is again second.

The club laid on a band with Guinness and oysters this evening. After the hard day's sailing not all crews made it, preferring presumably to fall asleep after a hot bath.

### Tues 19 Aug 08

Today is a much brighter day, with a hint of sun and westerly breeze force 3. The Distance Race of the Championship is scheduled today, using a course familiar to SLYC members as one of the club's Round the Lough courses. The Race Officer has set a windward mark after which the fleet sails south down Strangford Lough. This time there 2 were boats over the line at the start but only one heeded the Race Officer's calling offender's sail numbers. After a short beat the fleet arrives very close together at the windward mark with the predictable shouts and warnings as boats struggle for advantage, but once again Blue Tack is there first. All but one of the fleet then sailed out in a pack on a broad spinnaker reach into the centre of the Lough. Keeping to the east of the islands they benefited from cleaner wind but stronger tide against them. Triad alone opted to take a different course from everybody else sailing inside the islands down to the first waymark at Long Sheelah, a prominent pladdy in the middle of the Lough. Interestingly, the relative positions of the boats were exactly the same after the 30-minute diversion, Triad ending up in exactly the same position when she rejoined the rest of the fleet. There was then a tremendous tight reach with spinnaker down to Marlfield Bay, near the entrance to Strangford Lough's famous Narrows. Some boats struggled to avoid overpowering but most of the crews were able to enjoy the fabulous scenery. Two fetches then followed, on the starboard tack from Marlfield Bay to Jackdaw Island, port tack to Round Island. To help the visitors navigate Don Clarke, SLYC's boatman indicated mark positions by sitting near them in his RIB.

A beat across the Lough to the entrance to Ringhaddy Sound gave the opportunity for some positions to change, and then, unusually for a championship, the race progressed through the crowded picturesque moorings in Ringhaddy Sound before a final tight reach and close hauled leg to the finish at Trasnagh Island. Once again the race winner was Blue Tack, local knowledge proving no advantage against the Championship leader's superior skills. Second was SLYC's Ian Smyth helming Mouse. It then transpired that High & Dry was the second offender over the line at the start. They had not returned because his sail maker had transposed a

digit when putting the number onto High & Dry's new genoa; the number called by the Race Officer had not been recognised. This evening's entertainment was the class AGM followed by a pool tournament, which proved very popular. Team Eric won the Boat it.

### **Wed 20 Aug 08**

Lighter winds today, N & fluky; the weather is mostly overcast but in the second race of the day it brightens and briefly becomes sunny.

The race format today is reverse triangles, but in the variable conditions these prove hard to set. Blue Tack again wins the first race of the day, this time High & Dry are second. A late wind shift leaves a strong port end bias in the line at the start of the second race, those who spotted it had a big advantage. However the wind remained fluky and in the third round Triad tacked ahead of Saraband at the leeward mark forcing them to tack away to the left side of the course on the final beat. Saraband got a wind shift that took them into third place, Triad, who had stuck to the right, was 14<sup>th</sup>. Blue Tack won the race, with Mouse second.

This evening a protest committee convened, it was meant to be a night off for the Sonata crews, but those involved in the protest had to be there, by the time the protest committee made its decision to throw out the protest, bar profits had done very well.

### **Thurs 21 Aug 08**

The best day of the Championship so far as the weather was concerned. The wind was mostly NW 3-4, which meant the windward mark was placed close to the shore of Mahee Island. As local crews know this always means tricky wind shifts when approaching the island. As if to confirm the unpredictable conditions, there was an upset in today's first race (windward-leeward again today), with High & Dry winning followed by Saraband, with Blue Tack only managing third place. Between the two races the wind briefly picked up to force 4-5 as a nearby shower prompted a squall. Crews donned foul weather gear, but the shower stayed away. The first attempt to start the race led to a general recall. After a second general recall, at the third attempt the Race Officer flew the black flag. Not surprisingly this led to a much more restrained clean start. By this time the sun had returned and the wind was back to F3. To provide some entertainment in the second race Stephen Coulter on Gemini was seen sailing with his life jacket inflated. It seems he had fallen overboard, toppling over the stern on the run and the crew had to sail back to rescue him! Business as usual was resumed by Blue Tack, they won, High & Dry was second.

In the clubhouse this evening was a wine and cheese party with great cheeses provided by McCann's store at Balloo.

### **Fri 22 Aug 08**

This is the last day of the Championship, with wind NW 3-4. First place in the Series is clearly going to Blue Tack, but there is a three way split for

second place, with Mouse in contention along with Eric the Boat and High & Dry, so there is much still to play for.

Once again two reverse triangles are sailed. With wind direction still inconsistent there was a slight port end bias on the line for both races. In the first race this was spotted by Blue Tack & Cockahoop, who proceeded to sail away from the rest of the fleet up the left hand side of the course. By the finish Mr McGregor had managed to get into second place, Cockahoop was third.

The final race provided an upset in that Blue Tack only managed 5<sup>th</sup> place. The race winner was Eric the Boat and So finished second. There was disappointment for SLYC today, Mouse only managed a 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> place, thereby ruling a local boat out of the top three places.

In the evening, Guest of Honour at the Championship Dinner was Mayor of Ards Jim Fletcher who made a witty speech. Julia Bloch, wife of the SLYC Commodore Peter Bloch presented the prizes. Thanks were made to all visiting competitors, PJ Gault the Race Officer, Alan Marten, the volunteers from the Club and the sponsors whose generous support had made the event possible.

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