

Hunters Brewery Sonata National Sailing Championships-Brixham 17th -20th July 2014

Reported by Chris Coote Brixham Yacht Club

Once again Torbay was filled with the colourful sight of yachts racing in near perfect conditions last week. Some very close racing resulted from Brixham Yacht Club organising the National championships for these 22ft one design yachts with 20 boats in total competing. Sponsorship from local businesses Hunters Brewery and Celebration Vintage Cars, plus a very welcome contribution of malt whiskey from Old Pulteney, made it possible to welcome visitors from far afield and assist with entertaining and craning costs. Brixham Harbour Authority provided invaluable assistance with berthing and provision of quayside space for craning in and out, whilst the Sonata Association helped out with a travelling bursary for those coming from far and wide.

Brixham's home fleet of 7 of these RYA approved one design yachts welcomed no less than 13 visitors to the appropriately named Hunters Brewery sponsored National championships this year. Brixham Yacht Club provided the race organisation with a team of volunteers headed by race officer Sean Semmens and his team aboard the committee boat "Mary Flora", one of Brixham's well known cruising yachts. Visiting boats came from as far afield as Sunderland in Tyne and Wear and Windemere in Cumbria. A large party made the journey up from their Medway base in Kent and boats also arrived from Harwich, Cornwall, Poole and the Solent. This excellent entry was due in no small measure to the previous efforts of BYC organising the Southern Area championships in 2013 and the untiring efforts of local Sonata class captain, David Woolcock, who is based in Brixham with his Sonata "G String".

The first day started with a significant Easterly breeze and swell, not the best wind direction for Torbay. By the second race however the sea state was considerably reduced and racing concluded in light airs with the Sunderland boat "White Magic" dominating the results. The second day saw much brighter but lighter conditions and former national champion and chief sailmaker for Sonatas, Steve Goacher, finally got into his groove with a new crew and achieved two firsts. Unfortunately the third day on Saturday saw plenty of sunshine, but no wind at all. Racing was abandoned at 13:00 after a long wait and crews disappeared into Brixham for a variety of R&R activities, not all of which involved pubs and restaurants!

The final day was held in beautiful sunny but light and shifty conditions with everything to play for among the leading boats. Some very close finishes were observed with only a few seconds between rival boats including one dead heat between local boat "Sooty" and Medway visitor "Duet". Previous national champions from Poole in the form of the Cross family, father and son in separate boats, were in close contention right to the end of the final races. However Steve Goacher in "Eric the Boat", last year's winner of the Nationals at Strangford Loch maintained his lead over Dave Matthews from Sunderland in "White Magic" with Kevin Cross only one point behind in 3rd position in "Selene". Son Joe brought his red boat "Presto" into 4th place just 3 points behind his father. Best Brixham boat was "Blues Breaker" in 10th place sailed by the Savage family, who have owned the boat for over 30 years now and regard it as part of the family.

The entire event was sailed in shirt sleeve conditions, most unusual for a British summer. Brixham has a deserved reputation for hospitality and socialising at events. These Nationals were no exception. On the first day sailors coming ashore were welcomed with traditional pasties and beer. Friday evening saw a large BBQ arrive to accommodate a monster "hog" all of which was free to the sailors and crews. The highly acclaimed "Pub Band" fronted by Robbie Richardson had everyone singing both traditional shanty's and folk songs long into the balmy evening. Saturday evening provided the main social event with a formal Sonata dinner at which over 90 people sat down and enjoyed a 3 course meal. The desserts were a wonderful selection, all hand made by the local "Fleet Sweets" (Sonata wives), girlfriends and in some cases even the skippers. The sponsorship from Old Pulteney meant that everyone had a substantial tot or two of single malt to round off the festivities. Numerous bottles of this lovely smooth, dry, medium bodied 12yr old Whisky supplied a fair few wee drams to all the dinners, and were also provided as day prizes in addition to the main trophies awarded on the Sunday afternoon..

Race officer Sean Semmens is to be congratulated on running 8 of the planned 9 races despite missing one day completely and finished on Sunday in good time for visiting boats to bring masts down and motor around into the Fish Quay for a prompt lift out onto their trailers by Paul Sheppard with his familiar Brixham monster truck and Hiab. As farewells were made, many of the visitors commented on the beautiful venue and warm welcome given by Brixham people, both in the Yacht Club and in the town, where most of them took up accommodation for the whole event, adding that they would be returning when Brixham is offered another opportunity to run the Sonata Nationals.