

Ground Report from Cowes



Friday - August 10 2007 - 1010 PST - Another update from our embedded reporter Conrad Colman who is sailing in the Hunter 707 class at Scandia Cowes Week. Keep an eye out for Conrad - we wouldn't be surprised to see him at the helm of something agile and fast, chasing down Riou or Sanderson in the Southern Ocean one day soon:

"Racing at Cowes was canceled today, bringing to an end a week that has inspired more frustration than brilliance. Having suffered through two previous days where starts were delayed and courses truncated, we were summoned back to shore by the Royal Yacht Squadron with three bursts from the gleaming array of polished cannons.

Yesterday's fight between the northerly gradient wind and the south westerly sea breeze left us crossing the line in light breezes almost four

hours after our scheduled start time, only to have our return further delayed when the northerly threw in the towel at the final leeward mark. A few hundred small keel boats were left drifting dispiritedly in the receding tide. In a cruel twist of fate the fleets completely reshuffled when the wind died because yachts would charge down to the mark, spinnakers flying and, after rounding the mark, continue backwards on the tide. This shuffle continued until the boats that had floundered early were in the lead and in new breeze, while the previous leaders wallowed helplessly. While drifting, we were concerned to see many of the Laser SB3s around us suddenly take off back to Cowes, as if sailing in their own breeze. It was only when we heard the buzzing chorus of belabored two horsepower engines that we realized the fault was not ours. Nothing goes to windward like an outboard.

While this week's wind was emphysemic, the social scene has been booming. The pedestrian High Street teems each night with scruffy pro sailors, well dressed corporates from the Sunsail fleet and elegant types, dressed to the nines. We are all here for the same thing but its pretty clear that we're heading to different parties! Like other high profile events on the English social calendar like Ascot (horse racing), Henley (rowing), Chelsea (flowers) and Wimbledon, many people flock to Cowes for the spectacle and the parties, with no intention of taking part. On shore activities will come to an end with a bang tonight during the famous fireworks show." Photo Conrad Colman.

Scandia Cowes Lowdown - Tricky Tides



Tuesday - August 7 2007 - 0917 PST - From XS man on the scene
Conrad Colman:

The Scandia Cowes Week Regatta is notable for being the world's biggest and oldest sailing event, but also for its phenomenal home team advantage due to its uniquely complicated tides, winds and traffic. The basic recipe for this regatta is 1000 yachts, tidal flows of 3.4 kts, often in opposing directions, and one of the world's busiest shipping ports. Cowes is located on the northern coast of the Isle of Wight, separated from the mainland by a stretch of water called the Solent. The extreme tidal flows have contributed to the success of the neighboring port of Southampton's as its shipping channels benefit from a bizzare "double bump" high tide. The incoming high tide flows up the western Solent from the English Channel, but at the point of slack water it is augmented by a further rush from the eastern Solent as the incoming tide bends around the eastern tip of the island and meets itself right at Cowes.

On Saturday, the first proper days racing, we burst out of our 18 boat Hunter 707 fleet and led up the pebbly beach by the Royal Yacht Squadron until, upon rounding the first headland, were presented by a thick wall of Dragons, Laser SB3s and other small keelboats. The tide chart showed that there was a 0.2 kt Westerly counter current 100 yds out from the beach, beyond which the Easterly incoming tide roared in at 3.4 kts. As we were beating up the beach in less than 10 kts of wind any boat that strayed into the incoming tidal stream went backwards through the fleet just as surely as they would have if they were on the beach. This left a mixed fleet of 300 small keel boats fighting upwind in a small counterflow, looking for all the world like trout swimming up a river.

This tide-induced melee left boats on starboard tack charging into the shore, their skippers breaking into a cold sweat despite the warm weather, calling for water, tacking, and then reentering the fray with rights over the starboard tackers as they were in dire need of distance from the beach in order to stay afloat. The tactic we found to be most successful was to sit on the hip of another boat while on starboard and then tacking back out when they ran aground. While it made for challenging sailing it was a fantastic spectacle for those ashore as I noticed that the coast was thick with picnic blankets with tea-drinking English couples sitting back and watching the show. Photo Conrad Colman.

From One of Our Own



Monday - August 6 2007 - 1259 PST - This report comes from XS correspondent Conrad Colman who is sailing at Scandia Cowes Week. Conrad will be giving us an embedded report as often as he can. Here is his first installment - written on Friday:

Pro sailing is dominated by big egos, big budgets and glossy representations of Life at the Extreme. But what does this world look like from the bottom up? When one is not a Coutts or a Cayard, when one has to beg for each day on the water and go shopping in the discount aisle in the supermarket? This is my worms eye view of the pro sailing world.

I'm a kiwi who just graduated from college in Colorado, a place not exactly celebrated for its sailing. While sitting in the mountainous desert I read up on my childhood heroes of Dalton and the late great Sir Peter Blake, while adopting new ones like Pete Goss and Mike Sanderson, and decided that after graduation I would do my best to follow in their wake.

I am now racing as the bowman on a Hunter 707 in Cowes week and will be sending back reports of the great event that you likely won't see in the regular yachting press. To state the obvious, it is a sailing event of truly epic proportions. I must admit that after living in Colorado, I am susceptible to getting excited about any body of water larger than my morning coffee cup, but the constant hustle and bustle and hundreds of boats is almost overwhelming and the racing has barely started! The most impressive sight of the day was shared by the 100 boat SB3 fleet, and the enormous ICAP Leopard. Its size cannot be conveyed appropriately in photos as its huge sail area looked like an apartment block on the horizon. I am sure it made everyone in the Solent feel like a mere commoner as it scythed effortlessly past. More updates to come throughout the week. Photo Conrad Colman.

History For Sale



Friday - August 10 2007 - 0900 PST - Conrad Colman, our XS man on the scene in Cowes snapped this one and suggested for a caption: "Fast Tri, one careful lady owner, 30,000 miles, well maintained."