

Racing in a National Championships

A personal view from Fergus O'Sullivan and Mick Balaam, Versa 210



Friday Evening:

After a torrid drive down the M3 and A31 round Bournemouth where everyone and their family seemed to be on the road (oh, the delights of travelling on the eve of a Bank Holiday week end), we finally arrive at WPNSA having rung ahead as advised on the website to get the gate code. No problems as there was a constant queue to get into the dinghy park at the end of the RS regatta. We pull up in the boat trailer area and begin to unpack the Versa next to a RS200 crew who were looking a little the worse for wear after a hard week's racing. They were very pleased with their 7th overall as they think they were the first "private" entry, the top places being taken by semi-professional crews from the major sailmakers, chandlers and boat suppliers (where were you Andy?!). We wonder if we'll look as knackered after the Comet regatta!

As we raise the mast, David Talbot, revered CCCA Chairman, jumps out of his car and welcomes us, saying there are vacant places already in the Comet boat park area if we want to move our boat over to get a prime slot, which we duly do when it is all screwed together. After tying it down and removing all the unwanted trailing gear we set off to find our B&B on the island in Easton and sit down to an excellent meal in the local Chinese.

Saturday, Race 1 and 2

A good Force 5 of nearly twenty knots with squalls of up to 28 knots!

A leisurely breakfast, sort out today's sailing togs (looks a bit cold and windy, better pack the winter gear) and off we go to register and the briefing. We learn there has been a change of Race Officer and there is an "interesting" debate between the helm's union and the race crew over some of the SIs at which point we get bored and shoot off to get pole position in the changing rooms. Suitably muffled up against the wind, it's off to the boat park to prepare the Versa. We had stuck the tuning guide in the back of the cockpit and the three possible courses at the front, so we thought we knew where we would be going – all that remained was to set the boat up for high winds (we could tell you how but we'd have to charge!) and stand about with the rest of the fleet awaiting "release" to the racing area. Eventually, there was a faint hoot and some flags were hoisted on the shoreside flagpole. Somebody said "we're released" and so off we went to the slipway and away round the marina wall looking for a large white cruiser called [????]

Race 1:

Hey, it's blowing old boots – just like the Inlands – hooray! There's only us and a couple of other Versas carrying full sail, everyone else is reefed down – even the Trios and we thought they were hard men (and women)! After scrutinising the Trio and Comet starts, we reason the starting strategy is "blow the bias – start on time in the middle and get on with it". As it happens, there's plenty room on the line for 8 or so Versa and so off we go – grinding up wind, long tacks and keep the boat moving over the waves. Great, that seemed to

work and we are first at the top of the course, now where do we go for the “inverted P”? Bang a left and up with the spinnaker – hmm, that didn’t go too well, lotsa tangles and lack of co-ordination between helm and crew, however, we are still in front and all we have to do is get round the wing mark without dumping. That seemed to work OK, the only problem is dodging the inverted Comets that we have caught up who didn’t survive the gybe. The ride down the second reach is sensational and we decide to “do the angles” on the following run (port first) so we can drop the spinny in the right bag (i.e. the left side!) at the bottom mark for the second lap launch. A good round sees us charging up the second beat, still ahead but a muffed tack (helm left the mainsheet jammed which twisted around itself and refused to pay out on the new tack – hence a boat full of water but at least we didn’t fall over as we did in the third race of the Inlands. Well, happy readers, a Versa full of water is really stable in high winds but VERY SLOW, curses, I knew we should have packed the bailer and the rest of the fleet are beginning to catch us. Eventually the self-bailers begin to win the battle and drain the cockpit, especially as we remember to sit further back to power over the waves and stop the water coming through the spinny pole hole. All that training in the choppy stuff at Pyefleet Week off Brightlingsea is beginning to pay off!

What was the outcome of the debate about passing through the start line up wind each lap?? Perhaps we should have stayed to the end of the briefing! Well let’s make sure by doing it anyway; we’re still clear and so can choose our own course. Finally, here we are at the windward mark again, and still first, so up with the spinnaker... oh, blow, we find another way to mess it up with a nice hourglass but bearing away to a run and a bit of tugging gets it sorted so off we go for a great plane round the wing mark and down to the leeward end. This time we settle down to a great beat, through the start line just in case and up to the windward mark for the last time, now we can really enjoy the blast downwind and get it more or less right this time with the rest of the fleet way behind (sorry chaps but it is our weather). We get the gybes right and the drop and round goes well too, so we grind up the final beat and get our hoot – though something odd happens and we get credited with a 2nd, though we know no-one overtook us and some of the fleet only did two laps – AND we went through the gate every lap, perhaps they thought we were a Trio!! Anthea Wright and crew (243) were credited 1st and Mike Wilcock (232) 3rd.

*Anthea Wright battles
it out with Alistair
Baird – note the reefs!*



Race 2

A lot of flapping about with the jib furled waiting for the off but eventually we hit the line on time again and powered up the beat – but the wind had increased even more and it was on the edge of survival. We were happy with our boat speed and got to the windward mark again first, however, we noticed the Trios ahead weren’t flying spinnakers – good intelligence, let’s see if we can stay in front on two sails. Halfway down the top reach we notice none of the Versas flying spinnakers either, so we can concentrate on two-sail reaching after the gybe. What a blast! Just like sailing the Laser or my Solo in a hoolie, out over the back, plate up, dump and pull, dump and pull – Mick is grinning from ear to ear and enjoying the speed. Round the bottom mark, up the beat (still through the gate – just in case) and round once more – what a ride!! Nevertheless, we are happy to see the RIB at the bottom mark with the shortened course flag, so two laps it is then and a clear bullet this time. Time to go home for a pie and a pint. Ray Suomi and Janice (252) win the battle for 2nd place with Mike Wilcock in 3rd.

Mike enjoys
the blast.



Sunday, Races 3 - 6

Still rather windy with a good force 4-5 and gusts up to 6 but a better day with some sun, so out with the second lot of togs, early brekker and down to the boat park. Set the boat up for max power (in a Versa?!) and we're soon off to get reacquainted with [cruiser name??].

Race 3 & 4

The board on the Committee Boat says 2 laps for Comets and Versas/Duos – great, at least it's clear and now we are confident we can miss out the gate on the second beat. This time we do have some trial runs at the line and watch the Trio and Comet starts carefully for line bias. It looks like starting in the pin end third of the line, so we duly line up and off we go again. Not so much wind today and the rest of the fleet are getting used to the lumpy stuff, so we are all closer together with Anthea, Ray Suomi and Mike Wilcock fighting it out for second; we have to work hard to stay in front but the spinnaker legs are still great fun and we manage to avoid too many snarl-ups today, so it's another bullet. Ray Suomi wins the battle for 2nd and John Sturgeon (366) gets 3rd having decided the wind had dropped enough for a sail!

It's pretty much the same in Race 4 with Ray setting up a pattern getting 2nd and Mike Wilcock 3rd. On the way back for lunch we are thinking, one more and no-one can get more firsts, maybe – just maybe – we can tie it up today!

Race 5 & 6

This is serious stuff now, the wind has dropped a bit and the lake sailors are coming to the fore, we have to spot the line bias and get the wind shifts right. We think the left side of the course is favoured as, with a North Westerly, there is clearer wind between the island and the mainland, the right hand side having possibly more turbulence and a topographical swing, so we aim to bang the corner and keep the boat speed up. We have to cross behind John Linnell in Duo 69, (who is going up wind like a train and wins the Duo Championship) but we need to cover those who have gone out right, just in case we've got the plot wrong. As we reach the starboard layline, we see those out right are way over-standing, so we can tack early and get round first. Up spinnaker and away we go with the fleet safely behind, another similar lap and another bullet. Ray comes in 2nd again with Anthea getting to grips with the conditions in 3rd.

*Ray and Janice in a
relaxed mood!*



The final race today takes a similar course with Anthea still improving in 2nd demoting Ray to 3rd. After a long day's racing, we are all happy to have made it through the day and set off for a welcome shower and evening meal.

Fergus and Mick search for the wing mark.



Monday Race 7 & 8

Another splendid day with a gentler force 3-4, fewer gusts but more shifts.

Having amassed 5 firsts and that controversial second, we are more relaxed as we have acquired enough points to win the Championship, nevertheless, there are still two races to go and a bunch of Versas keen to wrest a win from us. The racing is much closer today as the fleet close up in the lighter winds. We manage to sail conservatively, keeping ahead of the fleet, getting another first with John Sturgeon showing his true mettle in 2nd and Anthea hanging on for 3rd.

John decides it's time for a tack.



The final race, in similar winds, proves most interesting, as, although we manage to keep to form and stay ahead, the shifts come into play more and it isn't quite as simple as just winning the start and bearing left up to the windward mark. Alistair Baird (237) has been single-handedly (see what I did there?!) improving since his baptism of fire on Saturday and is never far behind, in fact Mick and I reckon he was catching us on the off-wind legs and us with all the sails up and trying hard! Alistair sails splendidly to get 2nd and "Most Improved helm of the Championships" award with our esteemed Newsletter editor John Sturgeon coming in a well-deserved 3rd.

All in all, a great Championship with a competitive but friendly and supportive group of sailors. Many thanks to the patient Race Crew and the excellent staff of WPNSA.

Overall Results: 1st Fergus O'Sullivan and Mick Balaam, Versa 210, Ardleigh Sailing Club
 2nd Ray Suomi and Janice, Versa 252, CMYC
 3rd Anthea Wright and crew, Versa 243, Kingsmead Sailing Club

Most Improved Helm: Alistair Baird (singlehanded), Versa 237, Whitefriars Sailing Club

WPNSC 2011 Comet Versa National Championships results

Sailed: 8

Discards: 2

To count: 6

Entries: 9

Scoring System: Appendix A

| Rank | Tally No. | Sail No. | Club | Helm | Crew | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5 | R6 | R7 | R8 | Total | Net t |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|------------------|-------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1st | 395 | 210 | Ardleigh SC | Fergus OSullivan | Mick Balaam | (2) | (1) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 6 |
| 2nd | 398 | 252 | CMYC | Ray Suomi | Janice | (5) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | (4) | 4 | 24 | 15 |
| 3 rd | 397 | 243 | Kingsmead SC | Anthea Wright | | 1 | (DNC 10) | (6) | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 35 | 19 |
| 4 th | 396 | 232 | Bewl Valley SC | Mike Wilcock | | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | (6) | (6) | 34 | 22 |
| 5 th | 357 | 237 | Whitefriars SC | Alistair Baird | None | 7 | 4 | 4 | 6 | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | 5 | 2 | 48 | 28 |
| 6 th | 403 | 366 | Hawley Lake | John Sturgeon | | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | 3 | 4 | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | 2 | 3 | 52 | 32 |
| 7 th | 399 | 257 | Seasalter | Mark Dalton | | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | 7 | 8 | 58 | 38 |
| 8 th | 400 | 300 | Cotswold SC | Jon Vincent | | 6 | RAF 6 | 8 | 8 | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | 8 | 7 | 63 | 43 |
| 9 th | 356 | 235 | Cotswold SC | Roger Edwards | | (DNC 10) | (DNC 10) | DNC 10 | DNC 10 | DNC 10 | DNC 10 | DNC 10 | DNC 10 | 80 | 60 |

Prize Giving

3rd

Anthea Wright and crew



2nd

Ray Suomi and Janice



1st

*Fergus O'Sullivan and
Mick Balaam*



Most Improved Helm

Alistair Baird

