

Exhilarating, challenging, breezy, competitive!

The Irish Flying Fifteen fleet had their last provincial event, the South Coast Championships, last weekend before the Subaru sponsored World Championships are hosted by the National Yacht Club at the end of this month. This time the host was the near neighbours of the NYC, the Royal St George Yacht Club and there was some debate as to whether the RStGYC had ever hosted a Flying Fifteen event before. From early in the week before there was speculation as to what might happen on the Saturday as there was such an adverse forecast and in other regatta reports on the Y&Y website, the sense that not much would happen was replicated. By Friday evening the forecast had moderated slightly but winds of mid-twenties gusting to over thirty were still showing up on the XCWeather chart and other web-based forecasts weren't any more optimistic.

A fleet of 27 boats signed up for the event with four northern visitors, three from Strangford; the brothers Martin, Baker & Chamberlain, and McCleery & Dougan and one from Belfast Lough, Messrs Willis & McPeake with the newest Flying Fifteen in the World, sail number 4074. Dunmore East had a 100% turnout with Lee, Andy, Charlie and Rob all in attendance. Of the DL Clubs, the DMYC had a 66% turnout (2), the Royal St George had a 100% turnout (4) but the bulk of the fleet came from the NYC.

Race Officer Barry O'Neil committed himself and his team to trying to provide at least one race on the Saturday and they were true to their word. With a punctual start at 11:55, a slightly reduced fleet got off the start line cleanly in 20+ knots of breeze, coming from a W – WNW direction, with a start area towards the South Bull, located to avoid any possible clash with the DBSC fleets later in the day. It wouldn't be an issue!

Ben Mulligan & Cormac Bradley (3688) went left and worked their way up the left-hand side of the first beat to find themselves in first place at the mark. An element of confusion entered their thinking when Bradley stated that the offset mark for the Windward-Leeward course was going to be a black inflatable, matching the weather mark. Only problem was that the second black inflatable was sitting in a rib. The obvious conclusion was that the smaller white mark in the water was the offset. That resulted in a slightly delayed spinnaker hoist. Given the breezy conditions, identifying other boats in the immediate vicinity was less important, but my recall is that Ian Mathews & Keith Poole (3864), the Martin brothers, Andy & Rory (3974), Andrew Baker & Peter Chamberlain (3756) Charlie Boland & Rob McConnell (3682) and Lee Statham & Andy Paul (3896) from Dunmore East were in the lead bunch. The first downwind leg was still "playable" from a spinnaker perspective and the surfing was almost continuous as a consequence of the strengthening breeze. The Martin Brothers rounded the gate first with Statham & Paul possibly second. More boats tried out the left-hand side of the beat with reward, particularly Sean Craig & Alan Green (3970) who came from a low top ten position to feature at the front of the fleet. The Martin Brothers extended their lead upwind. The second downwind was a bit hairier than the first with the challenge "not to do anything stupid". Though not in the realms of doing something stupid, Statham & Paul turtled at a late stage of the second run following a Chinese gybe, stuck their mast in the "putty" and broke it as a consequence. Boland & McConnell were also telling stories of a hectic spinnaker drop. Matthews and Mulligan came dangerously close, given the conditions, but both survived to give a finishing sequence of Martins, Craig/Green, Mulligan/Bradley, Mathews/Poole and Baker/Chamberlain.

It is not often that a regatta fleet "votes with its feet", but as each boat finished, they made a bee-line for shore, even though the committee boat had flown no flags to promote that option. The two-sail sail in to the harbour was full of sight-reducing spray and was completed in a very short time. Later a WhatsApp post suggested that the race had been sailed in winds of high twenties knots with gusts measuring 34/35 knots.

Sunday dawned with a healthy wind forecast of ten- twelve knots gusting to seventeen and as promised the Race Officer started the day with two sausage-triangle courses. The wind reduction seemed to go unnoticed by the Martin Brothers as they recorded two bullets in the first two races. Dave Gorman & Chris Doorly (3920) particularly enjoyed the first two races of the day as they recorded a 3, 4, while Baker & Chamberlain also had a good start to the day with a 5, 2. Mathews

& Poole scored a 4, 7 while some of the others had a one good/one not so good start. Of these Alistair Court & Conor O'Leary (3753) registered a 6, 3, Craig & Green a 2,13 and Mulligan & Bradley a 11, 8. These combinations of numbers give an indication of the competitive nature of the racing, while the Martin Brothers registered two first places, my sense is that they didn't lead from start to finish in either race. And there is no recall that any one race was won by a large margin. The DL fleet would consider a number of fleet members to be a gauge of success on the water, so when one finds oneself in that company, the sense is that one is at the races, literally, but it isn't always the case.

Two Windward-Leeward races closed out the proceedings and in these the races wins went to David Gorman & Chris Doorly (Race 4) and Niall Coleman & Mick Quinn (4008) (Race 5). For the last two races of the series, Barry O'Neil was obliged to use the "U" Flag and in the last race, in particular, a number of high-profile transgressors of the "U" flag start regime were caught, namely Gorman & Doorly, Craig & Green and Gavin Doyle & Dave Sweeney (3912).

Frank Miller & Grattan Donnelly (3845) had a good series to win the Silver Fleet, counting a second place in the last race of the series and leading the fleet around the weather mark for the first time. Brian O'Hare and Tonia McAllister (4043) won the bronze fleet, counting scores either side of tenth position to finish 11th overall, a place behind Miller & Donnelly. Neil Colin & Margaret Casey also scored a second place, in Race 4.

Overall this was a very successful event – we found out just how these boats perform when it "honks" and the racing on the Sunday was very competitive. Aside from the Martin Brothers who had a final score of only 6 points, five points separated second overall to seventh overall.

It also proves that consistency is key in a fleet where the competition level is high – a salutary lesson with ten days of racing coming up shortly.

At the prize-giving, due recognition was given to the host club for their hospitality over the weekend, the race team led by Barry O'Neill were complimented on their race management and Conor O'Leary, in particular was singled out for his organisation and background work in getting the event off the ground. The prizes were handed out by RStGYC Commodore, Peter Bowring.

	Helm & Crew	Club	Sail No.	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	Total	Nett
1	Andy & Rory Martin	Strangford Lough Yacht Club	3974	1	1	1	12	3	18	6
2	Andrew Baker & Peter Chamberlain	Strangford Lough Yacht Club	3756	5	5	2	18	5	35	17
3	Ian Mathews & Keith Poole	National Yacht Club	3864	4	4	7	3	9	27	18
4	David Gorman & Chris Doorly	National Yacht Club	3920	12	3	4	1	30	50	20
5	Alistair Court & Conor O'Leary	Royal St George Yacht Club	3753	8	6	3	4	7	28	20
10	Frank Miller & Grattan Donnelly	Dun Laoghaire Motor Yacht Club	3845	9	13	10	13	2	47	34
11	Brian O'Hare & Tonia McAllister	Royal St George Yacht Club	4043	13	12	11	9	10	55	42