

Westray Sailing Club Regatta 2008

Not a year passes without the weather forecast being avidly scanned in Westray during the week before the regatta, differences between various websites compared and changes in the possible weather patterns discussed with a mixture of dread and anticipation. Not that committee members could do anything about what the day will turn out to be! So it was with a sense of relief when Saturday arrived with what turned out to be close to ideal conditions: wind strong enough to be challenging to most competitors without too many duckings or gear damage, dry overhead and enough sun to top up holiday tans. Downsides were a troublesome chop caused by the SSE wind direction straight into Pierowall Bay, and some changes in wind strength, bordering sometimes on squally conditions.

Sixteen boats arrived on the Earl Sigurd from Kirkwall by 0930. These and the sixteen visiting yachts already moored on the harbour pontoons were a very welcome sight to the organisers, as they added greatly to the competitive spirit and festive nature of the day. Together with the healthy complement of Westray skiffs which had competed twice weekly during the summer for points and cups, three locally based yoles and additional boats from Papay, everything was in place for a memorable day. In anticipation of the serious congestion of the harbour at Gill Pier, as many local boats as possible were moved to the outside of the pier or to moorings in the bay. This included the yacht *Vixen*, owned and skippered by a local, Jim Corse, which six days earlier had completed a trans Atlantic passage from USA via the Bahamas and the Azores. Even with this, yachts were stacked three deep on parts of the pontoons. Unfortunately, the Kirkwall lifeboat was unable to make an appearance this year due to a call out that morning to an ongoing maritime incident, but this did not dampen the enthusiasm of the local Lifeboat Guild in their fundraising activities for RNLI. The Craig family (Karen, Euan and Adam) and friend (Tosh MacDonald) visiting relatives

locally, provided excellent entertainment thoroughly enjoyed by everyone at the pier head, the prize giving and the evening dance. All are members of pipe bands in the Borders area.

A total of 37 boats registered to race. This was only slightly below last year's number. Participants were given a warm welcome at the pier head by Westray Commodore John Marcus.

A course briefing by Sam Marcus was aided by a large scale pin-board map and his precarious perch on top of a Westray Processors table. As usual, this was followed by a close discussion by skippers of the merits and difficulties of the chosen course and the direction taken.

The wind prior to the morning race was sufficiently strong and unpredictable to favour the more experienced and brave. A lone Mirror dingy owner by John Harper was seen to venture no more than 50 meters beyond the harbour mouth before the sea state was deemed unsuitable to continue, despite having sailed from Papay earlier that morning. A broken mast following a (hook-up on a buoy rope on his way to the start unfortunately forced the abandonment of all that day's activities for Brian Bain's yole, Bonnie Lass.

Racing started shortly after 11am with the swell causing difficulties to smaller boats including skiffs, many of which required regular bailing. Two Lugs and 3 Yoles led the way, with *Jim* (N. Rendall) and *Lily* (A. Budge) respectively winning.

Shiant (R.Farrer) won the handicapped yacht race, with the 6 competitors making a spectacular sight on the anticlockwise long course via the Skello Skerry and Papay shore. *Bonxie* (J. Burgon) came out top in a competitive race of five snipes while regular visitor from Lossiemouth to the Westray Regatta, Willie Finnie, successfully skippered local skiff *J&B* to be first over the line. *Ibis* (J Stout) unfortunately had to retire when conditions tested a new boom to destruction, while *Jammy Dodger* (P. Mills) also retired from the Fast Handicap race won by *Smyril* (J.

Clouston). The morning programme was completed with *Katoosh* (E.Tait) winning the catamaran race. Despite the difficult conditions, the five rescue boats on call had a quiet time with no crew requiring help.

Numerous “what might have been” discussions took place during a welcome break in Westray Processors for racing sailors and rescue boat crews, all amply fed and watered with tea, coffee, sandwiches and home bakes kindly donated by the ladies of Westray.

Wind strength had moderated slightly by the start of the afternoon racing and the bay was a spectacular sight with the amassed sails of boats making final adjustments and deciding on racing tactics. Yachts were first away with *Shiant* (R.Farrer) winning a highly competitive race, beating *Nereides* (G Shearer) by a mere 0. 55 minutes on the handicap corrected time. In the Lug/Yoles race *Lizzie II* (father and son team of Andrew and Richard Wilson) won for the yoles and *Ann* (P.Millar) for the Lugs after a spectacular collision and hook-up of two boats at the start, which caused much interest to the many spectators on the pier head and the opportunity for a good start by boats avoiding the confusion. *Katoosh* (E.Tait) was again successful among the cataramans and out of the eight skiffs competing, *Alice* (G. Rendall) proved a worthy winner. Eleven boats competed in the mixed centreboard race with *Smyril* (J Clouston) again crossing the line in the winning position.

At the end of the day, a large number of participants and spectators congregated on the green in front of the Pierowall Hotel, again well entertained by the pipers. Westray Commodore John Harcus thanked everyone for an excellent and competitive day and the Westray Sailing Club for another successful year. Cups for the winners and prizes for 2nd and 3rd places were presented by Michelle Parry as follows: D. Clouston (*Smyril*) Allcomers C/B; E. Tait (*Katoosh*) Catamaran II,;R. Farrer (*Shiant*)

Yacht II; H. Hutchison (*Ella*) Amazon Cup; N. Rendall (*Jim*) Lugs I; A. Budge (*Lily*) Pierowall Hotel Cup; G. Rendall (*Alice*) Skiff points; R. Wilson (*Lizzie II*) Hume Sweet Hume Cup Yoles; W. Finnie (*J&B*) Skiff; H. Hutchison (*Ella*) Rockets; J. Burgon (*Bonxie*) Snipe; D. Clouston (*Smyril*) Mixed C/B; E. Tait (*Katoosh*) Catamaran I; R. Farrer (*Shiant*) Yacht I; G. Rendall (*Alice*) Skiff A/C: P. Millar (*Ann*) Lug II. At the end of proceedings, the Commodore of the Stromness sailing club, James Burgon, thanked the Westray club for their hospitality and organisation of the day. Later, Willie Finnie from Lossiemouth also thanked the Westray sailing club for their hospitality during the time his yacht was moored in Westray.

Prior to the departure of the Earl Sigurd, the staff of the Pierowall Hotel provided an excellent buffet for competitors in the Marquee. The day was rounded off by a very successful dance, a large crowd dancing enthusiastically to the ever popular music of the Westray Band.