

Swale Regatta - 2021 report.

The Swale Regatta is a long standing local event traditionally held over three days, starting on a Friday in the Swale off Harty Ferry, and finishing in the Medway on the Sunday. It caters not just for regular racers but also especially for cruisers who would just like to give sailing with others a go. The Covid restrictions saw last years event cancelled but this year fifteen boats from various Medway and Swale clubs managed to get together for the regatta.

The forecast rain on Friday held off allowing all the competitors to enjoy the light conditions as they set off from Harty Ferry for the first race in the early afternoon. Some keen spinnaker work onboard the Feeling 326 Genevieve allowed them to pull out a small lead before the tricky dogleg at the Pollard Spit buoy allowed the chasing pack to close them down resulting to some tight racing to the turn at the Columbine Spit. A very tidy spinnaker drop by the crew of the Beneteau 25 First Knight allowed them to steal the lead momentarily on the leg inshore, before the fleet rounded the Oyster buoy just off Whitstable harbour and enjoyed a fast reach back to the Pollard Spit. This allowed the Telstar 26 trimaran Sputnik from Hoo Ness yacht club to stretch her legs and make good progress before the long beat back up the Swale to the finish. Here Genevieve again showed her strength taking line honours just ahead of Sputnik, with the Nonsuch 26 Hip Horray a few minutes behind. On corrected time Genevieve held onto her win with Hip Horray second and the beautiful Nicholson 32 Fals Cappa completing the first days podium.

With Covid restrictions preventing the usual Friday night social event the competitors enjoyed a very peaceful night at anchor in the Swale before waking to a clear sky and flat calm Saturday morning. With the tide turning against them the decision was made to move the fleet down to the Columbine buoy and start the race from there, by which time the breeze had filled in just enough for everyone to set off for Queenborough. Some early tactical decisions by First Knight allowed them to build an unassailable lead on the beat to the first mark at Middle Sand with the Beneteau Oceanis 381 Spiritus of Salcombe from Queenborough Yacht Club next around. A combination of runs and reaches around various marks on the Cant in a building easterly wind

kept the fleet busy with Spiritus of Salcombe defending hard against Genevieve, Hip Horay and Fals Cappa before the final run around Garrison point allowed Genevieve to exploit her spinnaker advantage and cross the line behind the dominant First Knight. On corrected time First Knight kept her win, followed by Hip Horray and Genevieve.

Saturday afternoon found the sailors enjoying the hospitality of Queenborough Yacht Club before moving around the corner to the Admirals Arms micro pub where they had taken over the car park opposite and laid on some excellent food for everyone. As the evening progressed the tales got longer and memories shorter so it was just as well Queenborough harbour had kept the trot boat on late just for them!

Sunday morning broke with a potential force six north easterly brewing so whilst everyone else was nursing their hangover race officer Nigel Stevens from Hoo Ness yacht club went out in his F27 trimaran Triassic to check the sea state off Garrison point. A combination of the conditions and the reduced visibility soon convinced him to revise the original plan for a foray into the Thames Estuary and a new course was set up the Medway to Kethole Reach and back. The bulk of the fleet made the delayed start and enjoyed a short but boisterous sail with Spiritus of Salcombe proving that size really does matter sometimes by taking line honours, although one of the smallest boats in the fleet, First Knight, did her best to upset that theory by finishing just a few minutes later! Her skipper promptly rewarded his crew with a spectacular broach right on the line ensuring that if they weren't already soaked, they were then! The aptly named Southerly 32 Summer Breeze came across third followed closely by a heavily reefed down Sputnik, Spice Cat (Comanche catamaran from Segas sailing club) and Hip Horay. On corrected time Spiritus of Salcombe kept the trend going by holding onto first place, which was a particularly pleasing result as her skipper John Irvine is the commodore of Queenborough Yacht Club and could consider this practically a home win! Summer Breeze corrected to second with First Knight third.

With all three races completed the overall regatta win went to Hip Horay skippered by Richard Openshaw from Conyer Cruising Club, First Knight was second, and Neil Merritt aboard Genevieve from Whitstable Cruising club third. This regatta has once again shown that you don't need to be a committed racer or even have a fast boat to enjoy huge

entertainment “cruising in company”. Plans are already underway for next years regatta which will hopefully see the return of the usual social arrangements and some more great sailing.

Genevieve winning Friday’s race just ahead of Sputnik. Photo from Nigel Stevens, Triassic.



First Knight and Summer Breeze enjoying the Medway on Sunday morning. Photo courtesy of John Irvine.

