

The Sodastream Cross-Channel Powerboat Race

The Sodastream Cross-Channel Powerboat Race took place on Sunday July 1st. Sue Drinkwater followed the race down to Ramsgate and back which enabled her to keep a close watch on all three stages of the event for Water Skier and Powercraft.





London/Calais/London! The longest race in the Class III calendar, also the most gruelling, exciting and exhilarating.

This year saw a disappointing entry of only 13 boats compared to the 20-25 we have seen in previous years. However, if the new sponsor SODASTREAM were worried about this at the start of the day, their fears had been completely dissolved by 6.30pm that evening when a thoroughly exciting and eventful days racing ended.

By 9.00a.m. on the Sunday morning we had seen all the usual pre-race panics at Putney, and indeed as the fleet left to proceed to the start at Tower Bridge there were still two competitors with their boats on dry land frantically trying to solve last minute faults.

Miraculously, the full 13 boats assembled at Tower Bridge for the start at 10.00a.m. and roared off creating the usual breath-taking spectacle for bemused tourists paying an early morning visit to the Tower!

All looked well, but we arrived at Ramsgate to hear the amazing news that only 7 boats had completed the leg. Paul Sinclair had retired with engine trouble in JUS GUS, while POBJOY MINT TWO, NIXDORF, MARINA EXPRESS, CHECKOUT and MUFFIN MAN, were all aground on a newly formed mud bank off Canvey Island. Barry Drinkwater and Dick Pearce had arrived first in Ramsgate at 11.19a.m. in BLU BLUD, the Wolbold designed C class cat, and swore that they had only managed to avoid the fate of the stranded boats by navigating around any seagull that was standing up!

They had beaten Terry Evans in his Stapley Cat CONCORD by only one second, but both these two had come in ahead of the D class boats PHANTASIZE and APHRODISIAC.

The only B class boat left in the race was FAYANIGAN driven by the 17 year old Toleman twins, who were duly sent out 20 minutes earlier than the C and D boats on the channel crossing. It was with amazement and admiration that we watched these two youngsters return 15 minutes later to re-take the first buoy that they had missed on the outward journey.

The remainder of the field left at 1.40p.m. but there were still only 7 boats running. MUFFIN MAN had managed to get off the mud and down to Ramsgate

FAR LEFT:

Possibly a sick engine, possibly a sick navigator!

CENTRE:

Overall winners Peter & Janice Armstrong.

NEAR LEFT:

Peter Bloomfield and Alan Baldwin getting Pobjoy Mint Two into the water

TOP LEFT:

Tony Leftwich flying the flag over to Calais!

within time, but had to retire due to engine failure. At 2.00p.m. the 'Mud Larkers' began to straggle in. They were too late to join the race to Calais, and spent a disappointing afternoon commiserating with each other in the harbour. This involved Peter Bloomfield and Alan Baldwin (the favourites to win) in POBJOY MINT TWO, Alistair Kendon and Paul Baldwin in NIXOORF, Bill Matcham and Terry Hedges in MARINA EXPRESS and John and Peter Symes in CHECKOUT. In all fairness to both Peter and Alistair, one must say that the main reason for their getting stuck in the first place was because they were leading the race, and by immediately signalling to the following boats they saved several of the others from exactly the same fate.

At about 3.20p.m. the first boats were sighted returning from Calais. We could see two battling home together, and the excitement mounted as they were recognized as the two monohulls APHRODISIAC and MOODY BLUE. Both crews were doing their first London/Calais/London, and had been suitably apprehensive about the crossing. The finish was more like the Derby than an offshore powerboat race with everyone screaming encouragement from the harbour walls! In the end it was Peter and Jan Armstrong who took the race from Bruce Nash in his Marsham 18' MOODY BLUE by one second. The new 23' Phantom APHRODISIAC had proved itself, and the look on Steve Bakers face made it all worthwhile!

CONCORD was next in, followed by Tony Leftwich in the C class Stapley THE INTERNATIONAL FACTOR. Howard Wretham had broken down somewhere in french shipping lanes, but was safe, and the Toleman twins came back at 4.15 to complete the field. Barry Drinkwater had tried to drive his boat under, rather than over, the water near Calais, but despite losing twenty minutes was still fit for the leg. Peter and Jan Armstrong sat looking dazed at their own success in their first full season, but happy in the knowledge that they had built up a 5 minute lead over their nearest rival CONCORD. MOODY BLUE was 7 minutes behind the leader, which all went to make the last leg back to Tower Bridge a really exciting situation.

The 'Mud Larkers' had cheered up a little by now, and agreed to make a race of it back to London between themselves! Viv Williams, the officer of the day, promised them a champagne prize, which in the absence of double points, seemed a good enough excuse for the whole thing, and so 10 boats roared off once more on the homeward route.

The tension on H.M.S. Belfast was unbelievable as we waited for the first boat to come home. The timings would be far more important than the placings,



TOP:
Barry Drinkwater and Dick Pearce in
Blu Blud – first into Ramsgate.

MIDDLE:
Peter and Jan Armstrong storm into their
first big win.

and stop watches were anxiously consulted.

In stormed the C class CONCORD with Wally Ansell nearly falling out of the back as he waved to the television cameras! Next came Barry Drinkwater in BLU BLUD, closely followed by the winning "Mud Lark" Peter Bloomfield and Alan Baldwin in POBJOY MINT TWO and Alistair Kendon and Paul Baldwin in NIXDORF. With 5 minutes in hand we knew that Peter Armstrong would be aiming on finishing safely rather than roaring first over the line, and that was just what happened. A huge cheer went up as Peter and Jan won their first

ever London/Calais/London, almost 4 minutes ahead of Terry Evans on elapsed time. Only 43 seconds separated CONCORD and MOODY BLUE, who finished third. One sad note was the retirement of FAYANAGIN about a mile from home. These two were the youngest competitors ever to do the race, and deserve every bit of the enormous applause given to them at the prize giving.

Once again it had been a truly great race, with all the thrills and spills that go to make Offshore Racing the fascinating sport it is. SODASTREAM had proved to be a rewarding sponsor; they had followed the race at all stages, showing a

keen interest in the event. No one left Putney on the Sunday night without a prize, but I don't think anyone left in quite the same state of mind as Peter and Jan Armstrong.

RESULTS

1. APHRODISIAC, P. Armstrong/J. Armstrong, Phantom/Johnson.
2. CONCORD, T. Evans/W. Ansell, Stapeley/Mercury.
3. MOODY BLUE, B. Nash/E. Williams, Marsham/Mercury.
4. BLU BLUD, B. Drinkwater/D. Pearce, Blu Fin/Mercury.