

Offshore Dampener

By Christopher Wright



The first round of the Peter Stuyvesant British Offshore Powerboat Championship at Poole Bay on May 2 had all the magic, tension, excitement and drama of a damp squib.

No-one can be held responsible for the weather, which was foul, and I must immediately admit that the nearest I went to the water was the cliffs by Canford library overlooking the start. Very breezy it was, too.

Fine drama

Having viewed the possible starters at Poole Bay Yacht Club, I whipped round to the cliffs for the start at 2pm prompt. Do not think for one moment I was alone at this prime vantage point, for I was surrounded by powerboat throngs, eager to view the spectacle. There were 23 of us. I could hardly move.

Five minutes before two o'clock the boats were milling about, straining at the leash to join the fray. They looked like corks down there, bouncing about among ominous rollers.

Two minutes before two o'clock and then came the drama of the day. The library car park attendant came round and 'fretted' that we would all be fined if we didn't have car park tickets.

Off we all scurried to the 25p ticket machine and rushed back, frightened we had missed the Big Off. We needn't have worried. Five minutes past two, ten past, quarter past and at twenty past apparently something happened because the Class III's went dashing off in a ragged, sporadic anti-climax of a start.

The cruisers followed eventually, some apparently in the know and some apparently

not, some under full steam while others could be seen gesticulating in confusion.

That was Poole Bay '81 from the cliff tops but, my dear reader, your worthy magazine will settle for nothing less than perfection as you well know and out in the boiling briny was our ace, on-the-spot reporter, Zoe Trumper.

This correspondent, in a private craft, was ordered to track down the action where it happened, as it happened. Her boat was even equipped with short-wave radio, giving access to all the Inside Gen.

Thus equipped, we expected plenty of news, but not so. Ms Trumper reported snatches over the short-wave of 'When are we going to start?'. Answer 'Wait one'. 'Where shall I drop the buoy?'. Answer 'Wait one'. 'Where's the start boat?'. Answer 'Wait one'.

The unfortunate Ms Trumper missed the start, never got near a boat and rushed back to Poole Harbour to find out what on earth had been happening.

Our first shock at the club was the brooding presence of an ambulance, doors open, waiting for an occupant. He turned out to be Duncan Foster, suffering from shock after breaking a wrist.

Ambulance required

The unfortunate Foster's seat mounting broke while Pent Up Fury was rounding a buoy and the navigator's injuries were immediately reported to control. The cruiser was then ordered to report to the Royal Motor Yacht Club, where an ambulance would be waiting. A good plan, with one tiny flaw. The tide was out.

This was pointed out, to no avail, and the order was repeated with some heat: Royal Motor. Pent Up Fury duly reported there,

duly found the tide out and duly ran aground. Quick change of masterplan and the ambulance was dispatched to Poole Harbour, where the poor man was finally collected.

In a more orthodox form of race description, Avia Watches led from start to finish, despite being harried for most of the way by the Tolentan twins in Faynagin. The Tolentans threw everything into it on the closing stages, but Ian Birnie and Alan Baldwin would not relinquish their lead and crossed the line four seconds clear.

Full credit

Gus It (Paul Sinclair and Russell Culpan) was a close third, three seconds further behind, and then came Tucktonia, Pancho, Panache Two, Mirage and Poco Homes.

Vergo took the honours in the Cruiser Class B and victory in Class A went to Aeon Splashdown who crossed the line five minutes later. Despite the previous derogatory remarks, full credit must go to all competitors who battled through some nasty water.

We all know that offshore racing is not a spectator sport under the present format of belting off and disappearing into the wide grey yonder, and that the drivers do it for their own fun and amusement — and goodness knows they pay enough for the privilege — but surely a slightly higher degree of organisation would not go amiss.

The Peter Stuyvesant Class I boat was there but did not make the start line, there were no Class II's and the field comprised entirely Class III's and cruisers. Is this the shape of the season to come?

No, it was not a very auspicious start to the powerboating year.