

Flying Boats on Lough Erne

This weekend the Lough Erne Yacht Club outside Enniskillen was the venue for the Northern IMA Championship. During the 2nd World War Catalina flying boats based at Lough Erne flew submarine patrols out over the North Atlantic. An aircraft hangar still remains on the grounds of Lough Erne Yacht Club and is now used for storing sail boats rather than flying boats. This weekend cats were flying on the lake again, not Catalinas, but catamarans when 5 Dart 16's from GBSC and 3 multihulls from Ballyholm took part in the Northerns.

On Friday night we were welcomed by Mae (Vice Commodore) and her husband Walter and Katrina (Rear Commodore) into their cosy clubhouse on the shores of Lough Erne and learned something of the history of LEYC, The Oldest Yacht Racing Club in the World, (with the emphasis on Racing). After the long journey and a few welcome pints shared with the Ballyholm contingent it was back to our rented accommodation for the weekend a few miles further up the Lough Erne shoreline. Some were already in race mode and had gone to bed early (a winning strategy ultimately), others went to bed on arriving back from the club but the hardier spirits required hardier spirits before hitting the pillow. The women were all in one room downstairs, the men upstairs. Soon the quiet lapping of the lake water outside was complemented by a 2-part snoring harmony. As a long rumble from one bed upstairs ended a gentle answering murmur drifted upwards from the bedroom below. With dawn light now breaking over Lough Erne the ducks on the jetty outside soon joined in with a loud chorus of quacking.

After a full Irish breakfast courtesy of Eric and Dee, a fresh breeze greeted everyone on the Saturday. LEYC were also holding their annual regatta this weekend, involving J24's, Fairy keelboats, GP14's and Yeomans so the club was a hive of activity. On the water the multihulls were the first fleet off. 3 races were ran on Saturday. Conditions favoured the one-man crewed boats. The vagaries of dealing with wind conditions on a lake with many islands dotted around the race course resulting in areas of slack air and channels of steady breezes and prompted frequent changes in position in the fleet. Racing was very competitive with Fidelma for instance jumping 2 places on the last leg of a race by astutely following the local boats and as a result getting a 2nd place in the first race. Earlier during the first leg of the race Ben took the opportunity to explore the relative difference in buoyancy between sea water and fresh water but had the boat uprighted again quickly, and with the hangover gone now set about getting back into contention. The theme song chosen for the weekend was "Love on the Rocks" after an alleged incident when a boat ended up on the rocks after failing to observe a navigational mark. In mitigation of the navigation error the mark in question somewhat incongruously also displayed a signpost for a hotel.

On Saturday Adrian Allen (Ballyholm) got 3 firsts overall on his Nacra. In the Dart fleet Padraig, Ben and Kevin/Dee shared out the first places. Back on land, the competitive spirit prevailed and extended post mortems were the order of the day. But the real order of the day was the fabulous feast prepared for the Lough Erne Regatta. This was truly one of the best catered events that I have ever attended and would be worth coming back to next year just for the meal alone. The desserts were absolutely mouth watering. Apparently the caterer works in the local grammar school, lucky kids!

After the sumptuous meal everyone repaired to the bar and swapped war stories. As the evening wore on the stories got longer, but racing was planned for early on Sunday and people began drifting off around midnight. And so our gang headed back to the lakeside cottage, and nightcaps with a few more yarns and more slagging. Some people developed a fierce tendency to talk in Northern accents and repeat "Aye surely" as the night wended towards the wee small hours. And so to bed, the gentle lapping of lake waterand the snoring, ... and the quacking.

On Sunday the wind was stronger and the sun came out allowing us to see Lough Erne and its surrounding scenery in all its splendour. One of the most beautiful spectacles of the regatta were the Fairy keelboats (some up to 100 years old), which were originally specifically designed for sailing on Lough Erne. They really must rank as some of the most beautiful sailing craft anywhere in the world. Trickier conditions caused by blustery winds and swirling gusts caught out many of the Darts. Padraig on Fan Amach was the only Galway sailor who didn't get an opportunity to closely examine the bottom of his hulls for zebra mussels (Apparently zebra mussels are not welcome in Northern Ireland). Capsizes and gear failure resulted in some retirees. First to go were Eric and Evelyn with a snapped forestay, but thanks to Adrian and Richard from Ballyholm they were back on the water for

the second race with a jury-rigged forestay. Then Pete and Dee (Ballyholm) retired their Spitfire after a litany of problems culminated in the tiller extension snapping. Despite some fierce exciting sailing in the first race Fidelma and myself retired after 2 repeated capsizes within sight of the finish line resulted in the hulls and mast filling with water rendering the boat impossible to handle. Swanee triumphed in the stronger winds beating Adrian in 2 out of 3 races, the last race involved a grandstand finish with the Hurricane just pipping the Nacra by half a boat-length right on the finish line in front of the clubhouse. Not to be outdone Kevin and Padraig also gave us a thrillingly close finish In the Dart fleet with Padraig just shading it but Kevin and Dee in scorching hot form had already racked up 2 firsts from the previous races.

After an eventful weekends racing the overall honours in the IMA Northern were distributed as follows; 1st Adrian Allen, 2nd Richard Swanson and 3rd Kevin Thornton. Kevin and Dee's outstanding performance on the Dart 16 ranks as the highest Dart 16 finish in an IMA event in a long time and is the highest finish by any GBSC boat in an IMA event this year, -some achievement for a sailor who first started sailing only 2 years ago! After 70 years the history of the Catalina flying boat remains strong on Lough Erne. Kevins stand-out result on his flying boat "Wild Thing" and the other pleasant memories of this weekend on Lough Erne will also remain for a long time with those who travelled there.

Finally we'd like to thank LEYC for the really warm welcome they extended to us, Mae, Walter, Katrina and especially the rescue crews who kept a watchful eye on us and were always there to lend assistance. LEYC has a really great club atmosphere thank you for sharing it with us.

Fair winds,

Niall Mac Loughlin,
Galway Bay Sailing Club