

Frensham Pond Comet Open Meeting 12th June 2021

I was discussing the attractions of open circuit sailing with a GP14 owner at the club and we agreed that there is a lot more to opens than just the sailing, and that makes them a treasured experience.

Once you have mastered the art of trailing (or roof-topping with a Comet!), attending opens can be a really rewarding experience:

- Trying out different waters, lake/river/tidal with different local character
- The opportunity to sail with fellow Comet owners and learn something new (I always do!)
- The hospitality of different clubs and friendliness of the Comet clan, who are a really sociable crowd

Regular readers will know that my reports are a bit thin on details of the racing. This is due to the practical problem that from the back of the fleet, it's impossible to give account of Bob, Eddie and Ben, because typically they are too far in front of me! So if you're interested in a blow-by-blow story of race-winning tactics, then look away now ...

The atmosphere at different waters first thing in the morning can be quite magical and Frensham Pond is no exception. I arrive early – as the sole FPSC Comet sailor, I am hosting our fleet for the day. A solitary grey wagtail is pecking around one of the slipways and the terns are swooping around using the sailing marks as convenient perches, a promising gentle North Easterly ruffling the surface over half the pond area.

Six Comet travellers from six counties – Devon, Cornwall, Bristol, Berkshire Hampshire and Sussex – arrive as well as two Solos. Frensham has a large Solo fleet and seven local boats make up their fleet of nine for the day.

As boats are rigged, a strange noise of seaside jollity begins to disrupt the tranquillity as the beach – yes, beach – on the far side of the Pond is filling up with early comers keen to claim their spot on the golden sand of Costa del Surrey. In recent years it seems that half of South London has become aware of the delights of this local 'resort', complete with sand and wild swimming, such that most of the lanes are now girded with ugly double-yellow lines, and the sailing club needs a sentry at the gate!

As we drift out for the first race, the wind has swung around to SW variable S, so the committee boat sets us off from near the beach. The safety boat is mainly employed in discouraging more adventurous swimmers from straying outside the buoyed area, (using 'nudge' tactics, rather than coercion), but a couple of beefy lads get quite close while I am waiting to start : "Ere mate ! Does that thing have a motor?"



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Two back-to-back races before lunch – glad I've remembered by sun hat and water bottle.

- Race 1 – still half asleep, so dreadful start and watch the fleet disappear as I struggle to make any headway in the light winds. By the end of the race, I notice some of our leaders have caught up with the Solos, who were started 5 minutes ahead!
- Race 2 – Better position on start line, but manage to foul Bob Dodds by getting too close upwind, so again, after my turns, stuck at the back. Then the embarrassment of being towed back to the jetty, so I don't miss lunch.

Frensham's organisation during the lockdown has been very efficient and a one way system for collecting food and drink, plus an open veranda outside means we are able to enjoy a hot meal, within the rules. A passing question to Ben, proves to be valuable: "Are you using much kicker in these light airs ?", I had assumed that not too much, if at all, was best WRONG Apparently it's good to put quite a lot on when beating, to get some mast bend, which improves the leading edge and helps to flatten the sail, so the air doesn't separate. Ahah!

- Race 3 – Armed with the new information and revitalised with pasta, I make a good start and find myself rounding the first mark with the leaders! Ben remarks that he might have been a little too free with his advice as he breezes past. Regrettably there follows an object lesson on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, as one by one, the entire fleet sneaks past, and I take my rightful place at the back again
- Race 4 – Well it would be rude not to come 7th again, so 10/10 for consistency

I think the others enjoyed their day at Frensham Pond, in challenging light airs. As he collects the winner's trophy, Bob Dodds thanks the organisers, – for the hospitality, organisation and course setting, which have all made for an excellent event. Particular thanks are given to John Haine, the Solo Class captain who navigated all the Covid regulations and organised a perfect day.

I sip a pint of Hogsback T.E.A, (brewed just up the road) savouring the last moments of my first open for over a year; the Comet crowd catching up on news and putting the world to rights, as you do.

The pond is now empty of boats and swimmers and the birds are returning. A couple of Orinoco geese have taken up residence, escapees from the local bird park, and honk triumphantly as they reclaim the jetty.

As someone once said: "It's not just the winning, it's the taking part".

Steve Gregory

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