

VRsport.tv International Moth UK Nationals at the WPNSA - Day 3

Monday saw another delay in the morning, but this time due to a lack of wind. Signs were promising though with a clear sky out to sea, the wind switching to the South West, and clouds building over the land.

It wasn't long before a steady 12-15 knot sea breeze had filled in and, combined with the flat water of Portland Harbour, the 73-boat fleet of foilers revelled in the superb conditions.

After 8 clean starts in a row, the Moths finally got over-eager in race 9 with a high flyer drawing the rest of the fleet over the line leading to the first general recall of the championship.

Principal Race Officer Bryan Drake has been impressed with the fleet's discipline so far, "They've been really good, close to the line, but up until the final race today the line has been nice and clear. In the last race there was one boat that was well up on the line and he basically pulled the others up as they assumed he wasn't over. Suddenly the whole fleet was up too early and we had the first general recall of the regatta and so we went for the U flag afterwards."

Robert Greenhalgh held a master-class, winning 3 of the 4 races with some of his winning margins being measured in minutes over the half-hour 3-lap courses. The call over the VHF of "first round the windward mark, GBR4340" became almost monotonous with surprise shown on the committee boat if another sail number was called in. The only thing that seemed capable of slowing him down was weed on the foils - something that nearly always has been cleared with via a capsize - but even this seemed to only halt his charge momentarily.

On his super speed Robert said, "I changed batten 3 today to a softer one and it definitely helped - I was ripping downwind. There was a lot of weed out there today and it was pretty shifty so I just stayed out of trouble and was going quick. I had one bad start but the wind was very left so I flipped onto port quickly, stuck it out there, and got to the windward mark in the top 3. My other starts were alright."

On whether a batten change could make all the difference Robert said, "Definitely, especially downwind in these things as a stiffer rig or a more grunty sail will definitely give you more downwind. Yesterday I was looking at that batten and it didn't look quite right so I put in a slightly softer one today and it definitely looked a lot nicer. It's such a small sail, only 8 sq. metres, so you really need to get everything out of it downwind when the apparent wind drops."

"One of the big things with Moth sailing is that there are so many factors going on; there's the rig and then you've got the whole foil package. It takes a bit of time to know what rope to pull when something's not quite right, whether it's the rig, the foil, the wand or the rudder angle, and after a couple of years you have the experience to know which is the 'go to' rope according to what the boat is telling you. A lot of the sailors who are new to it have to go through that whole learning process."

Behind Greenhalgh it was another day of tight racing within the pack with four-wide roundings of the leeward mark commonplace. The clash of rigs, shouts for avoiding action, emergency manoeuvres and capsizes were nearly as regular.

The question amongst those chasing Greenhalgh was how to catch him. We asked David Hivey, winner of race 7, about what the difference was between himself and Robert: "I was pretty tired and broken after yesterday - I don't spend as much time in the gym as Rob and I think that showed today. I sailed alright but I seemed to get a lot of weed and was struggling to get it off the foils. I had

to capsize 3 times today to get the weed off which cost me quite a lot, but it was the same for everybody."

Current European Champion Mike Lennon is lying 4th going into the final day. He's posted a number of top 5 results but said, "It felt like a bit of a war at times - there was a lot of weed around so you were constantly looking over the side and then trying to figure out ways of getting it off without actually capsizing."

On how to handle weed Mike said, "We get a lot of it at Hayling so we practice it. Just before you're about to tack you set the boat up really high and let it heel over, assuming the weed's on the windward side of the foil, and then as it falls down out of the sky sideways it washes off the foil. You can only do that one side at a time unfortunately. The other method is to just sky the boat, pulling on so much ride height that the whole foil comes out of the water - the problem with that is the rudder comes out as well and you lose steerage for a few seconds. As you're plunging back down into the water your steerage comes back again and you just hope you can send it in the right direction!"

There were some great battles amongst the 'elder statesmen' of the fleet with Jason Belben and Ricky Tagg battling it out all the way to the line for 7th in the final race of the day. Whilst losing out to Jason in the race, Ricky put his performance down to "Ignoring pain and competitive spirit".

On how he handles a four race day Ricky said, "I think you're relying on everything in the boat working well so that you expend the least amount of energy on systems in the boat. Then getting everything into its right position so that the boat hits the groove, then you've got time to look around and race, because you can't just fire into a corner - the racing is very tight and brutal. If you make a mistake then 4 or 5 places go in an instant."

Jason gave us his view of the battle: "At the end of the 4th race today we both gave everything we could for the last downwind leg. We went for it the whole run and it pushed us both to the limit."

Not every sailor is looking to put a full series together at the nationals. Graham Simmonds chooses his races according to the conditions saying, "In the first race I thought 'my legs don't hurt, the sun's shining and my new sail is working a treat. It's actually a boat where you don't really need to race it, but it does give it an edge doesn't it? Even Dave (Smithwhite) who's 60 can sail it, so I've got at least 5 years left in the boat! Next year I might take it seriously and get fit, but this year I'll just stick my finger in the air and see how it's going."

PRO Bryan Drake summed up with, "It was a dream day. The wind did flick around a bit but the average remained constant and I barely had to change the course at all."

Racing concludes on Tuesday with the final three races scheduled for 10.30am. Barring gear failure Greenhalgh should have the championship wrapped up with his current pace but Hivey is only 4 points behind so it's not a given.