

Authors Mike Bees/Mark Emmett

Shoot out Goes to the Wire at Whitstable 09

The B14 travelling circus arrived at Whitstable on 6 – 7 June, a fortnight after a light airs National Championships, with most of the top teams in attendance. They were treated to vintage conditions on Saturday with sunshine, 18-20 knots of breeze from the East and a long rolling swell - recipe for some of the best sailing of the year so far.



Race 1 - Sketch (Dave Hayes/Richie Bell) arrived at the start line at full bore with the kite up seconds before the gun. A swift handbrake turn and kite drop saw them just a few boatlengths late for the start. Quinta Raddison (Chris Bines/Dave Gibbons) and Ronstan (Mike Bees/Ferret) were quick out of the blocks with Acxiom (Mark Emmett/Alan Stuart) just behind. Acxiom tacked off early and came in just ahead of Ronstan and Quinta Raddison at the first windward mark. Ronstan got up the inside of Acxiom down the run to lead at the bottom, but Acxiom turned it on again up the next second beat to reclaim the lead with Ronstan maintaining a comfortable 2nd place. An indifferent beat dropped Quinta Raddison back behind Sketch (Dave Hayes/Richie Bell) and Seavolution (Mark Barnes/George Morris). On the last lap Acxiom still led Ronstan at the top but with the gap closed from a mid-course shift, which also bounced Quinta Raddison back up to 3rd. Down the final run Acxiom sailed high but was just pipped by Ronstan at the gun in a photo finish! Quinta Raddison came in 3rd with Seavolution 4th and Sketch 5th. New National Champions Tim Harrison and Jonny Ratcliffe suffered a broken mast after a departing rudder pitched them in to the drink and the famous Whitstable bottom claimed another victim.

Race 2 – similar conditions, possibly a slightly fruitier breeze. Acxiom were revelling in the conditions and stormed off with Sketch in hot pursuit. Seavolution, with George Morris deputising for the injured Pete Nicholson had passed Sketch at the top of the beat to take up the chase to Acxiom, only to hit the tide gybing inside Acxiom resulting in a long swim, leaving Quinta Raddison in 3rd and Ronstan 4th. By now the breeze and sea state were combining to make picking your gybe point a tricky business. Down the final

run Acxiom & Sketch were comfortably clear, but a hesitant gybe from Quinta Raddison allowed Ronstan to gybe over the top and just edge them out on the sleigh ride down to the finish. Acxiom held the lead to take the bullet with Sketch in second, but they headed straight for the shore to save their rig after a cap shroud pulled out of a spreader tip, meaning an early beer o' clock for Dave & Richie and some tape on the spreader ends in future!



Race 3 – the breeze continued to build and the swell started to be replaced by a shorter steeper chop as the ebb tide got going, although not to the extent that many had feared. Out of the start again Acxiom was racy, along with Quinta Raddison, Seavolution and Ronstan. Hills Group (Henry Wells/Alex Capon) was finding some form and powered up the beat to round the windward mark 2nd behind Acxiom, followed closely by Quinta Raddison and Ronstan. Seavolution pulled out with technical issues and would play no further part in the event. Quinta Raddison took the chase to Acxiom and overtook them at the last drop when the Acxiom kite was snatched by a wave and pulled into the sea. At the finish it was Quinta Raddison, followed by Acxiom, and then Hills Group ahead of Ronstan who took a dip on the final run.

Race 4 – most players had had enough by now, leaving a 1-lap shootout between Acxiom and Ronstan. After a level-pegging start Acxiom chose the left hand corner and Ronstan the right. As they converged again at the windward mark it was Acxiom who held a 2 length lead, but as they bore away around the spacer helmsman Mark Emmett was washed off the rack by a wave with the inevitable capsizing ensuing. Ronstan charitably chose not to run him down and sailed around him before hoisting. A few nerval attempts at the final gybe left Ronstan having to drop the kite to make the finish line, but comfortably clear of the recovering Acxiom.

Ashore many teams, both B14 and Musto Skiff were rebuilding their boats or rigs and it was fully beer o' clock. Some of the fleet chose to sample the delights of some of Whitstable's pubs, before heading back to the Yacht Club for an excellent barbeque. Battered and bruised bodies nursed themselves through the evening steadily gaining strength through the healing properties of fine Kent ales.



Sunday morning dawned with light rain and seemingly a light breeze, but as the fleet began the launch the wind veered from SE to SW and built to a fully-hiking Force 4.

Race 5 - Sketch were firing on all cylinders and raced away to an early lead chased by Acxiom. Anthill Mob (Tim Harrison, Jonny Ratcliffe), using a borrowed aluminium rig, took the lead by gybing early on the first run but relinquished it to Sketch again on the next beat. Acxiom and Ronstan were in the fray for 3rd and 4th until Acxiom's main halyard snapped. At the final weather mark it was Sketch from Ronstan and Anthill Mob, with the latter again picking the early gybe well and taking the battle to Sketch, with the order at the finish being Sketch, Anthill Mob and Ronstan.



The wind then eased and continued to veer causing the course to be relaid. The PRO decided to amalgamate the B14 and MustoSkiff starts into one for the remaining races leading to very tricky racing between boats of similar speeds but different angles, not ideal for either fleet. After an aborted attempt, due to the wind continuing to veer, race 6 got underway and this time Acxiom and Sketch left everyone else for dead. Acxiom built up a healthy lead and were strong favourites to take the event as the wind continued to ease, leaving the crews foredeck-bound, licking the moisture from their jibs. Fate had other ideas as Acxiom fell into a hole in the breeze and picked up a large clump of weed allowing Sketch through for their second win of the day. A race-long battle for 3rd between Ronstan and Anthill Mob was settled in Ronstan's favour as the wind went very light on the final run and then filled in from the left.

A further veer in the wind to the North forced another course move. As the seconds ticked down the gun for race 7 the wind went further right leaving a very biased start line and a number of early starters. Sketch lead around the windward mark from Anthill Mob and Ronstan, with Ronstan pulling ahead by dint of an early gybe. Acxiom were trailing after threading their way back through the Mustos to restart. Up a very one-sided second beat Sketch regained the lead and held it to the shortened finish, with Ronstan finishing second and Anthill Mob 3rd. Ronstan were scored OCS, a costly mistake in the final outcome, thus Anthill Mob scored 2nd and Acxiom 3rd.



Going in to race 8 there was only a single point between Sketch, Acxiom and Ronstan. The wind again played tricks and went further right, so another efficient course change was carried out by Whitstable's slick race team. At the start Anthill Mob were away, with Sketch in close pursuit. Ronstan and Acxiom were buried in Musto Skiffs. The leading pair steadily extended as Acxiom and Ronstan scrapped for 3rd, occasionally joined by Moby (Rod Boswijk/Sharon Binney) and Chattanooga Cho Cho (Dan Cowin/ Rachel Bennett). Down the penultimate run the breeze evaporated for Anthill Mob and Sketch, the latter seemingly heading for the overall win at this point. Ronstan quickly gybed away

and sailed round the outside of the becalmed leaders to take an opportunistic lead at the leeward mark from Acxiom. With the course shortened at the next windward mark the order was Ronstan, Acxiom, Sketch and Anthill Mob. This final twist left Acxiom winners overall from Ronstan by 1 point, with Sketch a point further back.

Thanks go to Whitstable Yacht Club for putting on another cracking event.

Results:

1. Acxiom, Mark Emmett and Allan Stuart, Weston SC, 11 pts.
2. Ronstan, Mike Bees & Ferret, Brightlingsea SC, 12 pts.
3. Sketch, Dave Hayes & Richie Bell, Southport SC/HISC, 13 pts.
4. Moby, Rod Boswijk & Sharon Binney, MountBatten SC, 35 pts.
5. Anthill Mob, Tim Harrison & Jonny Ratcliffe, 38 pts.