

My first venture into competitive sailing.

I'm a complete novice when it comes to RC sailing but not new to RC boating. My first venture into RC boating was in the 80's, racing nitro powered racing boats & again in 2016 when I began racing fast electric mono 1 & mono 2.

In late 2017 I decided to enter the black art of RC yacht racing, choosing the DF classes 65 & 95. Having done my research I really liked the idea of a class of yacht with a fixed standard where all boats have equal capability. The DF65 and 95 meet this requirement for a reasonable cost.

With virtually no practical experience under my belt and lots of good useful tips from experienced fellow club members I ventured into the world of competitive RC yacht racing by entering the first of the DF Racing association regional TT events held at Southport on the NW Lancashire coast in February 2018.

The DF95's were raced on the Saturday and the DF65's on the Sunday. The water was available for practice on the Friday afternoon for those arriving early.

The forecast for the weekend was not good, very light winds from the north peaking at about 4 knots on the Saturday & possibly slightly better on the Sunday changing to a westerly of 5-6 knots, and very cold both days.

I knew this first venture would be daunting but at the same time exciting, not knowing a single soul & not even sure I could set the rig even remotely competitive.

Mary and I arrived at the hotel around lunchtime on the Friday, checked in and headed into town for lunch. The rest of the day spent getting our bearings including locating the boat club in readiness for an early start on the Saturday.

Saturday morning came and 33 registered entrants fought for table space in the crowded clubhouse. Several well known names were there, John Tushingham, Bus Colman, Derek Priestly & Tim Long to mention a few, but also six newbies just like me!

The atmosphere in the clubhouse early on was electric, 33 competitors (3 were ladies) busy fitting their A+ rigs to their 95's waving their sails through the air like a professional. Naturally we newbies who quickly identified with each other did the same if only to look the part.

The races began a little later than scheduled due to a changing wind with the windward marker being about 150 yards away inland from the coast. I desperately struggled to get my boat moving under such light winds & again struggled to maintain momentum after a tack change. I managed to avoid being last in the first 3 of 8 races, a long way back in the field. As the third race finished John Tushingham came to me & asked to adjust my rig. After a couple of tweaks here and there and regulatory sail waving I was once again back in the fray for the fourth race. I could notice the difference immediately, John had transformed my boat I was now streaking up a reach hanging onto the field, only losing out by poor tacking and finally getting caught up on the windward mark on the second lap on two occasions. The wind was slowly changing direction and improving slightly in strength during the day necessitating no less than four course changes.

John had transformed the boat into a real sailing craft so it was now up to me! Poor starts and only managing to find dirty wind preventing me doing better, but I managed to avoid last place by one. Somewhat disappointing but I learnt a lot by watching and talking to other experienced skippers so I'm hoping to do better in the Fleetwood TT in April.

After the racing most of us decamped to a Italian restaurant enjoying great food the odd glass of wine and lots of laughs.

On the Sunday it was the turn of the DF65's, a total of 28 registered entries meant another exciting day and a crowded start line. A change of wind direction of about 120 degrees from Saturday meant a totally different course layout running parallel to the bank.

Thanks to Robin who loaned me his A+ rig I was able to compete doing slightly better than Saturday by one place overall but much better results in a couple of races achieving 21/28 & 22/28. I lost six places in the first of these by having to do a 360 a few metres from the finish line - I was gutted!

The day ended in the clubhouse where the hosts presented bottles of wine to the winners and support team.

I was awarded the endeavour prize, a complete surprise and pleasant one. Overall a brilliant weekend enjoyed by all including Mary my patient wife. I intend competing in a number of the TT series during 2018 including Fleetwood, 2 Islands, Manor Park and Keighley and of course all club events.