

Forth Yacht First In

THE MOBIL North Sea Race sails east to west in the odd years, and so 32 boats came to the line just outside Stavanger on Sunday 22 June, the date being set to allow the Norwegian hosts to celebrate midsummer at home, though the weather was far from splendid.

In the run up, the Scottish boats had been royally entertained in Bergen, Stord and Karmoy, culminating with a fine informal dinner in an attic restaurant in Stavanger where each skipper introduced his boat and crew with a few words.

Dominated by the home country, the fleet also included one German and 11 Scottish yachts, ranging from the 26ft Folkboat Yona to an ex-BOC boat Skaarungen, which although not stripped out, as it never had any interior to speak of, did have a young crew of ten who made up in enthusiasm for any lack of home comforts.

The start was peaceful, with spinnakers probing for the forecast northeasterly which never showed, and a good knot of adverse tide, unusual for this area. Once changed to her light kite, Arran Comrade raised a few eyebrows by daring to consort with much larger rivals and the replica Colin Archer gaff cutter Camalie af Lister was going steadily with her topsail raking the skies for every puff.

On rounding Tungenes Light and making for the open sea, the course turned into a fetch with the tide now favourable for a while, but it all became frustrating as the wind died, the tide turned and the whole fleet came into a bunch only a few miles from first to last. Camalie used every ounce of local knowledge to glide through the unmarked rocks of the Kvitsoy archipelago and gained the ocean ahead of most.

As darkness fell, a steady breeze from just west of south took hold and there were several private battles until the whole fleet was again left wallowing in a horrible northerly swell through the morning watch. Some just



Yona's crew arrive safely at MacDuff after four days at sea, including one day riding out a northern gale. Photo: Mike Johnston.

took down their sails altogether.

When the breeze filled in, it was still southerly but it couldn't last in the face of the forecast and it was no surprise when it at last chopped round to north and began to freshen, and freshen, and freshen, with the crews already fatigued by 24 hours of messing about, and only 40 or 50 miles on the log.

By Monday evening the wind was north by west, a good F7 and the skies grey. As the boats called in one by one to the Sleipner Safety Boat Ocean Star, she confirmed F8 at times.

The seas were dreadful with breaking crests and huge triangular lumps rearing out of nowhere. Occasionally, the full majesty of the scene could be judged as you stared into a deep trough to leeward.

Most crews set double or treble reefed mains with storm headsails and many suffered at least a partial knockdown. Fatigue became a major factor, even for the able-bodied, as shipmates suffered grievously from sickness.

The big boats of course came out best and carried the strong winds almost to the finish line in Banff Bay, whereas a calm of two

to 15 hours, depending on luck, moved slowly east through the fleet on Tuesday, wrecking many a dream of honour and the sanctuary of harbour. For some it was just nice to get a rest and enjoy the sunshine.

As the first boats were finishing on Tuesday morning, concern was growing for Yona, which had still not called Ocean Star, 12 hours after the second last boat had passed Sleipner. An 'All Ships' alert was broadcast and

repeated by increasing numbers of rigs and it was a long day for the other competitors until word filtered through that she had made contact, many miles south of the course, having been hove-to for much of the gale.

For the stragglers, the big trap was Rattray Head, and anyone who had wandered too far south was soundly punished by the tide as the new easterly came softly at first, not blowing home until Wednesday morning when all but Yona finished.

Several performances stand out. Alouette (Sun Kiss 45, John Murphy from Port Edgar), third home and first on corrected time,



The organisers of next month's Mobil North Sea Yacht Race are hoping this will be the scene at Macduff Harbour after the event finishes there. The fleet are due to leave Stavanger's start line on 22 June, the earliest the annual race has been run.

By bringing the start forward two weeks from early July the joint Scottish and Norwegian organisers expect to attract more yachtsmen keen to try cruising in Scottish waters after the race pressure is off.

The first boats are expected to arrive at Macduff around 24 or 25 June.