



The smallest fleet in the North Sea Yacht Race's 21 year history cools its heels at Macduff Harbour in brilliant sunshine after a frustrating light wind crossing and a nail-biting finish.

Yachting Life September 2004

A FLEET of 11 yachts crossed the North Sea Yacht Race start line in frustratingly light conditions at the beginning of July, the smallest entry the event has seen in more than two decades. But what the 21st North Sea Yacht Race lacked in numbers and wind it made up for in sheer fun and close racing, *writes Dave Morgan.*

It may have attracted its smallest ever fleet at the Stavanger start, but the unpredictable North Sea made the 320 mile event another challenge for the crews who tackled the westbound crossing and at the end of more than 50 hours racing the leading boats crossed the line with just 68 seconds between them!

As the leaders crept up on the Slepner Oilfield halfway mark it was clear the race was not going to break any records. Some of the slower boats had decided conditions were too light and retired leaving the leading Norwegian boat Linea followed by Port Edgar Yacht Club skipper John Murphy's Jeanneau Sun Kiss 45 Alouette at the head of the fleet and on his way to his second overall and class win in a row.

The Norwegian yacht was first to reach Slepner after 21 hours

and 40 minutes. Alouette was just an hour behind, but Linea went on to take line honours with a sailing time of 57 hours 56 minutes and 49 seconds.

John Murphy's crew crossed the line in 61.54.47, just 68 seconds ahead of Bergen based Kgeil Ove Klungrehaug in his Bavaria 35, Ventus.

'That was an incredible finish, said John who won the overall North Sea Yacht Race title. There were times when we were just sitting becalmed with the rig flapping about. Light winds dogged the whole fleet to Slepner but after that it filled in and we had a great second half.'

The well known Dunfermline motor trader and Forth racer made good time to the Moray Firth where they crossed the finish line in Banff Bay around 1am.

'After more than 300 miles we could have shouted across to Ventus on the finish line, it was unbelievable,' said John. 'It was a terrific race. We may not have had the numbers, but the atmosphere was great and the whole fleet were able to bask in brilliant sunshine when we tied up in Macduff. More Scots yachtsmen should take part in the North Sea Yacht Race, it's a

really friendly event.'

Alouette's skipper put his winning ways down to two prime tactics – operating a strict watch system and allowing

the lady members of his crew do most of the work!

At the end of the event all four Class 1 yachts had retired through lack of wind. Class 5/6 was an all-Norwegian benefit and won by Odd Svendsen in his Hallberg-Rassy 39 Necessé, with Stavanger skipper Dag Willhelm Danielsen second in his Bavaria 37 Ariel 11, and Stord sailor Solfest Utbjoe in his Comfortina 36 Sea Girl, third.

Class 7's rostrum line-up was led by Alouette with a convincing win despite the Norwegian organisers debiting John Murphy's handicap from 123 to 126 just before the start. Ventus was second with the X512, Linea taking third place on corrected time for her veteran North Sea Race skipper Odd Olsen from Stord.

At the prizegiving in the Banff Springs Hotel on 7 July John Sellar, race organiser at the Scottish end of the event, said: 'Entries may have been down, but both the racing and the crack were better than ever. The North Sea Yacht Race is clearly a great event and more Scottish boats should consider taking advantage of the fantastic camaraderie we have between sailors from Scotland and Norway.'

Next year's event is expected to be run in early July, but a decision on whether it will be a Stavanger or Banff start line has still to be made.



Port Edgar's John Murphy was a popular winner of the 21st North Sea Yacht Race in July.