

B14 Inland Championships 2008

Another Name Rocks the Fleet

[author Mark Barnes]

With 11 teams' kit already Tasmania-bound for the 2009 World Titles, the Flying Circus arrived at Grafham with a slightly depleted B14 fleet for the Ovington Inland Championship and final Travellers Trophy meeting of the year, shared with Musto Skiffs, 49ers, International 14s, 420s and 29ers. Some of the usual faces begged and borrowed boats. Like a last minute shower during a Grand Prix this was bound to shake things up and add some unpredictability to the results.

Saturday, day one, dawned cold and breezy. Grafham always feels 5°C colder than it really is, and today was no exception. Swarms of 420s and 29ers were held onshore causing total gridlock on the slipway approaches. This led to many of the faster boats, B14s included, missing the start of the first race.

Race 1 and a force 3, up the first beat the lead was exchanged between 2 racks of Pork (Piers Lambert/Mark Batt) and Ronstan (Mike Bees/Ferret) aboard their usual steeds, and Acxiom (Mark Watts/George Morris). Ronstan made the best of the lighter and shiftier windward mark approach and assumed a reasonably comfortable lead. Acxiom and 2 Racks of Pork battled for second till the finish with Chattanooga Choo Choo (Dan Cowin/Rachel Bennett) in fourth and Dryshirt (Phil Murrey/Kevin Rutherford) fifth. Bluebird (Nick Craig/Matt Johnson) found their borrowed steed to be reluctant in the softer going.



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Race 2 and the breeze picking up to top end force 4, Bluebird with prebent tin rig, shot off the line and held the lead to the finish. showing that when the breeze is up all is possible. Behind them Ronstan, 2 Racks of Pork, Acxiom, Hyde Sails (Alan Davis/Toby Bardsley-Dale) and Whacky Races (Mark Barnes/Pete Nicholson)

gave chase. 2 Racks of Pork succumbed to the conditions and headed ashore for overnight repairs. Ronstan held the batten chasing Bluebird round the top mark second time ahead of the pack, a position they held to the end. Acxiom's hopes were shattered on the first run along with their carbon mast, leaving them no option but to take the Early Shower of Shame and an embarrassing telephone call to the boat's owner. Whacky Races went on to finish 3rd followed by Hyde Sails.

Race 3 and the with the wind still on the up, the fleet launched up the first beat with Ronstan, Hyde Sails, Bluebird and Whacky Races scrapping all the way but with the latter struggling for upwind pace and eventually dropping back, then pulling out with blown outhaul. The lead swapped between the other three for the remainder of the race with Ronstan stealing it approaching the final windward mark and holding on to the finish from Hyde Sails. Bluebird remained 3rd and Chatanooga Choo Choo avoided the carnage to grab 4th.



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Race 4 and with a strong force 5 plus, the wind was well and truly up and the course area littered with I14s, 49ers and Musto Skiffs furiously washing their sails. Only the truly hard (and fortunate) remained. Bluebird again found their pace and led. Ronstan gave chase and just managed to cross ahead at the end of the first run but at the expense of rounding the less-favoured gate mark. Behind them Whacky Races (outhaul repaired) led Hyde Sails and Dryshirt (Phil Murray/Kevin Rutherford). Round the final weather mark Bluebird were a few lengths clear of Ronstan. As the breeze further increased and with boats making very deep angles downwind, it was all to play for. Bluebird survived the final nervy gybe to take the gun, but Ronstan hit the tide leaving Whacky Races to take a comfortable 2nd from Hyde Sails.

Overnight Ronstan led by a point from Bluebird, the latter not looking forward to Sunday's lighter forecast conditions in which their borrowed ship would struggle for pace.

As predicted Sunday dawned much lighter. Race 5 - a fairly even start had Ronstan, Hyde Sails, 2 Racks of Pork and Whacky Races scrapping up the first beat. 2 Racks of Pork dropped back, and at the 2nd and final windward mark, Hyde Sails just lead from Whacky Races and Ronstan. The latter spotted pressure out to the left and gybed away, which proved decisive as they sailed around the leading pair to win followed by Hyde Sails who survived an altercation with a typically ambitious 49er at the final gate to hold on to 2nd, followed by Whacky Races, 2 racks of Pork and Chattanooga Choo Choo. Primal Scream (Kathy Sherrat/Allan Stuart) the B14 Class Association boat, debuted with impressive style to take 6th.

Race 6 – Whacky Races and Hyde Sails lined up to port tack the fleet but found the door shut, leaving Whacky Races over early. An ever-increasing left shift saw Ronstan lead easily around the first weather mark and stay clear. Behind them a fracas at the weather mark ensued involving a number of B14s and 49ers. Whacky Races pull backed through and eventually took 2nd followed by Chattanooga Choo Choo, Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle (Iain Macintyre/Phil Eltringham) and Bluebird.

With first place now decided the battle was on for 2nd, any one of three, Whacky Races, Bluebird and Hyde Sails could take it. The RO relaid the course to suit the new wind direction with no noticeable delay in the proceedings, and the last race was under way. Bluebird and Ronstan headed left of centre. The majority of the fleet went right and it was from the right hand side that Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle came to lead around the top from Ronstan and a still-scrapping Whacky Races and 2 Racks of Pork. At the bottom the order remained much the same, but up the 2nd beat the wind decided to flick back to it's original direction allowing Ronstan through to the lead by a margin. Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle held 2nd round the top but ended up low of the gate as the wind continued to swing round allowing 2 Racks of Pork through to 2nd ahead of Whacky Races. The last beat was a one-tack procession with Ronstan in the clear, the next three were in close contention. At the windward mark 2 Racks of Pork rounded next with Whacky Races on their tail. Whacky Races was the quicker on the hoist and their pole made contact with the back of 2 Racks of Pork. So with pole out and kite on the deck they spun allowing Hyde sails back into contention. Down the reach, Whacky Races chased down Hyde Sails but were unable to sustain the overlap at the gate and so losing out to the finish. 2 Racks of Pork finished second followed by Hyde Sails, Whacky Races.

The final scores on the doors left Ronstan first, followed by Hyde sails winning on the tie break from Whacky Races. Thanks go to the team at Grafham for well-set courses and an extremely efficient race organisation leading to a minimum of waiting around between races in very cold conditions, something the last-starting B14 fleet were very thankful for.

The fleet now looks ahead to some winter training and for the lucky 11 teams a warm New Year's championship in Tasmania.

Results:

- 1 771 Ronstan - Mike Bees/Ferret, Brightlingsea SC. 1, 2, 1, (4), 1, 1, 1. 7pts
- 2 753 Hyde Sails - Alan Davis/Toby Bardsley-Dale. Weston SC. (12), 4, 2, 3, 2, 6, 3. 20pts
- 3 705 Whacky Races - Mark Barnes/Pete Nicholson. Whitstable YC/Brightlingsea SC. 6,3,(12),2,3,2,4 20pts
- 4 718 Bluebird - Nick Craig/Matt Johnson. Frensham Pond SC. 7, 1, 3, 1, (8), 5, 6. 23pts.
- 5 769 Chattanooga Choo Choo - Dan Cowin/Rachael Bennett. Ely SC. 4, 6, 4, (12), 5, 3, 5. 27pts.
- 6 774 2 racks of Pork - Piers Lambert/Mark Batt. Brightlingsea SC. 3, (12), 12, 12, 4, 7, 2. 40pts