

Student Yachting World Cup Report

After a long journey from Oxford, we arrived in La Baule (Brittany) on Monday evening (12th) to launch straight into the festivities of the international fair. This was a great opportunity for all the teams to meet and to showcase food and drink from their own countries. There were 10 teams in total, including 2 other teams from England (Cambridge and Southampton) and others who had flown half way across the world to be there. We would soon be competing fiercely with all of them on the water and befriending many of them off it.

The conditions were set fair for the entire week in Pornichet Bay, with a good off-shore breeze, beautifully flat waters and October sunshine - the perfect recipe for great racing. The Tuesday saw all the teams head down to the marina to draw for boats and to check they were all ready to go. Unfortunately, due to issues with a few of the boats, the sailors were made to wait another day to get out on the water, but we all managed to make light of the situation and took the opportunity to get to know our competitors.

On Wednesday, the teams left the marina for a day of practice, which resulted in a very promising 3rd in the practice race. Thursday was unfortunately rather harder. A technical failure resulted in the Oxford boat having to miss three out of four of the day's races. Luckily we were able to get redress for the last of these races, as the organisers could have responded faster to help get us back out on the water in time for it. The crew rejoined the fleet for the last race of the day and placed 8th. Respectable for a team who hadn't had the luxury of three previous races to iron out the early mistakes and who were exhausted from climbing the rig several times in their efforts to get back on the water.

Friday started slowly with a frustrating 9th but quickly improved as the team secured 5th place in the second race of the day. The final race was a coastal race, which showcased some of the beautiful coastline of Brittany. The race was promising to begin with as we were 3rd round the halfway mark, but a difficult tactical passage navigating the rocky islands surrounding the bay saw us slip back to 7th.

Saturday was our most consistently positive day. We started with an encouraging 7th, placing ahead of Cambridge, and followed it up with a 6th and a 7th after that. We headed into the coastal race determined for another good result. This was a particularly hard fought race, as we had to defend Ireland for most of the race as the gap between us grew and shrank again with every wave. The Irish passed us on the second to last leg and it looked as though they might have beaten us, but five minutes from the finish line a brilliant tactical decision saw us choose the faster side of the course, overtaking the Irish and claiming 6th place.

The Sunday saw another good day of racing, although we struggled for boat speed in the heavier winds. After a 7th place in the first race, we enjoyed the planing conditions downwind to place 6th in the second. For the third race, the wind had eased a little, meaning it was touch and go as to whether planing was favourable. Unfortunately, our decision to sail high and fast didn't pay off and we finished in a disappointing 8th. The coastal race had another promising start but we soon started to struggle in the stronger winds. The final upwind leg had us defending Japan and France aggressively, while Canada shot past several boats. Many of the teams agreed that some of the boats seemed to be tuned far better for the stronger breeze than others. After a

long battle with Japan on our tails we eventually crossed the line in 8th.

The wind on Monday was stronger still, which caused us more problems. While we finished 9th in the first and 7th in the second, Switzerland went on to take the title of World Champion from the defenders Southampton to round off what had been a close fought battle between the two teams. At the end of five days of racing, Switzerland were Champions, Southampton 2nd and Ireland 3rd. We finished a slightly frustrating 8th overall, but we now know that we can sail amongst the best student teams in the world and can be competitive, and in slightly different circumstances things could have been quite different.

Overall the experience was a very positive one for us all. We had five days of very competitive racing in perfect conditions in a beautiful French setting. We met amazing people from all over the world, and made longlasting friendships with many of them. Despite our overall result, we have all taken away a huge amount of sailing knowledge and experience from the last two months. At the beginning of September few of us had ever sailed J80s before. Now, we have competed at the Student Yachting World Cup and the J80 Nationals, and have had the honour of being coached by J80 Oman coach Mary Rook, and our sailing abilities have all been enriched by the whole experience.

Our most heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who has supported and funded us, but also huge thanks must go to a number of other people. Firstly, to Mary Rook, for her two days of invaluable coaching. When Mary first stepped on board with us, we were fairly clueless, but after two days with us we all felt immeasurably more confident in our ability to sail a J80. Secondly, to Tim Thubron, and everyone at the Royal Southern Yacht Club. His hospitality and good nature made training possible, and the grant awarded to us by Royal Southern was incredibly generous and kind. Finally, a enormous thank you must go to Cressida Robson, who very generously allowed us to use her boat 'Juicy' for all of September, and without her, we really would have struggled to train hard enough while keeping within our budget.

Please see below for photographs of the event.



Oxford (left) try to maintain their slender lead on rivals Japan.



Oxford (right) fight for room at the top mark with Cambridge (left) and Norway.



Oxford (left) fight for clean air with Southampton, Switzerland and Canada.



All the teams celebrate a fantastic week on the water at the closing ceremony.