

The North Sea Race 2009 – A view from ‘Cavalcade’

Sponsored by Boyes – *for good value !*

Any seasoned old salt on the NE coast will have done the North Sea Race, from Scarborough to Ijmuiden, at some point. The ‘Blue Ribbon’ event of the Scarborough Yacht Club varies in character every year, but three things remain constant: Impeccable organisation, lousy weather and a challenging scarcity of places to shelter if things get unpleasant. We thought we would give it a try.

Thursday 09/07/09

The first task was to get ‘Cavalcade’ from Whitby to Scarborough for the start, with Phil Leach and David McKie volunteering as crew for the delivery. Whitby harbour mouth is not at its best in a northerly. It looked passable but we decided, rather nobly, to allow ‘Samaki’ the honour of going out first, whilst we watched from 100 yards astern. As she remained the right way up, more or less, we bashed our way out and were somewhat relieved to reach the north cardinal, turn the corner towards Scarborough and put the waves behind us. That evening, we supped yacht club beer on the lighthouse balcony and watched the increasing swell breaking across the whole of south bay.

Friday 10/07/09

The pre-start weather briefing was indeed brief: “The forecast is awful” ! The race crew - David Stamford, Richard Cantillon and my cousin Russell Griffiths - were all issued with the official race polo shirts in bright orange, emblazoned with the sponsors logo. By the start at 1900, the swell had subsided from monumental to large and there was a complete absence of wind. As a consequence, 19 competitors crossed the line, without steerage way, heading for a turning mark which had been positioned close to the surf line, by the Scarborough lifeboat ! Eventually, the breeze filled in to make forward motion just possible and the fleet rolled and slatted into the night.

Saturday 11/07/09

After what seemed like several lifetimes, we put Flamborough head behind us and headed out into the gas rigs. Indeed we found some of them so fascinating that we passed them more than once in different directions on successive tides, keeping the guard boats entertained trying to guess which one we were going to drift into next. Thoughts of kedging came to nought as we couldn’t find enough bits of rope to tie together to give sufficient scope, or a volunteer to pull it all in again afterwards. The breeze came in fits and starts from varying directions, accompanied by the spinnaker being raised, gybed, handed, raised, lowered *ad infinitum* until eventually we got a solid westerly.

As the forecast was for the wind to go round to the south, our strategy was to keep west of the rhumb line to keep the wind free as it headed all our competitors. This turned out to be completely wrong, as the wind didn’t back and those who sailed a straight line were able to lay their course.

Sunday 12/07/09

The loom of Cromer lighthouse illuminated the night sky and the wind filled in to a solid force six south westerly. With the sheets eased we crossed from the Norfolk coast to Ijmuiden; knocking off the last 100 miles in 16 hours. Before the start, someone had tied a Boyes balloon to the backstay and amazingly it had survived the entire trip. However, to our horror, as we approached the finish line we saw a similar balloon floating in the water. This was the equivalent of Scott of the Antarctic seeing the Norwegian flag and realising that he was not first! We were 6th over the line (after 50 hours 40 seconds exactly).

Monday 13/07/09

The trip up the Noordseekanaal to Amsterdam was pleasant and uneventful, although we did prove that it is possible to get two yachts, a barge and a 500 foot container ship line abreast – just.

Tuesday 14/07/09

Jo joined ship from the airport in the morning and we immediately cast off to head up the Markermeer to Hoorn for the prize giving dinner that evening; arriving in good style under spinnaker. The dinner was excellent and afterwards the sponsor, Andrew Boyes, surpassed himself with an oration which ranged freely and in some detail around most parts of the human anatomy. None of the content of the speech can be reproduced here despite our reasonably lax censorship laws.

There were 11 finishers out of 19 starters. One retiree having been helped into Lowestoft by the lifeboat. 'Tarka of Tees' won first place in IRC, for the second year running, with a corrected time of 41 hours 57 minutes. Our corrected time of 44 hours 18 minutes was enough to put us last in IRC. 'Vado' and 'Resolute' won Portsmouth Class 1 and Class 2 respectively. 'Skools out' took second in Class 2.

15/07/09 to 22/07/09

The outbound crew returned home, and Jo and I made the most of the sunshine, Texel stumpkoppe beer, ice cream and relaxation – the last marred only by running out of cooking gas and having to locate a company (who shall remain nameless) willing to put the wrong sort of gas into the wrong sort of bottle. We then moved 'Cavalcade' back to Sixhaven marina in Amsterdam ready for a crew change. The boat-packing ability of the Havenmeister at Sixhaven has to be seen to be believed. First he filled all the berths, then rafted boats in the gaps between pontoons, then back-filled until the entire space, including the entrance, was solid with yachts – thus setting the scene for fun and games the following morning.....

Thursday 23/07/09

Jo departed to the airport, and Rob Mitchell, Richard Dowgill and Sam Ashby arrived fresh from a night in the bar of the ferry from Hull. Half an hour later we had exercised our international diplomatic skills to negotiate with various Dutch, German and British yachts to shuffle positions to allow us a narrow and tortuous route to the exit – which we would need to negotiate backwards, probably in a series of controlled collisions. However, for the first time

'Cavalcade' decided to go astern precisely in the various directions requested and we made our exit in fine style whilst giving the nonchalant appearance that we could do that sort of thing all the time !

A F4 westerly greeted us at IJmuiden and we set course for home. Within an hour we had a reef down and were making good speed fairly hard on the wind into a freshening breeze. This situation remained unchanged for the next 26 hours, by which time we were north of the mouth of the Humber. In the meantime, the boat became noticeably lighter as large quantities of pork, bacon and steak were converted by Richard into excellent meals, which I picked at in a desultory fashion with Stugeron tablets for pudding, whilst the others tucked in with gusto. The constant stream of verbal nonsense and insults was abated only briefly by chewing.

Friday 24/07/09

The wind died to be replaced by thunderstorms in the late afternoon, requiring use of the engine for about three hours before the breeze returned. The suggestion of a beer with dinner that evening was greeted with such whoops of joy and alacrity that I later judged it wise to sleep on the starboard bunk with my back against the beer locker.....the forecast suggested we would be rounding Flamborough on the spring ebb into a NW F6 that night.

Saturday 25/07/09

In fact the wind only went a touch north of west, so we could almost lay our course from the head to Whitby; arriving into harbour at 0730, 45 hours pontoon to pontoon from central Amsterdam.

Statistics

557 nautical miles.

21 engine hours.

Average speeds:

Scarborough to IJmuiden: 4.6 knots

IJmuiden to Whitby: 6.1 knots.

All distances and speeds by log.

My thanks are due to the race sponsors and organisers, and the out and return crews – I could not have wished for better.

Neil Paveley
'Cavalcade'
RYYC