

2022 International Flying Fifteen European Championship at Cowes, UK

21 - 25 August, 2022

Andy Mckee and Richard Jones become worthy new 2022 European Champions

The 75th Anniversary year of the international Flying Fifteen class proved to be a bumper year. As the curtain fell on a very successful Uffa Fox 50 extravaganza, attention turned to the 2022 European Championships where 71 boats representing the length and breadth of the UK, Australia, Belgium, Hong Kong, South Africa and Spain, gathered at one of the spiritual homes of the class, the Cowes Corinthian Yacht Club, to continue the celebratory year of regattas.

Day 1

The Solent served up a classic Cowes day with semi-overcast skies, light and shifty breeze and a moderate tidal flow. The course was set up in the busy Bramble Bank area of the Solent between Southampton Water and Cowes on the Isle of Wight. Laying a course in this busy section of water in the height of August was quite a task but the RO set up for two races of around 90 minutes duration.

With some petulant shifts and a slightly nervy fleet not used to a big start line, it took several attempts to get race one under way. On the fifth attempt under the dreaded black flag, race one got started around 1300hrs in a fluctuating soft breeze of 5 - 10 knots.

The pin end of the eventual start was a bit messy and caught out a couple of the top contenders. Steve Goacher and Tim Harper (RWYC) got caught in the mess tangled up with the pin mark leaving them to be one of the last boats to get off the start line. Ian Pinnell and Ian Cadwallader (Hayling Is SC) broke out a strong lead from locals Henry Bagnall and James Downer (Cowes Corinthian YC). The bulk of the fleet chased these two for three windward-leeward legs.

However disappointment for Ian Pinnell crossing the finish line to realise he was one of four boats black flagged. This handed race one victory to Bagnall and Downer. Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado (WYC/HISC) worked hard to take second place and Michael Wilson and Peter Greenhalgh (Isle of Man YC) moved up to third.

The RO re-set the course and the second race was started in a slightly steadier SW breeze of 9 - 11 knots. This start under black flag was exemplary and the fleet was well spread. Andy Mckee and Richard Jones (Dovestone SC/Shotwick Lake SC), led the race from the first mark around a course of two sausages and a triangle to

take the win closely followed by Steve Goacher and Tim Harper (Royal Windermere YC), making amends for a bad result in race one. Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado again sailed a solid race to finish on the podium and with their consistency, the early lead in the regatta. Ian Pinnell & Ian Cadwallader recovered from their disappointment in race one to finish 4th in race 2.

Of the visitors, Campbell Alexander and David Herridge from Durban in South Africa sailed a solid day to sit in 10th overall and Philippa Packer and Dean McAullay from Royal Freshwater Bay YC in Perth, Western Australia sit in 11th overall at the end of the day.

Day 2

The second day of competition was greeted with drizzle, overcast skies and a light and quite fickle 7 - 12 knots of S/SW breeze. 3 races were scheduled predicting a long day on the water.

After a few attempts race 3 got away sailing a 3 lap course. Andy Mckee & Richard Jones picked up from where they left off with a race win from Andrew Jameson and James Grant (WYC/HISC) joining the podium for the first time. Jeremy Davy and Martin Huett were third.

Race 4 of the regatta was raced in much the same conditions but with some more black flag waving. Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado (HISC) were back to winning ways and Jeremy Davy and Martin Huett were getting some consistency with a second. Third was Mark Nicholson and Steve Culpitt (HISC), their first visit to the podium.

Race 5 followed late in the afternoon when the wind shifted a little causing a course re-shuffle. More black flags and some persistent drizzle. Greg Wells and David Tulloch (HISC) scored their first race win of the regatta. Nigel and Gavin Tullett (Royal Windermere YC) had a great race to finish second and 3rd was Hamish Mackay and Andrew Lawson (RTYC/HISC).

After 5 races Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado increased their overall lead after discarding their worse result to date, a 12th, to top the leader board with 16 points.

Big movers were Andy McKee and Richard Jones, discarding their opening day 22nd and posting a 1, 13, 8 to move from seventh into second with 23 points.

Henry Bagnall and James Downer could not match their first day performance and a 19, 4, 15 saw them drop back to third with 26 points.

In fourth were Jeremy Davy and Martin Huett, now able to drop their BFD, for 28 points. Fifth were Hamish Mackay and Andrew Lawson with 31 points and sixth Greg Wells and David Tulloch who won the final race of the day on 33 points.

Top visiting boat was John Lavery and Alan Green from National YC in Dublin who sit in 10th place overall.

On Tuesday 23 August, the fleet take a break from the Europeans to sail in a special Class 75th Anniversary Regatta started from the Royal Yacht Squadron. The F15 Europeans resumed on Wednesday 24 August. n.b.: see separate report.

Day 3

On the penultimate day of racing the sun came back out but the wind died for a few hours then did a 180 degree flip about lunchtime. A two race day was delayed for a couple of hours waiting for the wind to settle and the tide to go slack.

The RO released the fleet from shore around 1300hrs but it was quite a slog to get across the tide to the starting area near Hill Head buoy. When the breeze did settle it allowed two back to back races to be sailed in a fairly stable 8 - 12 knot S/SW.

Less black flags as the fleet got used to mass starts, but a tactical course all the same. Seasoned F15 regulars Andy Mckee and Richard Jones excelled in the light winds scoring bullets in both races. Terry Shutcher and Chris Hewkin (Burton/Shotley/Dubai Offshore SC) proved their win in the 75th Anniversary Race was no fluke, crossing in second in race 6 of the regatta, followed by Hamish Mackay and Andrew Lawson (RTYC/HISC) in 3rd.

Race 7 was sailed in similar light breezes with the now familiar blue kite of Mckee and Jones taking the gun from ex Finn sailing local hot shots Henry Bagnall and James Downer (Cowes Corinthian YC). Third was Ian Pinnell and Ian Cadwallader.

The results at the end of 7 races left Mckee and Jones on 25 points, Previous regatta leaders Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado slipped to second overall on 32 points after counting two 8th places. Bagnall and Downer's 12 & 2 moved them into third place on the overall table on 40 points.

All was still to play for however with one more race scheduled on the final day but once 8 races were completed a second drop came into play so the European title was still very much in the air!

Day 4

The final days racing forecast was for early showers clearing late morning and another light breeze to fill just in time to get the final race completed before the 1600hrs cut off.

The 75th Anniversary Flying Fifteen European Championship came to a fitting close on another semi-overcast but warm, humid day (for the Solent)!. There was a short delay of an hour to wait for the wind to fill, which it did, to start one final 3 lap race at 1330hrs on the second attempt.

The wind averaged 10 - 12 knots from a NW in direction, with a slightly stronger ebbing tide improving upwind boat speeds by a shade. With a second series race discard coming into play the maths was a bit complicated but Andy Mckee and Richard Jones did enough with an 18th finish in the last race to win the championship. The pair from Dovestone SC / Shotwick Lake SC counted four race wins and an overall net points score of 25 points.

Their nearest threat before the last race of the series was Richard Lovering and Matt Alvarado but the Hyde Sails pair suffered a bad start and struggled deep in the pack for the first two laps, deciding to throw in the towel and retire.

But this did provide another twist in the maths when Ian Pinnell and Ian Cadwallader (Pinnell & Bax) broke into a handsome lead to finish their regatta with a race win and thus, when dropping a lowly 27th in the 5th race of the series, promoted them to second place overall on 30 points.

Richard and Matt secured third overall nudging the youngest competitors in the fleet, Henry Bagnall and James Downer to a very credible 4th overall. Henry and James both sailed in the British Finn squad and James still races an OK Dinghy but the pair jumped into a Flying Fifteen this week for the first time to give it a go. Henry explained that he had borrowed the boat from his father in law and enjoyed his time with the fleet but was suitably surprised by the level of competition.

5th overall was Hamish Mackay and Andrew Lawson (RTYC / HISC) and 6th, seasoned F15 campaigners Greg Wells and David Tulloch from the big team from Hayling Island SC.

Top of the visitors was John Lavery and Alan Green from the National YC in Dublin in 15th overall. All the way from Australia, Philippa Packer and Dean McAullay from Royal Freshwater Bay YC came in 21 overall and top of the two South African boats was Campbell Alexander and David Heritage from Durban in 27th. The three visiting Spanish boats from Puerto Pollenca were in a row 46,47 & 48.

The Silver fleet trophy went to Graham Latham and Sara Briscoe from Parkstone YC. The trophy for best local sailors went to Henry Bagnall and James Downer.

This event staged by Cowes Corinthian YC brings to a close two weeks of thoroughly successful and enjoyable F15 sailing on the Solent on this the 75th anniversary of the class.

At the prize giving all were thanked for their hard work including the many volunteers from CCYC who fed and watered sailors with cholesterol busing breakfast buns and burgers/hot dogs every day!

by Jonny Fullerton of Regatta Services on behalf of FFI