

Great times at the 2011 Etchells NSW State Championships.

After racing in the 2011 Thrifty NSW Etchells State Championships was abandoned on Saturday for the day, crews were very keen to get out there again on Sunday and get a title sorted. Perhaps this is why all three starts were clean. Having said that, one vessel did get to within less than a metre of the line before the gun, however.

On the Saturday, there was 20knots from the Sou'souwest blowing through, with more than the occasional gust to 25. In itself, this was not the cause for the abandonment, as Race Management stayed out there for around five hours trying to find a suitable race area. Alas, it was the sea state that put a halt to activity. The waves were over 2m, with very steep back and closely stacked together. At one point, the Committee Boat took a metre clean over the whole vessel, as they pitched through the short cycles.

On the Sunday, the current seemed to run in a Northerly eddy in front of Newcastle, which meant the Southerly swell went back to being gentle, if sometimes tall, rollers. The best part of 1.5nm course heading South in to the beach at Merewether provided great viewing and conditions for all, especially in the first two of the three races, when the sun did its best to light up the fleet, with a great contrast over the surrounding grey background. Unfortunately, by the final race, number six for the championship, it was a little more like a snow-in for the first couple of legs as the rain finally won over.

In the first race of the day, the wind started at around 8knots from about 190 degrees and with the gentle 1.5m sea, it provided for 'excellent sailing', as one competitor put it. For spectators, the race was most memorable for becoming the land of the penalty turn at the top mark. This was due to both the crews misjudging the current pushing them into the top mark and the inevitable highly charged, competitive atmosphere. The very same current was of course keeping the pin end boats back from the start line and why in the last race Matt Whitnall on Umami was less than a metre from the Committee Boat end, whilst those at the pin end were a whole 15 seconds behind the line. By this stage, the breeze was a genuine and consistent 15 knots, as well.

Overall, the right side seemed to be favoured, no doubt due to the kinder sea state there, closer in to the city. The odd driver who spends a lot of time in larger boats did seem to have some difficulty adjusting to the lack of acceleration of their Etchells. As usual, there was a lot of close proximity work near the marks and in the first race of the day, the top mark was dragged 30 feet from where it was dropped. In the last it got carried a little further afield - 30 metres, actually and was hastily reset for the next rounding. Phil Collyer, the Principal Race Officer for the 2011 Thrifty Etchells NSW State Championships was happy to get it done. 'Great to get three races in today to provide six overall and show them what the Newcastle Cruising Yacht Club can do. Wonderful close racing with some bumping around the marks as a feature - the 360 and 720 reign! Good sailing in nice seas today and a bit of surging on the waves at the end there', said Phil

Most of the regatta had been very close racing indeed and after Race Five, just seven points separated first from second. You would not have been alone in thinking that this would have been a winning position, but a very consistent day from Sydney's Mark Johnson with a second, sixth and first place, saw he and crew of Nick Burfoot and Peter Conde take it by one point. In second place was Melbourne Fleet member, Steve Gunther and crew of Gin Gibson and John Collingwood. Five points astern of them was Sydney Fleet member David Clark with Andrew Smith and Alan Smith, themselves just point clear of Melbourne Fleet Captain, Jake Gunther, Stuart Skeggs and Tony McPhail on, The Boat. Local Lake Macquarie sailors, Gary Boyd and Kane Sinclair, took the other positions in the top six.

Mark Johnson said of it all, 'Great regatta, great racing, great venue and obviously a great result for us!' Steve Gunther who just got pipped at the post, said 'It's good to relegate my brother (Jake) to fourth place.' So clearly there's some fantastic sibling rivalry alive and kicking there.

Crews, officials and volunteers all enjoyed some hospitality in the afternoon before presentations and then a lot began their journeys home.