

Royal Thames YC Inshore series for Farr 45s for the David Diehl Trophy.

Regatta 1, 18th/ 19th April 2009

Werewolf Takes The Lead

But the trophy is far from settled.

Two days, eight races, five different winners: the first regatta of the Royal Thames Inshore series for Farr 45s delivered all that was hoped for it.

After 8 races – with another eight to sail over the weekend of May 2nd/ 3rd – Jerry Otter's Werewolf leads the series by 7 points from Simon Henning's Alice 2. Jeff Blue's Martini Espresso and Stewart Whitehead's Rebel snap at their heels, separated by just half-a-point.

Overcast skies and an unstable north-easterly offered less-than-perfect prospect on Saturday morning, but while the shifty breeze produced taxing tactical calls that kept the racing close and places constantly changing the overall direction remained sufficiently stable to keep the course sensible and well within the accepted meaning of "windward/ leeward".

Werewolf put down her marker for the series with a win in the first race, a straight-forward 5-mile two rounds. Shaun and Emily Frohlich's Exabyte Four was second, Alice 2 third and 2008 series winner Agne Nilsson in Fortis Excel fourth.

Alice 2, Fraxious and Exabyte were just a mite too eager for action at the start of race two and by the time all three had returned and started correctly the rest had long gone – and in a fleet as high calibre and closely matched as this, there is seldom a way back from such an error. By the end of the first round these three were just about back in the hunt, but not in contention, while Excel led from Werewolf and Rebel. The two leaders stayed ahead to finish 20 seconds apart while John Greenland calling tactics on Espresso Martini got Jeff Blue's boat ahead of Rebel to finish third.

There was no such yawning gap between first and second in race three, where this always closely bunched fleet had what must have been one of its most closely-fought races ever. The breeze had gone right and was even more full of shifts, while the gathering tidal stream dictated a spreader mark at the top end of the track to get the fleet square above the leeward mark. While the drag race from the windward mark to the spreader is always that – a bit of a drag – the chore is worth performing when it opens up the race again with a proper, tactical square run. Thus it was. Alice 2 led almost comfortably at the end of the first round with Espresso second, Jack Pringle's Fraxious third, Exabyte fourth and Werewolf buried. Fortunes stayed much the same on the beat but the cross-tide run provided Werewolf's chance. At the downwind finish half a spinnaker cloth decided the outcome between Alice and the fast-gaining grey boat while further back Exabyte and Rebel, also approaching the line on opposite gybes, could not be separated and were scored as a dead heat.

Werewolf gained her revenge in race four to end the day looking good – but Sunday was to prove another day.

Bright sunshine and more of the same breeze set the scene for another good day, though with the Fars pushed slightly to the east of the central Solent to accommodate the round-the-cans fleet contesting the Warsash SC's Spring Series. The gunsmoke had barely cleared for the attention signal when one of those Solent Hazards that do not get marked down on charts appeared in the shape of a large tanker, in ballast, coming to anchor neatly half-a-mile to windward of the committee boat, swiftly joined by a pilot launch and a bunkerer. Alice 2 opened the scoring for the day with another win with Rebel now appearing in the frame and Werewolf mid-fleet.

Whether it was the tanker or whether it was tactician Ian Dobson keeping his eyes open, but in race 2 Jack Pringle's Fraxious was the only boat to break away from the rest and bang the right

hand corner. Whatever the reason, the result was a lead of what in this class counts as a country mile: almost half-a-minute. Rebel led the pursuing pack with once again Espresso having a better day and Werewolf still mid-fleet. Thus it was at the finish, with a nice win for Fraxious, Rebel second and Espresso third. Next came Alice, displaying a red flag and citing a protest against Werewolf, just astern.

Espresso continued her return to form with wins from Rebel in the next two races to close the points gap on Werewolf and leave the leader-board enticingly open for the next regatta in a fortnight's time.