

Alice 2 wins David Diehl

By just two points in the last race of the 16-race, no-discard series, Simon Henning's Alice 2 snatched the Royal Thames Yacht Club's David Diehl Trophy for Farr 45s from the slipping grasp of Jerry Otter's Werewolf in a nail-biting finish that could not be called until the six leading boats had crossed the line. It was a fitting climax to a series that had throughout seen the closest possible racing between the most closely-matched big-boat fleet in the country. The Farr 45s are the largest one-designs regularly racing in the UK, and finishes just seconds apart are the norm.



1 Alice 2 lines up for a start as bowman Tim Jeffrey calls the line

Nine boats, and with crews of between 12 and 15 each pooling some of the best big boat talent on The Solent, contested the series with 16 carefully managed windward-leeward races held over two weekends, April 18th/ 19th and May 2nd/3rd. Class chairman Jerry Otter's Werewolf set the early pace with two wins and two seconds on the first Saturday while class champion Alice took an early tumble, with an 8th in the second race. Last year's winner Agne Nilsson in Fortis Excel – this season without her striking mirror-glazed topside finish – bounced back into the frame with a second race win but it was in race three that Alice let Werewolf

know she would not have things her own way too easily. The two boats, slanting-in to the downwind finish on opposite gybes from opposite sides of the course, slid across the line with little more than the thickness of the spinnaker cloth to separate them, Werewolf fractionally in front by just one second. With three different winners from the first four races, it was evident that this was good racing – but Werewolf's consistency looked like putting her comfortably in command of the series.

At the end of the second day– and though somewhat off the boil with a 4th, a 5th and two more 4ths – Werewolf was still top boat with a seven-point lead and with Alice 2, Stuart Whitehead's Rebel and Jeff Blue's Martini Espresso clustered together within 2.5 points of each other. The crown, however, was less than secure with a protest pending from Alice 2 over an alleged rule 18 incident at the windward mark in race 6.

This weekend's final regatta of the series began with a shifty north-westerly on Saturday morning that pulled left during the day and with Werewolf back on song, posting 1-3-1-2 to tighten her grip on the trophy. Alice 2 kept herself in the hunt with 3-5-3-1, as did Rebel (4-1-2-5) but Martini Espresso did herself no favours with an uncharacteristic 7th. Fortis Excel, just out of the chocolates, kept herself in touch with a 2-2-4-4.

The Werewolf thread began to unravel on Saturday afternoon, with the postponed hearing from that race 6 protest, two National Judges and an IJ deciding that Werewolf tactician Leigh McMillan had taken too big a chance by trying to come in late, on port, to tack under Alice's bow inside the tree-length zone. It could have been worse: even though Werewolf now had to carry a dsq, it was from her worst race so far, anyway, adding just five points to her score rather than a possible nine. She still began the final day with a clear 7-point lead over Alice 2, with Rebel just 2.5 points astern of that.



2 Class Captain Jerry Otter's Werewolf: series leader from start to (almost) finish.

Did the protest result unsettle the normally settled Werewolf team? Hard to say: what characterises the dark grey boat over all her rivals in the class is her crew's ability to hang in there. Even when they look beaten they as often as not pull something special out of the hat to get back to a finish position that – while it might not be spectacular – keeps them in the hunt. So it seemed to be on the final day of the series. A jumpy Werewolf jumped the start, leaving Alice 2 free to score a great win over Martini Espresso, gaining, then losing, then regaining the lead with Werewolf recovering well from that OCS to get third while Rebel was fourth. Meanwhile Agne Nilsson in Fortis Excel considerably enlivened the morning by seriously misjudging the weather-going current that had caught out Werewolf and comprehensively clobbering the committee boat.

Some careful covering now engaged the series leaders, leaving Rebel relatively unmolested to score two good wins over Martini Espresso while Alice 2 ground down Werewolf's points advantage by leading her over the finish line in both races 14 and 15.

Even so, Werewolf was still two points up with one race left to sail. Alice 2 hunted Werewolf down before the start and did a spectacular shut-out at the committee boat end to disappear up the track while her rival grimly circled round and trailed across last. Oh dear. With the breeze still firmly in the north-west – a notoriously shifty wind direction in the Central Solent – Alice hung a loose cover on Werewolf while still sailing a blistering first beat to lead at the top mark from Excel with Werewolf fourth. Had they finished thus they would have tied – but with Alice 2 now counting one more win than Werewolf in the 16 races, the series would have been hers. In the event, Werewolf's fate was sealed by a massive 30-degree shift half-way up the second beat that converted her fourth to a sixth (in this fleet, that's about four boat lengths!) at the top mark and turned the final square run into a port-pole reach. Werewolf went to the left down the run while Alice had gone off on starboard, then gybed to cover. When the breeze did not shift back the move left Werewolf a long way on the wrong side of the shift and on the slower gybe back both Fraxious and Espresso Martini were able to slide across ahead of the grey boat. Her 6th was her worst score of the series and Alice had won.



3 Alice 2 afterguard: 1 –r Chris le Provost (boat manager), Mike Henning (steering), Nick Meadows (tactician) Frank Gerber (seated), owner Simon Henning (in red cap), spinnaker trimmer James Read, Jules Knights and Dan Whapples.

Royal Thames YC David Diehl series final standings; 1 *Alice 2* (Simon Henning, skipper Mike Henning) 48 points; 2 *Werewolf* (Jerry Otter, helmsman Mark Richmond) 50; 3 *Rebel* (Stewart Whitehead, tactics Mike Richards) 51.5; 4 *Martini Espresso* (Jeff Blue) 60; 5 *Fortis Excel* (Agne Nilsson) 68; 6 *Fraxious* (Jack Pringle) 88; 7 *Shadow* (David and Gill Richards) 114; 8 *Exabyte Four* (Shaun Frohlich) 118.5; 9th *Atomic* (Tony Langley) 160.