



Miracle Nationals 2011

A beginners' view

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Miracle 3838

Halo Winter 2011

Why attend the Nationals? We had four reasons this year to give it a go:

- We'd bought the T-shirts
- It was only an hour away by car
- Bragging rights back at our home club
- To race against another Miracle and look (spy) at rig setups.

Really it was the last reason that was the clincher. Myself and my other half, Isabelle, sail our boat on the River Exe in Devon. In our club the main class raced is Lasers, so since getting our boat, 3838 "Taliesin II", two seasons ago, we had never actually raced against another Miracle. True, there is another Miracle in our boat park, but it only gets out once or twice a year. We've done a fair bit of club racing, with the most competitive event being the annual River Regatta in which there can be a fair bit of action around the cans. However, we did wonder whether we would be completely outclassed at the Nationals. So as an insurance policy, accommodation was booked at Wembury, a coastal village to the east of Plymouth. The idea was we could retire gracefully and do some coastal walks if it all got a bit too much. But we never did have to dust off our walking boots as we really enjoyed the week of sailing in Plymouth. Here is a short account of what we got up to.

Arriving at the Mayflower dinghy park we had to undergo the pre race check. As our boat was previously owned by the Measurement Secretary, we were pretty sure it was within class rules and indeed it passed the checks with flying colours. So far so good. The amount of people tinkering with various tools on their boats made us feel a little nervous, so it was nice to see a familiar face (Brian's) and look at "Taliesin"s successor, "Puff" with its distinctive dragon design. After a little chat with our neighbours in the park and a quick look round at the other boats, we headed off to our Wembury refuge, wondering what the next days would be like.

Then came the first day of racing. The slip at Mayflower is steep and narrow, no worse than our brook at home, but we never have 35 boats trying to launch at the same time there. So it was a bit daunting but we soon got the hang of it: rig boat, launch, instruct crew (briskly) to paddle like crazy until you get round the corner, pass the passenger ferry and into some wind. We'd not been in such large starts before, but the race line was long and we found it easiest to hover just back from the first row of the action. The bronze fleet can best be described as competitive, but friendly, and we soon got confident enough to fly the kite on the reaching leg of the course. That was a first for us, normally back home the kite only goes up on the run (and if the crew is feeling up to it!). Racing in Plymouth Sound made us feel right at home, a bit of chop though not too much and fairly constant wind, plus a little tide. Day 2 was harder, winds were lighter and we struggled to keep up with the rest of the bronze fleet, particularly on the beat. At the intermission between races 2 and 3 we looked at the other boats and realised that we had far too much tension on the tack of the sail. Back on shore and after a quick discussion with more experienced racers it was off to the chandlery to get some more string. (So that's why we had a bit of rope left after rigging the boat for the first time six months after buying it...)

Equipped with our new setup for the rest of the week we found the boat sailed faster and crucially



pointed better. We even got a bit quicker at spinnaker launch and recovery, but never quite managed to get ahead of the Gibson's in "Great Expectations". Our last day of racing was Day 5 on which we encountered the lightest winds of the race. The first and only race of that day was situated just off the Sound Breakwater, with a fast tide running against us. As the wind dropped most of the bronze fleet got stuck at the top mark and a variety of tactics were employed to attempt to get round the buoy. We got timed out as try as we might we were stuck fast against the tide. The second race was cancelled and we had a long paddle home, including a handy tow out the way of one Her Majesty's finest ships. Fortunately back at the club there was curry and chips on the menu.

Overall we learnt so much in the week, through sailing against other Miracles and seeing what other competitors did. Will we come again? Well, an order has already been placed for a new set of sails and we are looking at buying a new trailer road base with the intention of travelling more than an hour away to some Miracle meets in 2012. Finally, thanks to all who helped organise the week and especially those who made us feel so welcome.

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