

An Adventure in a Venture

Rutland Sailability hosted the Sailability Multiclass Regatta over the weekend of 4-6 August at their fabulously equipped sailing club on the south bank of Rutland Water. This is the tenth Sailability Multiclass regatta, but the first time that a crew from Sussex Sailability has taken part. As the name suggests there were many different classes of boats taking part from a full range of Hansa Access dinghies to Challenger and Weta trimarans, dart-like International 2.4mR class boats, racy SKUDs and the largest fleet of RS Venture Connects yet assembled for a race.

Declan Rock and I represented Sussex Sailability in the RS Venture Connect Class. Declan has a high spinal injury and helms the Venture from one of the seats. I have a lower and incomplete spinal injury and can move around the boat and pull on the ropes.

The opening Friday afternoon was set aside for coaching and race training with RS expert, Steve Dean. As it turned out, the wind blew pretty hard and the main learning points were shaking out the niggles of rigging the boat after a 150 mile drive.

Saturday was the real thing with two races set for the morning. The weather threw a bit of everything at us with strong wind, followed by heavy rain, followed by a lull and a big wind-shift, which inevitably arrived 30 seconds before the race start. That turned the first race into a very tactical affair. By the end of the first lap we had nudged into a narrow lead when the curse of the main-sheet bridle hit as we gybed and we found ourselves doing an unexpected 360° turn before getting back on track at the back of the fleet. Nonetheless we plugged away and rounded the windward mark in touch. As others tried to get their spinnakers working downwind, we stole a cheeky overlap at the final mark and forced the rest of the fleet wide securing victory in the first race with all the Ventures within hailing distance of each other.



The wind had picked up again for the second race which turned out to be a more comfortable win for us with the Venture fleet well spread out - and we even gave a (much lower handicapped) SKUD and Weta a run for their money until the last couple of legs. Two wins out of two had us going into Saturday lunch feeling pretty pleased with the morning's work.

Saturday afternoon was the Ken Ellis Pursuit Race that I took part in with a Rutland sailor while Declan warmed up from the rain of the morning. Pursuit racing was a first for me - everyone starts at different times depending on their handicap and the fast boats then have to try to overtake the slower boats by the end of the race. It means you always have someone to race against and you know where you have come at the end - for us, on this occasion, it wasn't at the front.

On Sunday morning we set off in warm, gentle breezes with the unusual feeling of having a lead to defend. The wind built as we got down to the race area, but it remained fairly steady. We got a decent start and made a couple of long beats to get close to the first windward mark in second place with one of the other Ventures breathing down our

necks. We went to roll into the final tack to the mark and ... was it an ill-timed gust, a second too slow releasing the jib-sheet or some mis-placed balance, but the boat was knocked flat and Declan slipped out of his seat. I followed him over the side to help turn him over and make sure that he was able to float clear of the boat. We were both wearing inflatable life-jackets that ensured that Declan quickly turned head up. The RAF safety crew were with us in seconds and some very beefy guys were able to help Declan and I onto the safety boat. The Venture had popped up and was sitting waiting head to wind a few boat lengths away. I hopped back on and sailed it back to base, but our racing was done for the day.

There had been a lively debate during the regatta about whether the Venture was un-capsizable. Unfortunately we were able to resolve the debate in the negative - and it turned out that we weren't the only ones. One of the other crews had also been knocked flat but they were able to hang on in the boat which righted itself and they carried on sailing.

The main lessons were that when one of the crew is moving about the boat and the other person is in a seat you need to be particularly careful when the seated person is going from windward to leeward in the tack. It also demonstrated for me (and not for the first time) the benefit of a lifejacket over a buoyancy aid, particularly if the sailor is not a strong swimmer and able to turn themselves upright. The debating point that we still didn't resolve was whether a seat harness would have helped Declan stay in the boat as it righted itself or would it have made it more difficult to enable him to float safely free.



As it turned out we ended up just one point behind the leading boats in the RS Venture Connect class. Even finishing one race on Sunday would have won us the regatta after our flying start on Saturday. But it was not to be this time round and we did get a prize of some useful Rooster goodies (a good deal better than a silver cup in my view) for our adventure in a Venture.

Thank you to everyone at RYA and Rutland Sailability for arranging and hosting the RYA Sailability Multiclass Regatta, to the RAF safety team for being there when we needed them, and particular thanks to Tina Billett for her care and support.

Chris Hodge
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