

Stellas at Burnham Week.

Aquarius, Polaris and Stardust came out for the Bank Holiday weekend of Burnham Week, which was also the last event of the Stella Worlds, although that had already been settled by the dominance of Estrella.

They enjoyed some spectacular sailing, though the Saturday became something of a practice race, for no one managed to follow the SI's very well, and at least two different courses were sailed at two different start times, none of them the proper ones.

Battle was joined properly next day, Big Sunday, when the winds peaked at some 35 knots from the west. Polaris bigged up their game by flying the kite all the way out to the river entrance, the wind building all the time. Fairly flat water helped them tame the dreaded roll and they were some 20 minutes up at the bottom mark, giving them enough margin to go back to windward in some comfort, eventually with two reefs and a working jib, the helmsman's rictus grin of terror gradually reshaping into something a bit more human. The more sensible Stardust and Aquarius had followed downwind under white sails, after which Stardust's very good windward speed was unable to make a big enough dent in Polaris' lead.

On the way back into the river the crew of all the Stellas felt very grateful to be in such seaworthy little vessels as they sailed through a scene of carnage. A Squib was overwhelmed in the typically rough sea at the entrance to the Roach, and partly thanks to the well-meant but clumsy efforts of the lifeboat actually sank; an RBOD got T-boned and lost their rig; most of the Hunter 707's ran away under headsails; and further up river a big boat lost their rig after the backstay gave way. That night the bars were full of sailors with slightly demented grins: this was sailing at full pelt, as good as it gets.

Effectively reduced to a series of two, the bank holiday event hinged on Monday, and a less dramatic but still vigorous day beckoned with a northerly in the mid twenties of knots. John "How does this thing work?" Irving in his new toy Aquarius will one day make her fly, but had to be content with following Polaris and Stardust round the track again. Polaris, despite having two 84 year olds in the crew that day, tried to fly the kite at the start on a very shy and breezy reach, but gave up after five minutes and nearly as many broaches, but during that time actually managed to pull out a couple of lengths over Stardust.

Almost overlapped at times the two of them rushed out to the mouth of the Crouch again, to the only real corner of the race, where Polaris managed to pull out a few lengths at the mark, and as is often the way, once a little lead was established, managed gradually to grow it.

The very strong crew of Stardust must have been cursing the lack of a decent beat, for they are witchlike to windward.

The only thing Burnham Week 2010 lacked to make it absolutely perfect was a few more Stellas. Conditions were diverse and benign, and every sail bar the storm jib had an outing. Polaris and Aquarius stayed on, playing in the large locally handicapped Class 3 during the week. Tuesday

was a kedging match at times, but the rest of the week took place under perfect full sail breeze, and all the week under warm sun.

Polaris went up to Class 2 for the final Saturday to have a go at the Commodore's Cup and got 3rd in a competitive fleet, missing out on the win by a minute and a half, despite having to return at the start. "If my aunt had had a bigger moustache then she'd have been my uncle" indeed. Conditions suited her that day, but her success also illuminated how fairly the IRC rating system treats these wonderful old boats.