

29er European Championships Brissago Switzerland July 18th -23rd 2011

Recognised as a light weather venue, the 2011 29er European Championships were always going to be challenging, but just how challenging is an understatement.

155 boats, crews and support staff made their way toward Brissago, for those arriving from the North to find the road 6 miles from the venue had been washed away on the Wednesday in a storm. For those of us arriving on the Thursday, this only became apparent on arrival. The official diversion was not useable by vehicles with trailers so taking off in the logical direction led to a 65 mile detour up the mountains and along roads that are not to be recommended. Some with ribs in tow found the easiest way around hairpin bends was to lean against the lamp posts with the rib trailer and use it as a fulcrum!



On arrival, we found the venue was the Dannerman cigar factory on the edge of Lake Maggiore. Launching for 155 boats was down two narrow ramps one of which had been provided by the Swiss Army. A third ramp had been washed away in the storm. The not so happy campers were on an area of flat/stroking ground on the site, and Bruce Woodcock and family who were another Mersea boat had witnessed a Danish tent taking off in the storm and heading for the lake leaving some very surprised Danes sitting on their groundsheet, whilst they held their own tent down!

Measuring and settling in took the usual pattern, whilst the reality of the situation started to settle across the fleet. The fundamental problem being that the venue was inadequate and the organising club was so far out of its comfort zone, everything to do with the event started to fall apart before it had officially begun.

Racing was to start at Noon each day, and Monday saw the inevitable postponement before the 4 qualifying flights launched at around 2 p.m. To cut a long and tedious tale of woe, stress and consternation short, for days 2, 3, and 4 in order to try and make the most of what little breeze there was, launching commenced at 07.15a.m. This was bad enough in itself, but many were on the water for between 6 and 9 hours each day as well for the unfortunate few who then got caught in a variety of valid and farcical protests which went on regularly to gone midnight. James and Tim were on the water for 12 hours before they even finished their first race.

James and Tim's target for the event was to be top Brit and to finish in the top ten, taking into account total crew weight and anticipated wind conditions. Gavin and Tom also from Mersea attending their first major 29er event overseas were seeking a place in Silver fleet for the finals.

The plan was for three days of qualifying with a total of 9 races and then three days of finals with another 9 races, total races 18. The final tally was 5 qualifying races over four days, and (not certain at time of writing due to protests) three, four or five races in the finals over two days. Assuming ten races are counted, it took James and Tim 35 hours of time on the water to achieve at an average on the water time of 3.5 hours. Each race should take an average of 30 to 45 minutes. They also started and abandoned due to lack of wind 11 races which are more than they actually finished. The maximum wind speed during any one race was reckoned to be around 17 knots which lasted for 1 lap (Approx 10 minutes) whilst 4-8 knots was more like the average.

The final results were James and Tim 16th in Gold Fleet and 1st Brit. Gavin and Tom 44th in Silver Fleet. This was disappointing as at some point on Saturday after racing, race five was declared void due to a technical flag error by the start boat. Race 4 was therefore not a discard which meant James and Tim carried a 25th in race 4 which saw the fleet results turned completely on their head as a result of a wind shift of 90 degrees and the race initially voided as a result was for some reason re-instated.

One the impressive outcomes of this event, was how well the Mersea boys handled the stress of the event which was enormous. They stayed focused on the job in hand and kept calm, whilst other crews fell apart under the pressure and even went home. For James, Tim, Gavin and Tom their experience at the Youth Championships in April undoubtedly assisted. Not sure that their parent support teams handled the stress so professionally!

In conclusion if anyone suggests you go to Lake Maggiore for an event, my advice is don't and save yourself untold grief and money!

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