

A weekend of light, fluky and veering breeze proved a suitable challenge as the Lightning368s thrashed out their Nationals at Northampton recently, but through it all, the perseverance and impressive consistency of Richard Palmer shone through as he took the title back to Cookham Reach with him - just in time for his wedding!!

Twenty-four boats were on the water for the event - with two more 'joining in' on the Sunday - and, once again, the fleet didn't disappoint.

Saturday's four races saw the light, fluky wind provide a mighty challenge - even to these 'Light Wind' boats. With the windward mark becoming something of a maelstrom of slow-motion action as perfect approaches were wrecked by headers/lifts/holes from about three feet to the mark in almost every race. Making it safely and efficiently around here proved to be key as not one of the helms that made it first around the windward mark actually went on to win a race.

Patience and persistence would be the hallmark of the entire weekend.

Whilst several helms used the wind to disguise Friday night's excesses (this author included - though I did have raging manflu too), others simply got down to business and showed us how it's done.

However, whilst battle (slowly) raged up ahead, the fleet continued to show how many helms have improved with no-one from around 10th especially safe at any point.

Just a few years ago the fleet would have been strung around the water, lapping of backmarkers was commonplace. Now? Well, one bad tack could drop you from 10th to 20th if you weren't careful. Real testimony to the development of the fleet over recent times.

By the end of day one, it was Richard Palmer and Caroline Key who were heading the leaderboard. Both, though, had been pushed hard by Alexander Baxter throughout the day.

'Battle-pockets' all the way down the fleet, though, saw just how tight things were for all of the places - again, one slip up could see a major drop - or vice versa. So, despite the lack of breeze, this was turning into a classic Nationals where tactics were at a premium and concentration would be rewarded.

Day two dawned and it was a mirror-like surface that faced the waking sailors. For a while it looked all over for the weekend, but pretty much on queue, a breeze came up - enough to actually hike on out to the start line - before promptly dropping again. Enough to sail on, so away we went for two quick Sunday races that would decide the title.

A hairy moment for Richard as a determined Lee got below him whilst both on port - neither noticing Simon Hopkins approaching on Starboard until the very last second - Disaster averted, with Lee taking two turns by way of an apology!

With Paul White reviving his chances with a win here, Richard second and Caroline third, we went into race six of the weekend to round off a wonderful Nationals.

Appropriately, Richard took the win in this race to finish a tough weekend with three victories and the title of Lightning368 National Champion 2014 - a very well deserved and popular victory....we just hope his fiancé (now wife) saw it as a suitable reward!

With Caroline second and Paul third, another Nationals was over.

Huge thanks must go to all at Northampton SC for consistently putting on a fantastic event - OD Neil for a well-thought out set of races to give us a full championship, Elaine for the constant provision of food, and the bar - who we drunk out of 'Doom' (Lee really should have seen this as a warning sign!).

A super event with an ever-closer fleet providing wonderfully close racing in a beautifully sociable atmosphere.

Congratulations to our very worthy Champion Richard and we'll see you all again next year.