

A First-Timer's Round the Island Race – Steve Mitchell

After a few years of pondering I finally took the plunge and entered into this year's Round the Island Race. Father-in-law Billy was up for the challenge, so I set about preparing *Spray* for the big day. New flares had to be bought, and my Silva hiking compass was going to be inadequate according to the rules, so a steering compass was purchased and fitted. I had heard how some Shrimper owners stripped their boats of non-essentials for racing, which brought me to re-evaluate *Spray's* necessities. In no more than half an hour she had lost about 150kg in weight! I just did not realise how much junk I had on board. Billy was a bit perturbed to find the portapotti had been replaced with the trusty rubber bucket. The list of items removed would make this article too long!

We set off in the lean machine from Bucklers Hard to our overnight anchorage in Osborne Bay on the evening of 22nd June. After a couple of beers we hit the sack. To be honest I didn't sleep a wink, nervous of the dawn start the next day.

An exhilarating experience amongst the tens of boats starting, I played it safe and kept to the middle of the line. If I had kept any semblance of boat log I would be able to detail our times at certain points of the course. I didn't, such was the concentration to keep boat speed. *Spray* performed brilliantly in her lighter condition. I tried to keep to the middle of the Solent, hopefully where we would get

more favourable tide. Having watched the race last year from the Island, I was worried about the bottleneck at the Needles. No such worry this year as we passed close to the rocks with clean air all around us.



A First-Timer's Round the Island Race

We chased *Porthilly Dreamer* (851) as hard as we could and were also mindful of the Cape Cutter *Sanuk* not far behind. This lead we actually built on, to our glee. However, losing the boathook cum spinnaker pole within 15 minutes of the downwind leg to the south of the Island did not help. Such was my commitment to the race that I didn't turn round and sacrificed the pole, which floated quickly away astern of us. Rounding Dunnose point is where I made the fatal mistake. Other Shrimpers behind were taking the inshore route and catching fast. *Mustang Sally* (790) did so and was making good speed. But even the best make mistakes: it was good to hear in post-race interviews that Ellen Macarthur's boat only just missed the Bembridge Ledge buoy, realising their mistake at the last minute. However we tore across Ryde Sands (a Shrimper advantage) as numerous yachts followed to their peril. The finish was an exciting if not dangerous beat approach just as the tide was turning, and we finished 3rd, just under 7 minutes behind the first Shrimper. Not bad after nearly 11 and a half hours at the helm.

Collecting our goody bag from the Declaration Barge was by far the most difficult manoeuvre of the day. Trying to keep *Spray* stationary in a long line of much larger yachts by going astern against tide and wind with a 4hp outboard was a little trying, to say the least. On submission of our declaration we made for the Beaulieu River entrance in now freshening winds. It had been a long day and we settled down at anchor to reheat some of Beryl's (mother-in-law gets a mention) homemade stew before falling asleep after half a beer. Now that is a first!

Shrimper Results, Round the Island Race 2007

Sail No.	Name	Finished	Elapsed	Position
790	<i>Mustang Sally</i>	16:24:53	11:14:53	1
851	<i>Porthilly Dreamer</i>	16:29:13	11:19:13	2
19	<i>Spray</i>	16:30:06	11:20:06	3
785	<i>Eclipse</i>	16:44:39	11:34:39	4
807	<i>Snowgoose 2</i>	18:12:55	13:02:55	5

Steve Mitchell *Spray* (19)

(photo courtesy of David Harding (www.sailingscenes.co.uk))

Note to self : Will try harder in 2008.