

Fireball Nationals Racing Report

by Martin Herbert, Fireball #1205

July 23-25 2017

We had a great event and both Greg and I were very pleased with how we sailed. There were ten races over three days, mostly in good wind and with excellent Race Committee work by Rupert Holmes-Smith (a six times National Champion himself). We got better as a team as the racing progressed and worked together very well. I could not have had a better crew than Greg. Fourteen teams took part, all racing together with the three classic boats keeping score for the Classic Trophy and bottle of rum. My good friend Matt Law, who has a very fast modern boat, chose to dig out his old classic and go head to head with me, which added extra spice to the event. Vincent well knows Matt's tenacity and ability to make good calls on the water after having traded the lead with him eight times in the last Round Saltspring Race before the time limit called it a tie. Matt won his division in the previous RSSI race.

In the overall event we managed to stay in the top half of the fleet, finishing seventh. In the daily reports we were described thus:

"Another boat and sailor of note was Martin Herbert racing on Fireball #1205. Amazingly Martin won the original Canadian National Championship 50 years ago. Still racing, that old dude and that old woody were fast. Martin scored two third place finishes over the regatta. Just fabulous to see that old rig cooking through the water. "

The regatta was won by Debbie Kirkby and Gregg Ferguson who won six of the ten races. I first met Debbie when she was six years old; she came running down the dock and pushed me in the water for beating her dad in a race. We have been firm friends ever since. Second place went to Mianne Erne and Clay Poulson, our Swiss/American team. Fireballs have always been a female friendly boat and we had four female skippers in this event, two at the top of the podium and all in the top ten.

In the classic division we managed four wins. Matt took the other six to win the rum and also 4th place overall. In the sixth race we had a tremendous battle up the first leg where we crossed them with three inches to spare. On the next tack they crossed us but had to do a quick bare-away to swing the transom clear of our bow. It was beautifully done with our bow going over their transom, depressed by the heeling, with the same three inch gap, but vertical rather than horizontal. At the final cross on the lay line to the windward mark we were roaring in on Port set to do a classic lee bow manoeuvre when my life jacket caught the boom and we were swimming. Greg got the boat up swiftly from a complete turtle

position and then executed one of my more colourful commands, “grab me by the life jacket and haul me in like a dead fish”. No sooner said than done, good going Greg. We shook ourself off, bailed the boat and gave chase, passing three boats to come 11th. At the lee mark we threw in a clearing tack and amazingly our lunch bag floated into view and Greg scooped it aboard. All was well in the world.

Thanks to all the club members who sent well wishes. Special thanks to Rob Denny for sailing over and acting as camera boat for Amy Melious, who got some great shots of the racing. I like the one that shows us leading the 8th race with Debbie hot on our heels. I am not dragging the spinnaker sheet to give her a chance and Greg will soon remind me to get it aboard.

The event was held on lands of the Cowichan Tribe and on one evening we were able to help unload their racing canoes and talk with the builders and racers. It was a magic moment for me when I got to run my hand over a boat called Red Feather while talking to the man who built it, suddenly a common language across two cultures. Boating was very formative in my life and it was great to see the young Cowichans so involved and so passionate.