

Extracts from a J/24's experiences of Cowes Week....

By William Lack, Vinyl Solutions – GBR 4067

“And the course for IRC class 7, starting at 11.50hrs, is as follows....

3K to port, 3S to starboard, 3E to port, 3P to starboard, 2R to port, 3F to port, and finish at the Squadron Line.”

Decipher that!! With ten minutes to go before our start I was crouched down below, checking the course, which then had to be drawn onto a waterproof chart which we velcroed to the bulkhead in the cockpit. Cowes Week Radio was doing their race commentary which had to be listened to. Which side shall we tie the spinnaker for the first downwind leg? Where did that chinagraph pencil roll too? Don't forget to tack me !! Helmsman, son Simon, trimmer (Simon's brother in law) Ian, spinnaker trimmer, daughter Emma and foredeck guru (Emma's former sailing companion) Brendan, were throwing Vinyl Solutions about, tacking from side to side to get the best position, and generally tying themselves, and me, in knots. The courses, at Cowes Week are only read out on VHF, and only twice, and, only ten minutes before your start, and you can bet your bottom dollar that the reading will inevitably be interrupted with “ready about” or “here are the spinnaker sheets” or “can I have my spray top” or “where did you say the windward mark is?”. And, of course, it was blowing a nice steady 20 knots which was responsible for a few additional bruises. Oh, the joys of yacht racing in a J24 !! And this was day one of a promised, seven!!

Simon and Emma had decided, in the autumn of 2012, that as 2013 was to be Simon's 30th year on planet Earth, and as I have been around twice as long, that we should make an effort to sail together at Cowes Week.

Problem one was that we didn't have a boat and the other observation was that we had never sailed competitively together before, so it was quite a call. Whilst partaking of a swift half at Parkstone Yacht Club, after an autumn series evening race, a suggestion was mooted that might have answered problem number one. The J24 "Vinyl Solutions" was used by the Youth section of the Club and, if palms were sufficiently crossed, she might be available for "charter" next year. I had initially thought of a Swan 45, but beggars and choosers came to mind, and, after all, I had been sailing one of these big dinghies for a good few years, and, amazingly, the Club authorities were happy to trust me with their prized asset!!

Observation no. 2 ...well, we'll find out

A deal was swiftly struck before minds could be changed and I found myself with a list of maintenance jobs on board "Vinyl Solutions" which promised to take a few winter weekends. An echo sounder was purchased and fitted, an outboard bracket likewise, paint was applied throughout, teak was scrubbed, plywood was cut and varnished, winches were dismantled and remantled, pushpit and pulpit were removed, resealed and replaced, and so it went on...actually it was great fun, not only because I am a masochist, but because the boat was, initially, looking rather sad for itself and I felt we were giving her a new lease of life, and giving her a revitalised spring to her keel . The decks were still a bit squidgy, the gelcoat crazed in several places but, she was to be ours for a few weekends prior to Cowes, and then for a whole week at.....The Week !!

Spring came suddenly and the first “training” weekend was upon us. Team uniform was garnered from a well known wet weather gear company so we were definitely the boys, and girl, with all the gear and.....

A decision was made to enter the Taittinger Trophy weekend at Yarmouth in early July, to see how we got on. We were joined by two other Parkstone J24's, Duncan McCarthy's Madeleine, and William Pollock's Flying Colours. Taittinger is a champagne manufacturer and they have, apparently, been sponsoring this event for several years, and the Socials on Friday and Saturday are not to be missed, so that's just what we did !! “We are entering to practice for the real thing so we should try and take it a bit seriously” ...yeah..a seriously bad decision!!

However, the Regatta was really good fun and we even managed a third place in one race in our fleet of 12. Of course Duncan won all three races to show us how it should be done!! We crossed the finishing line on Sunday with the spinnaker up, and didn't take it down until we entered the Parkstone Marina, great sail!!

Now towards the real thing, the flat was booked ages ago, but the list of requirements seemed to get longer rather than shorter, and the wallet emptier and emptier. First Aid kit, flares, mini loo, spinnaker sheets, foghorn, torch, tidal flow diagrams, marina berth, food, ferry for Sue and the car, flags, RORC rating forms, Solent hazards book, Solent charts, Dodgers with sail no., waypoints into

the Garmin, check the VHF and Charger. It doesn't seem a lot now, but, at the time.....



“Mid tack on Saturday”

First day, Saturday, was breezy, but once we had got over the initial hesitancy about spinnaker flying, we had an amazingly exhilarating ride and as we crossed the finishing line a cannon fired in our direction. It was almost as loud as the cheers on board “Vinyl Solutions”. First over the line, but, sadly, demoted to fifth in class. Nonetheless a fantastic first race.

Sunday, another cannon (4th on handicap), Monday, yet another but (6th on handicap), Tuesday abandoned. “We are going to have to sail a perfect race, or Jo Richards (on board his H boat K9 called Woof) was going to have to make a serious mistake, if we are to stay top !!” and then.....

Extract from Cowes Week daily report, Wednesday

*At the other end of the IRC fleet, **Class 7** encompasses a wide mix of different styles of boat, including E-Boats, Contessa 26s, David Kirkley’s 1959 39ft Nicholson Contessa, Mini Tonners and Hunter Impalas. At the start of today’s race, from the Bramble line, it was Jo Richard’s H-Boat Woof and Madelaine and Isobella Donald’s Folkboat Madelaine that led the fleet*

away at the committee boat end of the line. However, Richards, winner of the first three races, had crossed the line moments before the gun and was scored OCS. Madelaine was quickly overtaken by the Lack Family's J/24 Vinyl Solutions, who went on to win on corrected time by a margin of almost eight minutes.

HOORAY !!!! OK, that's done it, we can go home now. We had made a good navigation call, to finish well ahead of the rest of the fleet, and Mr. Richards was scored OCS.

Ever so meekly, we went to collect our Race Winners Flag from the Cowes Week Results Office, and celebrated all the way home !!!



Thursday, doing well, but the jib halliard broke, so demoted to 8th on handicap, and Friday we suffered from last day blues, so, despite doing well initially, we, OK..I., made a wrong tidal call and we sailed our way to a discard !! oops. However, we did enjoy the run into the finishing line as we overtook an Impala 28 (yellow spinnaker) and several Class 6 yachts, as we crept along the Cowes Parade, to stay out of the adverse tide. The spectators, fishermen and even the jet

skiers were waiting for the crunch of keel on gravel but, it's OK, I've done it before (lump in throat !!)



Friday night is Cowes Week Fireworks Night which was spectacular, but nothing can ever eclipse the preceding display by the famous, and amazing, Red Arrows.

What FUN !! Next year ?? Know of a Swan 45 anyone ??