

ROLEX FASTNET RACE

14 - 19 AUGUST 2011

THE CREW



BRITISH KEELBOAT ACADEMY SQUAD MEMBERS

WITH DAVID AISHER, OWNER OF YEOMAN OF WIGHT

HENRY SMITH, Skipper/Navigator, 22 years old, from Oxford, studying at Plymouth University

STEVE AIKEN, Main, 23 years old, a sail maker from Southampton

JAMES BROWN, Trim 1/Bow, 24 years old, from Southampton, studying at Exeter University

ROBIN ELSEY, Helm 2, 18 years old, from Falmouth, Cornwall, just finished 'A' Levels

ALEX GARDNER, Trim 2, 21 years old, a sailing instructor from Isle of Wight

SAM MATSON, Helm, 20 years old, from Ottery St. Mary, Devon, studying at Plymouth University

JAMES O'MAHONY, Main/mast, 21 years old, from Cork, Ireland, studying at Southampton University

NEIL PAYNE, Bowman, 20 years old, from Leicester, studying at Portsmouth University

THE YACHT



INTIMIDATING THE OPPOSITION IN OUR NEIL PYRDE OFFSHORES AT
THE START!

DAVID AISHER'S J109 YEOMAN OF WIGHT

THE RESULTS

RESULTS: 132 OVERALL 17 IRC 3

GBR1242R	Yeoman of Wight	J/109	British Keelboat Academy	4 - 12:15:00	1.029	4 - 15:23:21
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THE EXPERIENCE

“INTENSE AND EPIC!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

The Rolex Fastnet was a totally unforgettable, awesome experience and it was a privilege to be a member of the crew of David Aisher's great yacht Yeoman of Wight. I had never anticipated taking part in this major offshore race when I started keel boat racing last summer and becoming a member of the British Keelboat Academy after my Laser Standard Season.

Sam Matson and I had a great build up to the Race. We worked for Artemis Offshore Academy in the two weeks before and during Cowes Week. After training to familiarise ourselves with the Artemis Figaro we spent Cowes Week racing in IRC2. We had a fantastic experience doing corporate racing and entertaining. Figaro's are really great fun to race and we experience a great variety of conditions throughout the racing week that held us in good stead for the Fastnet.

Broaching and gear breakages were perhaps not what was expected of us but the clients thoroughly enjoyed themselves which was what it was all about. My being deluged by a huge wave when working on the bow was a highlight, at least to their point of view!



YEOMAN AT HAMBLE YACHT SERVICES

We left from Hamble Yacht Services where Yeoman was moored. The previous day the yacht had been prepared by the rest of the crew as Sam and I were still working although there was still plenty to do when we got there. By doing the preparation the day before leaving was quite a relaxed affair. This was fortunate as we were photographed by Dan Wilson Photography in the great offshore gear that was provided by Simon Bennett and Neil Pyrde.



MODELLING ADVICE FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHER!

It was great for crew morale to have a real team identity and we definitely looked the part. I think this really gave us a boost at the start as everyone was so impressed by our Neil Pyrdé outfits that the opposition was a bit intimidated as we looked so professional. It is just a shame that the impression did not last long although we had a brilliant start!

Leaving the Solent was very windy but the weather calmed and lighter winds were experienced as we neared The Lizard. Unfortunately, we suffered both GPS and engine failure on this leg of the journey and were seriously considering having to stop at Penzance when both were sorted and we were able to continue.

It was dark when we rounded Land's End and ploughed on into the Celtic Sea when everything kicked off in a big way and it got very real. Just about every condition you read about huge waves and strong winds; may be not what you want to experience but great fun for all that!

Rounding the Fastnet Rock was in the dark but it was cool to see this iconic lighthouse looming out of the night sky. Sailing back to the Isles of Scilly was a good trip, blasting down on jib top. We made great headway and hoped that we would be able to crack on down The Channel. But Cornish weather put an end to our challenge turning light and shifty, leaving the fleet languishing off Fowey when the light winds finally gave up. This made for a very frustrating end to the race. We had hoped for something much more of a competitive challenge as before the wind dropped we were in a good position to mount a strong challenge. But sailing is so dependent on the vagaries of the wind.

The breeze did not kick in again until early evening so that our expected time of arrival went from 1800 to our actual finish at 0005 the following morning! Then there was the long slog into Sutton Harbour who just had enough room for us fortunately as all the other yachts were sent over to Plymouth Yacht Harbour. The cheers and lights from the quayside were very welcome. It was great to be back and we all had enjoyed the challenging experience.

It was a truly memorable race from which I have gained a wealth of experiences from the huge seas, the wind at night, crew dynamics, the welcome sight of dolphins following the yacht and the sheer exhilaration of taking part in this great iconic race!

There were some downsides in delights of being continually damp although the offshore gear kept me warm and dry, being hosed down by a huge wave while answering a call of nature did not help! Food was again a problem. I think I should have experimented with the freeze dried menu prior to departure as rehydration was a problem but most of the crew enjoyed them. The high energy soups proved to be best. But we had plenty of chocolate and Dorset Cereal bars to augment our diet so hunger was not an issue. When one is so involved in racing you do not always feel the need to eat although it is important to keep up your energy levels which was why we chose high calorie meals.



SNACKING ON DORSET CEREAL BARS

But it was great to get home and get tucked in to a steak from Calenick Farm Butchers. It tasted like nectar from the gods! A good long bath was equally pleasurable!

I had to leave the boat at Plymouth rather than returning to Hamble. I thought I would need to deal with the UCAS Clearing system as my 'A' Level results were published on 18th and although mum had picked them up she would not open the envelope. But driving home I found out I was off to Southampton Uni as I had got the grades!!!!!!!!!!!!!! So I had successfully finished the Rolex Fastnet and got into University in the same day. Southampton too, so I will be able to continue my keelboat career.

During the summer I have met some great sailors and received some brilliant advice as well as gaining some invaluable experience. But if it weren't for the support from The Lord Lieutenant's Fund for Youth, The John Merrick's Trust, The RYA, Optimist, Topper, Laser Radial and Standard Squads, RYA UKSA Keelboat Academy together with the individuals and

local Rotary Clubs I would not have been able to follow my dream of one day being involved in the Volvo Ocean Race. Although I have a long way to go to fulfil that part of my dream to take part in the Rolex Fastnet has been a great step forward.

**THANKS TO EVERYONE, I REALLY DO APPRECIATE YOUR
HELP**

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