

A dinghy race at Fidlers Ferry on the River Mersey



Everything looked calm and then the tide came in! When a big tide hits the 'Ferry' you can see and hear it. A big wave surges past bringing a healthy depth of water to race large dinghies. Sometimes a very big tide will actually cover the launch area, which makes it easier for those who meant to sail that day and a bit of a surprise for those who hadn't secured their boat.

At our pre race briefing two newcomers have turned up with reasonable wet gear, which is good news. We need new members to survive – one opts for a sail in a Falcon and the other takes a ride in the safety boat. Today's tide was a modest affair but we still let it run for half an hour before launching the boats. There were ten boats ranging from a single-handed Topper to some three person Falcons and two safety boats.

The course was set out to towards Widnes and then a long run up to Monks Bridge in Warrington and, for once, we weren't last to start. The beat to windward was a bit wet and crowded but once round the first marker the boats had spread out to reflect their various speeds (a handicap system gives the smaller boats a fighting chance).

The water is good and deep near the 'Ferry' pub and was running fast so we zipped along and were soon broad reaching in a steady breeze as the Mersey twists its way towards Warrington. The big challenge is to make best use of the width of water but we're already aground. It's difficult to judge how to play the drying banks as the tide rises but the grinding halt is a fair indicator that we got it wrong. We may have stopped but the wind keeps blowing and mild pandemonium breaks out as we try to stop being blown over or irrevocably driven onto the bank. Thankfully we break clear just as the safety boat arrives to mock our predicament and we're off again striving to make ground on the fleet that has just disappeared round the next bend. Bucketing water out of the bilges lightens the boat and we pick up speed. Yes, another boat has just over tested the limits of the water and we call out some words of encouragement as we pass by.



The trick is to round the Warrington marker just as the tide turns. Get there too late and we will struggle to make the last few meters as those lucky enough to have rounded the mark fly back with the tide in their favour.

Today we're ok and are soon beating back towards the 'Ferry' and a reviving bowl of soup in the clubhouse. First though we have to get the boats out of the water and stowed, which is a team effort made easier with a winch. Then clean the boats down, chat about the sail and plan the next. 'Last place' is a good solid platform to build on and we had a lot of fun in the process.