

Sailing

Australia keeping firm grip on Admiral's Cup

Bob Fisher at Cowes sees the fleet make a brisk start to the 206-mile Channel Race

AUSTRALIAN hopes of retaining the overall lead in the Champagne Mumm Admiral's Cup were high as the fleet of 22 completed the inshore circuit yesterday at the start of the 206-mile Channel Race.

Syd Fischer's Ragamuffin was at the front and her teammates Great News II and Ninja were both handily placed.

A spirited start in 15 knots of south-westerly breeze saw the Dutch helmsman Bouwe Bekkings claim the best start from the Royal Yacht Squadron line. With a quick tack just after the gun, Bekkings took Bert Dolk's Promotion from the inshore end across the front of the other boats, all of which were on right-of-way starboard tack.

Chris Law's Indulgence led the pursuers as they beat to windward for five miles to the West Lepe buoy, but it was Ragamuffin who made the biggest gain, Peter Gilmour making a calculated move into the middle of the Solent while the majority were inshore trying to avoid the worst of the foul tide.

The flood had just begun and, as it turned first along the mainland shore, Ragamuffin may have been in slightly less

adverse tide in the centre of the West Solent, rounding the buoy in the lead. By then the flood was running hard, as other competitors discovered to their cost.

Indulgence was fourth to that mark, 45 seconds down on Ragamuffin as she began the short reach across to the Salt Mead buoy before the long run eastwards to the Nab Tower.

From there the fleet will be heading south-west to a mid-channel marker, EC2, for a shuttle to Poole Fairway and then to another mid-channel mark, EC3, before making for a mark off Rustington and back into the Solent.

Corum Saphir approached West Lepe inside Container and Jamieson 3 but her skipper Pierre Mas misjudged his line in the ever increasing current and tried to shoot the boat directly into the wind. This was a grave mistake and Corum Saphir hit the mark. She was lucky to escape this incident undamaged but she had to perform a 720-degree penalty turn before setting off in pursuit of the rest of the 50-footers.

Jamieson 2 led in the 45ft Two Ton division, Dave Cummins steering the Irish boat to the front of his group on the

first leg, lying 18 seconds ahead of Davide de Genarro's Larouge by No Man's Land Fort in the eastern Solent.

Britain's Provezza Source overcame a slightly worrying start when the crew were unable to pull on the new running backstay after a jibe off Cowes. They were in third place as they headed towards the Nab Tower and were making ground on the leaders.

After heavy overnight repairs to her keel and rudder Pinta was leading the 40ft One Ton division for Germany from Corum Diamant. GBE International, skippered by Glyn Charles, suffered from starting at the outer end of the line and was fifth of the seven boats.

Missing from the action was the Irish 40-footer Jamieson 1, who was salvaged after her sinking in the first race but found to be too badly damaged to repair. Her skipper Harold Cudmore asked to substitute another yacht but the International Jury rejected his request, citing the express terms of the event.

Cudmore replied by pointing to a precedent set in 1979, when the Brazilian team was allowed to replace a yacht damaged in the first race. Race officials have since indicated that, if Cudmore can obtain the unanimous agreement of the other teams, a substitution will be allowed.

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