

Checkmate's adventure in Torquay

Half Ton Cup

August 3rd – 9th

Last year's (2024) half ton cup was in Nieuwpoort (not Newport !!) Belgium. Trailing Checkmate to Nieuwpoort had involved a truly epic journey which resulted in Will (Boland) Mark Lewis and myself staying awake for more than 36 hours but that is another story! To learn that the 2025's regatta was in Torquay was a huge relief.

Trailing Checkmate to the event was a simple 3-hour trip. The boat was entered, crew registered, accommodation booked, and crane in/mast stepped organised. What could possibly go wrong?

With almost 30 boats entered and a list of crews including Olympic medallist, and National and World champions we knew that the competition would be tough

Royal Torbay Yacht Club have a great history of running significant regattas and we were all looking forward to a well organised competitive week.

The accommodation was brilliant easily housing 7 crew and close to the yacht club. It was an Air B&B with the owners living on the ground floor and our flat in the basement. I should have known that the week was going to be tough when on arrival the hosts a husband-and-wife couple invited me to look at the rest of the house. Two / three hours and several large whiskies later the crew called off the search as I walked (stumbled) into the flat.

Monday was scheduled to be the first day of racing but a short walk down to the harbour confirmed that it was blowing hard, very hard. It seems to me that the whole season has been plagued by high winds. Undeterred we took advantage of the postponement to enjoy a hearty Devon breakfast. Waiting for the organisers to make up their mind on whether to race or not we took the opportunity to inspect the other half tonners and chat to the crews. A number of people have invested huge sums in the hulls and rigs. Whilst some looked extraordinary but I find it difficult to justify the sums of money involved. Luckily for us mere mortals we often benefit when the half tonners turn up in the classified after the expenditure.

Enough to say it was a true pleasure to be amongst such beautiful race yachts and experienced racers. The first day's racing was eventually cancelled as the flags staffs were still bending which meant we had some extra time at the sponsored pontoon party. However, whilst preparing the boat and looking for the sheets, we discovered that they were missing. They were not in the car or at the flat but My wife's short search in the garage in Cardiff discovered their location. A journey to Gordano services was needed to meet my long-suffering wife (Kate) to get the sheets. As an aside Kate rarely mentioned this episode in the following months (!).

Tuesday dawned with the winds easing. The race officers were keen to get as many races in as possible to catch up. The races were very competitive with many general recalls and close, close competition. With all the boats having similar speed there was little room for error.

Racing was epic but an OCS and a dodgy port/starboard did not help our overall result.

Thursday's race was the long offshore which carried 1.5 points and not discardable. The wind was

gusting 27 knots and the race involved a 13-mile beat into a significant formation of waves. On the beat after much pleading with the navigator to reveal the windward mark, the red/white object of our desire emerged from the driving rain. We were in the top group of 4/5 yachts, and we slowly came to the realisation that we would have to carry a spinnaker all the way back to Torquay in 27 knots and very large waves. We normally have a long discussion over which spinnaker to fly. Suffice to say the discussion was short and S4 (the smallest) was readied for launch. The mark was rounded the S4 launched, the jib was dropped and the crew all ran to the stern . Quooka and Headhunter were close behind so easing off was not an option. We got home a lot quicker, in one piece without a broach and in front of our closest rivals. Result.

I will not dwell on the following series of protests which are worth an essay in their own right. To give you a flavour the three members of the committee had a total age approaching 250 years, I am not kidding. I have not been treated with such indifference since I was in junior school with nuns as teachers. The situation was not helped by the fact

that of the 6 yachts that were protested I was the only person whose first language was English. In hindsight it was hilarious and would have been a great comedy sketch but whilst living through the investigation it was difficult to appreciate the funny side. It concluded after hours of debate that the Race Officer had made a mistake and we were all exonerated.

The last races were held in virtually no wind and as a result became a lottery. They were held in a desperate attempt to complete a minimum number of races.

Socially the week was superb with sponsored pontoon parties, barbeques and Plymouth Gin evenings all contributing to a great atmosphere. The majority of the crews were from the continent which led to a number of hilarious misunderstandings. The prize giving was hosted at the Imperial Hotel and well attended by people who looked vaguely familiar but far better dressed and well behaved.

In all of this enthusiastic socialising the Checkmate crew had the dubious honour of being banned from the Irish Pub on the harbour in Torquay. (For further

details please ask Owen as it involved a lighted Sambuca and body parts.)

As painful heads were nursed Checkmate was manoeuvred, mast lifted and all craned onto her trailer. The dockside crew were brilliant, and nothing was too much trouble. They even gave us the combination to the locks of their yard on the quayside which allowed us to leave car, boat and trailer there to facilitate an early morning departure. Checkmate is a bit of a lump to tow and Torquay we discovered has some narrow bits not helped by a number of carelessly parked double decker buses but in a surprisingly short time we were driving back through the gates of C.B.Y.C. safely home.

I have been fortunate to have raced yachts for more years than I care to admit having started in a firefly and progressing to a mirror however 4 races a day followed by an enthusiastic social evening was hard work and it took me at least a week to recover.

The crew/Checkmate/trailer/car all performed perfectly. The organisation was good. The competitors were fierce on the water and the best

company in the bar. The protest committee were daunting and unnecessarily severe but obviously great material for subsequent retelling of the experience.

Next year's half ton regatta is in Norway and despite some attractive sponsorship we have decided that it could be a bit of a challenge for one week's racing. The costs are substantial and that would be before the first round of drinks. Cowes week is far closer, and the voting of the Checkmate crew is favouring that regatta as we all enjoyed it in 2023. At least 4 competitive half tonners have already decided on Cowes so I think the decision is made. The only slight worry is that we have to drive past the DVSA in Swindon who took a real interest in Checkmate as we were driving to Belgium last year (but that is another story)

We finished 7th overall and we all agreed (as per the school report) we could have done better but and OCS and a costly Port/Starboard didn't help but with over twenty half tonners racing we always enjoyed extremely close racing with all yachts very closely matched and well sailed.

We are always learning

Boat:

Checkmate IRL 2016

Half tonner built 1984

Designed by Rob Humphries

Crew:

Mark (navigator) Lewis

Geoff (breast stroke) Carter

Simon (the twelve year old) Gadsby

Gethin (is he awake?) Gronow

Jack (starting guru) Preece

Owen (Sambuca kid) Kinsella

Phil (uncle) Cook