

2019 RS800 Runners and Riders

With days to go until the 20th anniversary Volvo Noble Marine RS800 Nationals at Eastbourne, it's time for the annual runners and rider piece in which we examine just who are the favourites to be running and riding their way onto the podium. Before I begin, let me remind you that this is no ordinary nationals. The RS800 is twenty, yes 2-0 years old, and the competition is looking as fierce as ever. Lurking around in the 40+ entries are everyone from National Champions from days gone by, to recent 29er graduates; all hoping to set their eyes on the prize.

Andy and Allyson Jeffries

First up, the home team: Andy and Allyson Jeffries. Having shone at the Europeans recently in Garda, taking home the silver medal, we are quaking in our boots at the form these guys are in. No stranger to the RS800, as well as an Eastbourne Nationals, these two will almost definitely be found in one of two places: a) the bar or b) at the front of the fleet on a windy day.

Tom Morris and 'Hi I'm Guy' Fillmore

Having spent approximately 95% of the Winter daylight hours either sailing or making videos of sailing, Tom and Guy have found a new gear this year. With Tom having finally improved his gybing technique (pew), it's all to play for. These two well and truly wiped the floor last year at Weymouth and there's nothing to say that they can't do it again. Will they be able to stay away from those spiky Italian RIB hooks? We'll have to wait and see...

Luke and Emma McEwen

After a short hiatus due to injury, it's likely that Luke and Emma have been sailing more times in the past few weeks than I've been all year. Not that they need it. These two are stalwarts at the front of the fleet, winning multiple Europeans and Nationals titles over the past couple of years. So fast in the breeze and even faster in the light airs that they are often found to be politely giving the fleet a headstart on the start-line. But then it's only a matter of minutes before the Gul machine comes racing past. How will they fare in the biggest nationals of the past decade? Will they be able to fend off Tom & Guy?

Hugh Shone and Hannah Tattersall

For the entertainment of the post-sailing reports, we have to hope that Hannah and Hugh sit in third for most of the regatta. I joke. Sort of. They are also no stranger to an Eastbourne nationals, and having been on or around the podium for most of the events this year, this might just be their time. Often found larking around with the Dart 18 fleet at Swanage Sailing club, they are not short of practice on and off the water. If the breeze freshens then they could just clinch it.

Frances and Tom Partington

Can't quite believe I got this far down without mentioning the Hayling dream team. Having managed to 'stay friends' on their way to victory at the Europeans in Garda, Frances and Tom will be the ones to beat. Often found either out playing with Tom and Guy, or at the front of the 2nd-best skiff class in the country, it clearly all comes together in the RS800 where they have found a 6th gear. They're also not afraid of a duel and snuck past Stevie and Rory on the final day of the Europeans. These two certainly bring a competitive edge and plenty of pedigree to the battle for the podium.

Phil Walker aka Crispin Beaumont and John Mather

Safe to say that we are genuinely shocked if Phil and John turn up a) on time b) with a full boat and c) with two sailors. If that happens, we could be in for a treat. With Phil dipping out, John has allegedly snapped up top helm Crispin, who was found at the front of the 29er fleet not long ago. With the RS800 proving a good stomping ground for ex-29er sailors, these two could be scary.

James Penty and Eddie Grayson

Turns out that practice makes perfect. James and Eddie apparently sought out the smallest Yorkshire pond they could find in order to...work on their speed. How they manage it, I'm not quite sure, but it seems to work and they found themselves safely in the top 10 at Garda. Barring 'weed stopping play' over the Summer months, it's almost certain these guys will be challenging for the top spot.

Stevie Wilson and Harvey Hillary

What a pairing. I wasn't entirely sure how to give this blast from the past an intro, so I'll let google do the talking: *"Formally Head of High Performance & Innovation for the British Sailing Team and UK Sport 'Elite Coach', Harvey now advises individuals, teams and organisations in delivering optimal performance & maximising competitive advantage."* Wow. Buzzword bingo. Stevie and Harvey stormed their way to the top in the last nationals they sailed together, at Hayling in 2012, but can they do it again? If Stevie can pull himself away from helping the rest of the fleet fix their boats, as well as knock some sense into Harvey, then these two will be frightening.

Rory Hunter and Steph Orton

In their debut Nationals last year they came 3rd in a 17-year-old boat and are looking even hotter this year. Rory has now won the Waszp Nationals, Europeans and Worlds, and Steph crews an FX in the British Sailing Team so these two have the credentials to match their youthful athleticism. Definitely ones to watch!

James Date and James Green

Another blast from the past but certainly no strangers to the RS800 Nationals podium, the only question about this pairing is whether they will be able to perform as well on the water as they did all those years ago? If the last Eastbourne nationals is anything to go by, then you don't have to look past the number one spot to find James Date. Having been absent for a few years since, will they be able to find their way round an RS800 again?

Pete Barton and Chris Feibusch

As chief missionary of the RS Aero, Pete is the main culprit for their rapid rise to fame. The real question here though is that with all this Aero-ness flowing through his soul making him feel light and bubbly coupled with arms undoubtedly fatigued from non-stop RS Aero drum banging, will he be in fit shape to compete for the podium with Chris? They have probably not had as much time on the water as they would have liked but it won't take long for them to get back up to speed. Boat handling might take longer as I'm sure Chris has to wear ear plugs to keep himself safe from the sales pitch, but they will definitely be up there and competing for top spot!

Tim Gratton and Fiona Hampshire

Having spent a bit too much time sailing other boats, we're doing a 'Phil and John' this year and rocking up for the weekend fresh from Torbay. We didn't quite find the right gear in Garda, but perhaps all the practice in the J70 will transfer nicely over to the RS800? Not sure, but we'll have to find out.

The Unknowns

You never know who's going to be on the startline until you get there, and with entries open until the last minute, rumours are circling about who else might show up. Steve Irish? A few of our European friends? Some quick young guns who take themselves down in the bar? I'm hoping for all three to be honest. Whatever happens, the 2019 RS800 nationals is shaping up to be a cracker.

Online entry is now closed so come along and enter in person on paper at registration. All the info is on the event website here: <https://www.rs800.org/championships/cindex.asp?clselect=Home&eid=1777>

Report by Fiona Hampshire