

Wind makes for breathtaking sailing

NEAR gale gusts led to dinghies "flying around the course" and capsizing in races off Fisherrow at Musselburgh on Sunday.

Eleven boats were on the start line of what promised to be a fun event with a favourable wind but unexpectedly the wind strengthened and suddenly the fleet was being knocked down.

A spokesperson for Fisherrow Yacht Club explained that capsizes were "very much part of the exhilaration of sailing" but the cold waters and the energy to pull boats upright could be "very tiring" so many of the dinghies did not complete all three races.

Mark McClelland, former club commodore who won two of the races, said: "The forecast looked great for a sail. Finally, after a week of cold rain, the sun was visible and bringing some much needed heat and an exciting southerly wind."



A dinghy capsizes off Fisherrow amidst strong winds on Sunday. Photo: Angus Bathgate

"When the wind is from the south, conditions are always tricky sailing out of Fisherrow. The air coming over the land, over Edinburgh and around Arthur's Seat, over trees and rooftops, becomes turbulent, like water rushing down a stony river bed.

"Pockets of high wind drop from the atmosphere and hit the seas, spreading out in random directions; very tricky for the sailors."

He added: "We launched 11 boats and sailed a brilliant first race with plenty of excitement. The gusts combined with flat water, meaning that at any point the boats will take off into turbo mode. However, the gusts kept building throughout the day, getting heavier and harder to handle. One by one, the less experienced or wiser dinghy sailors decided to call it a day and head for shore.

"We were down to six boats for the second race, with many capsizes happening as the gusts hit. Still the wind speed in the gusts built further."

The final race, won by new member Elliot Hurst, saw boats "flying around the course" and the wind speed picked up another notch.

Mr McClelland said: "To be honest we were now into conditions that were too hard to handle. At several points, 80 per cent of the fleet were capsized as 'near gale' gusts swept over the city and hit the water. It was time to hit the beach but of course the wind was coming directly off the beach, pushing us to Fife. Our safety boat driver Ben Saunders was up to the task and performed brilliantly, assisting those who were struggling, towing them through the wind safely back to the beach."

Max Blinkhorn, who was also in the race and had his own capsized to manage, said: "All our safety boat training paid dividends."

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