



# Nationals **diary**

**Kirsten Claiden-Yardley** describes the day our Fireball went for its first sail, at the Fireball National Championship in Brightlingsea! It was a true baptism of fire!

the nationals! We were rather overwhelmed by the kit before us and had little idea how to rig it. Up to that point, our Fireball experience consisted of a handful of outings at the start of 2007. In addition we had just rejoined sailing after breaks of 10 and four years; had limited experience of sailing with each other; and Andy had never used a spinnaker that hoisted from bags, sailed on the sea or competed outside club races!

In the run-up to the event we couldn't help wondering whether we were making a huge mistake! However, luckily for us, we quickly discovered that the rest of the fleet were very welcoming and happy to help us out. The boat started to attract attention as soon as our undercover was removed, probably something to do with the mirror-finish stickers on our hull! The novelty of these lasted all week and various people told us that the reflections when we were sailing looked great.

It is probably fair to say that our first Fireball nationals experience was an unusual one. Elated winners of the *Yachts and Yachting* 'Pimp my Dinghy' competition, we met our pimped boat for the very first time on the way to

**Below** The distinctive branding caught the eye.



## **A challenging first day**

Our first day's sailing in the boat was not perhaps our finest moment. As the top five boats finished the first race, we were not quite starting our second triangle. We managed to stay a bit closer to the rest of the fleet during the second race until our split mainsheet decided to knot itself up just when we needed to bear away at the windward mark. The resultant swim did at least allow us to sort the problem out and finish the race. We sailed back to shore, resolving that we should probably work out how to use the

# pimp my dinghy



PHOTOS: TIM BEES/FOTOBOUT

spinnaker if we wanted to have any chance of keeping up with the fleet!

## Tuning and tips

Monday morning saw us having our mast rake and spinnaker system sorted out for us. It transpired that we had sailed the previous day with a mast rake of 22ft 10ins. Apparently this is not a good idea when you have a combined crew weight of approximately 18 stone. Racing with 22ft 7ins rake and a functioning spinnaker we managed to perform much better in the next two races, even going so far as to beat some people on the water.

We continued this trend on Tuesday, posting our best result of the event by not being OCS under black flag. Not that it was much of an achievement given our cautious approach to starting – especially when sailing such a distinctive boat.

We returned from the layday on track for the perseverance trophy.

Apparently all we had to do was be the lowest boat that finished all races. So our aim was: no disqualifications or top 10 finishes in the final four races! It quickly turned out that the last point wasn't going to be a problem. We might have reached the

point where we could fix most issues on the boat without help, but we still couldn't seem to sail it quickly. We sailed the first race on Thursday with the language in the boat steadily going downhill, reflecting general frustration with wind, waves and our inability to sail fast in the conditions; it was our worst result of the week.

Happily, we had a more competitive day on the Friday, making the most of the light winds during the first race to pull back from a shaky start to 36th! Definitely our favourite result of the week, especially as we overtook boats upwind – a reversal of the trend up to that point. Stronger winds in the second race put paid to a repeat result.

We struggled with, and eventually survived without, the spinnaker along the reaches but this didn't dampen our spirits: we made it round the course one last time and clinched the perseverance trophy!

## To sum up our experience...

Altogether, we had an unforgettable week of sailing and it was a brilliant introduction to the class. We have to thank all the companies involved in 'pimping' our boat for giving us a whole stack of brilliant kit, but we also have to thank everyone who helped us to set it up and use it. We learned so much and, without them, we would still have been chasing the back of the fleet with the kite in its bag. So thank you to everybody who donated time, spares and advice to us over the week! We highly recommend the nationals as an event and the Fireball as a class. ■

**Below** Returning to competition after absences of four and 10 years apiece, the championship was a big test for our brave competition winners, and they were deserved winners of the perseverance trophy.

