

COWES WEEK

Dave Willis

Cowes Week is a British sporting institution. It is one of the longest running and most successful sporting events we have and has become a highlight of the British sporting summer. It has been held in early August every year since 1826, except during the two world wars.

Cowes Week is a unique mixture of classic and ultra-modern designs with several classes still racing after more than 50 years: Dragons, Flying Fifteens, Redwings, Seaview Mermaids, Solent Sunbeams, Swallows, Victories and XODs. New classes are being introduced as they increase in popularity. The Laser SB3s for example, have been the largest class of the regatta for the past few years.

Cowes Week attracts over 8,500 competitors, ranging from Olympic and world-class yachtsmen and women to weekend sailors – all racing together and watched by over 100,000 visitors to Cowes. One of the most enduring traditions of Cowes Week is the spectacular fireworks display, which has taken place on the final Friday of Cowes Week since the very first years.

The regatta is now such an indelible fixture on the British (and international) sporting scene that it is taken for granted that it will continue to thrive and inspire all who love sailing, competition and the ocean for years to come. With over 140 striking and immediate images, Dave Willis captures the excitement, disasters and triumphs of one of the sporting calendar's ultimate events.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Willis has always been a photographer. It's what he does. He's been other things as well but always there was a camera. Born and raised on the south coast, he quit school, left home and left the south to hitch to the lakes and become a climber and a photographer. He learnt the trade as an assistant photographer in Kendal, a press photographer on national papers and an expedition photographer in Patagonia. He returned from Chile in 1990, penniless, homeless and unemployed to set up Mountain Sport Photography – and is still going strong. Dave now works from his base in Shap, on Cumbria's eastern edge, photographing outdoor life, landscape and tourism projects for tourist boards, the outdoor industry, press and stock libraries. He also teaches photography.

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Above: The beautiful and distinctive Redwing is the oldest competitive sailing fleet in the UK.



Above right: The XOD class have been racing in the Solent area since 1911.

Right: Spectators who can get afloat will want to watch events from the water. Few will travel in quite as much style as in the steam yacht Kariat which makes a lovely sight pottering around the harbour.



Beau Geste HK, a Class Zero racing yacht at Cowes, the largest of the Class Zero boats competing in 2009.



The traditional brass starting cannon of the Royal Yacht Squadron, afloat in the sea.

Class 1 IRC (Black group) boats race in light winds as they approach Cowes, ashore along the Green. Spectators gather on the grassy banks to watch the spectacle of dozens of racing yachts competing close ashore.



Class 1 racing in very light winds can lead to very tight finishes with dozens of boats jostling for position and flying every inch of sail they carry.

Example of a double-page spread.