



FIRST RACE FOR THE LIPTON CUP.

"ERICA'S" MISTAKE ON THE LAST LEG.

"SKEBENGA" WINS.

DURBAN, July 16.—(From Our Correspondent.)—The first of the series of yacht races for the Lipton Cup was sailed to-day, in weather which it was generally supposed would favour Erica, of the Royal Cape Yacht Club, the challenger. Skebenga defended for the Point Yacht Club.

The course was a triangular one of three legs of five miles each. The first leg was a beat dead to windward, the second was a broad reach, which permitted the use of spinnakers at times, and the third was similar. The breeze, which at no time was more than light, at times faded away to a dead calm.

On the first leg Erica was at one time perhaps 20 minutes behind Skebenga, but she improved her position considerably, and rounded the first buoy only 6 minutes after the defender.

On the second leg she reduced this margin to 2½ minutes, and on the last one actually drew level, and passed Skebenga, but it was but a temporary lead. She fell back again, and passed the finishing line 3 min. 48 sec. after Skebenga, at the end of a race which, for the most part, was a drifting match.

The opinion has been expressed that had Erica on the last leg sailed her own course, instead of trying to get to the weather of her rival, she could not have failed to win. Erica would have had the tide on her lee, which would have set her to windward, and at the same time she would have been making better progress, instead of being handicapped by sailing so close hauled.

THE RACE IN DETAIL.

There was a good sized crowd on the harbour tug, Sir John, when she left the quay. The weather was then bright, with a light breeze from the South-East blowing. The first gun went at 11 o'clock, and ten minutes later the second, the starting gun going off exactly at 11.15. The boats, which had been crossing and re-crossing the line gauging the time for crossing, got away as follows:—

	H.	M.	S.
Skebenga...	11	16	0
Erica...	11	17	4

Skebenga pointed well up into the wind, and Erica followed suit, but she did not hold the wind the same way as the Durban boat. Erica went about some five minutes after the start, apparently with the idea of getting to windward of Skebenga; but the latter, close hauled, held on. A minute later Erica went back on her original course, and some quarter of an hour after she was again dead astern of her opponent. Skebenga was the first to get the benefit of a few puffs, and was about 3 minutes ahead a quarter of an hour after the start. Erica then slackened off her sheets, and, running more freely, went along to leeward. She went about again about 11.50, and at noon Skebenga, for the first time in the race, altered her course. Just after this Erica had the better wind, and Skebenga made but little way, another slight shift in the wind took away the challenger's advantage, and Skebenga was again seen coming along better. Just an hour after the start Skebenga went about again, but the wind was then dying away, light puffs coming from the water aiding one boat and then the other. Erica got a slightly better breeze, and began to draw up, but the defender, in her turn, got a slight blow, and again improved her already long lead, estimated at quite a quarter of an hour. But at this time the contestants were mostly engaged in wallowing more or less, just putting their noses into the swell. At 12.25 both went about again, and came slowly along on parallel courses, apparently helped by a light breeze unfelt on the following tug. At 12.40 there was a little better wind, but not enough to push the boats along at all fast; but a few minutes later Skebenga's canvas was flapping. It was evidently the intention of the skipper of Skebenga to stand well up before going off on the final tack to make the buoy, but his judgment was just too close. At the last moment he had to go off on a short tack to avoid failing the mark. This cost the leader about two minutes. Erica, which was steered wider, had been making up quite a lot, and the times at rounding were:—

	H.	M.	S.
Skebenga...	12	52	20
Erica...	12	58	20

a difference of exactly 6 minutes.

Skebenga, after gybing round for the second leg, a broad reach, immediately sent her spinnaker aloft in stops, but it was 4½ minutes later before the big sail broke out. Erica, who followed suit, was much smarter in getting her boom out, but her balloonier either fouled or else was too tightly stopped, because a man had to swarm up to clear it. Seven and a half minutes had passed before the sail was drawing properly. Meantime she had been enjoying a nice streak of wind, but she could not make the most of it. Erica was then sailing the faster, with her boom well out. After sailing about half way to the next mark, Skebenga took in her spinnaker, and went along with big reaching jib instead. Erica followed suit soon afterwards, but while Skebenga's sails were filled, Erica's, closer hauled, were flapping badly. Notwithstanding that she did not do what was expected of her Erica made up a lot of the daylight between them at the first buoy, and at No. 2 was only 2½ minutes behind, the official times being

	H.	M.	S.
Skebenga...	2	3	35
Erica...	2	5	50

After gybing round Skebenga hoisted smartly a reaching jib, the wind being abeam, and Erica came round 2 minutes or so later. The latter was kept more closely hauled, and it appeared that her skipper was trying to get to windward of Skebenga. Skebenga, however, was content to let Erica make up somewhat. She then luffed, crossing Erica's bows and placing the challenger again on her lee. Spradbrow then laid away a little and made his course again. This manoeuvre was repeated two or three times. For a little time there was an improvement in the wind, of which Erica got full advantage, Skebenga standing still, and the Cape Town boat not only made up much ground, but actually passed the Durban yacht. But the lead was not enjoyed very long. The wind died away almost completely, and the boats drifted towards the line, and Skebenga actually beat Erica on that point too. Skebenga, which had up to this time been carrying a foresail jib and reaching jib, set her spinnaker, and it seemed to help her a great deal, and the light air prevailing sent her along to the front. When less than half a mile from home Erica followed that example, and began to creep up somewhat, but it was too late. Drifting along with a slight breeze helping Skebenga crossed the winner by 3 min. 48 sec., the finishing times being—

	H.	M.	S.
Skebenga...	3	17	38
Erica...	3	21	26

The race had occupied 4 hours 2 min. 38 sec. The wind at the start was South-East, and it varied a point or so all through the race. At the finish the breeze was East. Directly after passing the line spinnakers were stowed, and the boats made the fastest sailing of the day. Both crews were cheered as the boats crossed the line, the Cape Town boat being as heartily applauded as the local yacht. The course, a triangular one, was a beat E. by S. five miles, thence N. by N.W., the third leg being S.W. The first leg was a beat and the second and third broad reaches, which permitted of the use of spinnakers part of the time. To-morrow will be spent in drying sails, overhauling gear and making preparations for Saturday's race, when the course will be six miles beating and six miles of running. On Saturday evening the visiting yachtsmen will be the guests of honour at the Royal Natal Yacht Club, when the entertainment will take the form of a smoking concert.