Sail On launch at Otley SC

Dignitaries including the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Sir Jimmy Saville OBE, the Mayor of Otley and paralympic sailor Allan Smith showed their support at the launch of a new initiative aimed at recruiting more blind people to sailing in July.

The Sail On launch took place at Otley Sailing Club, Weston Water. Sailing teams from Huddersfield, Leeds and Hull Actionnaires Clubs, Henshaws and Bradford colleges, along with members of the Hull Visually Impaired Sports Club, participated in various sailing events as well as enjoying a barbecue.

Sail On is a campaign to raise awareness of the opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to access sailing at all levels throughout the UK. This project is being led by the RYA Sailability team with support from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), British Blind Sport, Action for Blind People, and LOOK (the National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children), amongst others.

Vicki Sheen, former winner of the World Blind Sailing Championships and guest at the event, said: "Sailing is a wonderful sport and it's one that allows blind and partially-sighted people the opportunity to participate with very few adaptations. Innovations such as speaking compasses, bright track radar screens and signs in braille on the controls all go some way to enabling blind and partially-sighted sailors to take an active part."

Vicki continued: "Sailing has given me such a lot - even my guide dog has sea-legs now. I would love to encourage other people with sight loss to give it a go and experience some of the fun and pleasures that sailing has given me."

Kevin, 15, a Sailability member with glaucoma said: "Once I'm in the boat everyone forgets about my sight loss. I want to race one day, I saw it on the Olympics - it looks amazing!"

Sarah, 25, who has been blind since birth, enjoys the racing element:"I like the intensity of racing and working closely in a team - getting to know each other so you can support each other - getting the best out of everybody and communicating well. It's challenging but that's what makes it exciting."
First multi-class regatta “overwhelming success”

A total of 53 boats took part in the first ever multi-class event for disabled sailors, held at Rutland Water in July.

The fleets competing were Challenger, Access, SKUD, Artemis and Squib with 73 sailors from all around the country taking part. Exceptionally foul weather prevented racing on Friday but competitors enjoyed meeting other sailors and attending the official opening ceremony, led by Debbie Blachford, RYA Sailability manager. Light winds on Saturday provided testing conditions with the giant pursuit race on Sunday revealing the competitive nature of the sailors. The regatta was sponsored by RYA Sailability, the National Sports Foundation and the Fawcett trust.

The racing kicked off on Saturday 21st July with convincing performances in the Artemis, Lucy Hodges making a clean sweep to lead every race. Light air specialists Val Millward and Simon Harle sailed their SKUD to victory, and Graham Hall was also victorious in his Challenger. The Access 2.3s had a different winner in each race but Geoff Gibbens was the overnight leader. On Saturday evening the club was transformed into a restaurant for the Regatta dinner and cabaret for over 130 guests. Spot prizes were awarded to the fleet leaders and a raffle raised £300 for Rutland Sailability.

On Sunday in the pursuit race all the classes were put to the test, with blue skies and a steady force two southwesterly breeze. Searching for the Champion of Champions provoked fierce competition between the SKUD, the new Paralympic boat, and the Artemis, a fast, exciting keelboat designed for both able-bodied and disabled sailors. Expecting a win from either of these high performance boats, everyone was amazed when Andi Dickson and Ian MacNair won in an Access 303!

The regatta closed with a memorable prizegiving, with both Challenger and Access presenting National Championship trophies, plus over 100 other prizes donated by sponsors Harken, Henri Lloyd, Laser, Yachts & Yachting, Crewsaver and RYA Sailability. They were presented to the different fleets by Ian Mills of Laser, the Deputy Chairman of the RYA Richard Langford, Debbie Blachford and the Lord Lieutenant of Rutland, Laurence Howard. Finally, the Champion of Champions trophy was presented to Andi Dixon and Ian MacNair of Rutland Sailability by Sue Ellis, wife of the late Ken Ellis, ex-Chairman of the RYA and trustee of RYA Sailability, a great supporter of disabled sailing.

Richard Johnson, the event organiser commented: “The regatta was the largest gathering of disabled sailors ever in the UK and an overwhelming success. There were some really competitive moments, particularly in the pursuit race on Sunday. Many thanks go to the 50 volunteers from Rutland Sailability who ensured the event ran smoothly. We are already planning for next year's event.”
Young VI sailors

Seventeen visually impaired youngsters aged between 9 and 17 took part in five two-hour sailing sessions at London’s Stoke Newington West Reservoir in August, and all achieved their Stage 1. The sessions were part of Sports Connect, the London Sports Forum scheme to engage youngsters with sight loss in physical activity.

The youngsters came from all over London for the sessions, which were funded by the Blatchington Court Trust and run with the help of RYA OnBoard Development Officer Steve Mitchell.

Alan Whetherly of London Sports Forum, said: “This week was part of a sports activity scheme we ran at the Castle Climbing Centre and the Reservoir – the idea was to get young visually impaired (VI) people confident in climbing and sailing. Steve had not worked with VI people before, but now we are hoping to work with him and OnBoard to identify new sailing opportunities for the youngsters to tap into.

“We’re also working on a new initiative, Inclusive and Active, for all disabled people across London – so I’m sure we’ll work more with OnBoard in the future.”

New pontoon at Westbere

This photograph is proof that Westbere Sailing Opportunities (WSO) actually did spend its RYA Sailability grant in the appropriate way, reports Richard Gaskell, its Chairman.

Westbere Sailing Opportunities would like to thank RYA Sailability for their grant toward the pontoon extension which is making a real difference to the service we provide for our members. As well as Thursdays and Fridays, we are now operating on Wednesdays as well in June, July and September and are pretty well fully booked until the end of October.

Research opportunity

RYA Sailability produces an online directory of equipment and services used within sailing for people with disabilities - the address is www.sailability.co.uk.

We ask each company that has a product entry to update its details every year, but are conscious that this does not capture the new ideas, initiatives and products that are continuously emerging within disabled sailing.

We require a self-driven individual to research the new and existing products that are being used at grassroots level within disabled sailing, in order to develop the content supplied in our directory.

Payment of £500 will be awarded on completion of the project.

If you are interested please contact Connie Lebrun, Communications Administrator, on 023 8060 4247 or Connie.lebrun@rya.org.uk

www.rya.org.uk/sailability
Wales Open Day

A watersports Open Day promoting sailing for disabled children and adults was recently held in Cardiff Bay organised and funded by the lottery project Venture Out Cardiff. Over 30 novice sailors, with varying disabilities, took to the water in two brand new Access 303s and a Laser Stratos. The event was promoted by James Dwyer, RYA Sailability regional organiser, in partnership with Cardiff Bay harbour authority and the Welsh Assembly. The Open Day was well supported by Cardiff Bay users and helped to launch RYA Sailability in the area.

It was a bright sunny day with light winds providing excellent conditions for the Try a Boat event. As part of the regeneration of Cardiff a barrage has been constructed in the Bay forming a large freshwater lake perfect for sailing. Visitors with a range of disabilities came to try out boating, including people who are blind or have a visual impairment and wheelchair users. Ben Owen Jones, the well-known TV actor who uses a wheelchair, took people out in one of the Access dinghies.

There was lots of enthusiasm, especially from one visually impaired sailor who capsized but got straight back on board for more fun. James said: “Thanks to this brilliant Open Day all users of Cardiff Bay are now working together to promote sailing for disabled people. This latest funding is fantastic and meant we were able to buy two new Access 303s - we plan to grow the fleet, get more people on the water and teach people to sail the boats themselves.”

Ben Smith, Chief Sailing Officer for Cardiff County Council added: “It was fantastic to see so many disabled people enjoying sailing and keen to come back for more. The staff really enjoyed themselves too and we will organise some disability awareness training for them. Overall it’s looking pretty exciting here in Cardiff.”

Aly wins BBC Community Champion Award

The BBC South Community Awards has once again recognised those people who have given their time freely to make life better for others - the South’s true ‘unsung heroes’.

Viewers of BBC South Today, listeners of the BBC local radio station and Where I Live website users nominated individuals who they think deserve special credit for going the extra mile to help others in the community.

Aly Gunn has won the 2007 Community Champion Award in the Contribution by a person with disability category, and was presented with her trophy by Esther Ranzten at the awards ceremony in July.

Aly, Chairperson of Lymington SailAbility, has very limited partial sight and she recently sailed single-handed and non-stop around the Isle of Wight, whilst taking verbal instructions from a small support team.

Aly said: “I am honoured to have received a Community Champion Award from the BBC and I am proud to be associated with Lymington SailAbility. It may not be a life saving charity but it certainly is a life changing one.”
Alistair goes walking - for sailing!

Isle of Man charity Sailing for the Disabled reports that one of its members has achieved an amazing feat to raise money for the cause.

Alistair Shillito completed a sponsored walk of 37 miles over the Isle of Man TT course on 17 June.

He set off at 6am from Ramsey, travelling over the mountain in fog and drizzle to arrive at midday in sunshine at Government House, where he was greeted by the Governor Sir Paul Haddacks and his wife (above right)

Two other members of the charity walked with him for about six miles, and Ian Clark (right), who had a brain haemorrhage some time ago and last year again became seriously ill, walked with him for seven, an incredible feat, considering he has problems with his balance.

Sailing for the Disabled Chairman Alan Cope walked with Alistair for the first sixteen and the last seven miles - not bad for a fit 78-year-old!

Alistair completed the 37 miles in 15½ hours! The total money raised to date is £800 and it is still coming in.

Alistair (42), has a heart defect and learning difficulties but that does not deter his spirit. He is very proud to tell people that the doctors said he wouldn’t live beyond 21. He loves sailing and joining Sailing for the Disabled three years ago changed his life. He helps care for his ageing mother, doing the cooking and cleaning, but still he finds time to do fundraising for the charity and go sailing.

He is a popular and well loved man in Ramsey, always smiling and known throughout the town. A local police sergeant said: “If we had more Alistairs, the world would be a safer and happier place.”

www.rya.org.uk/sailability 0845 345 04 03
Sailability went to see ...

Sailability often promotes opportunities to sail on Gwennili Trust voyages through e-mailing disabled sailors, advertising in our newsletter and on the website, so in return Debbie Blachford, Sailability Manager, and Connie LeBrun, Communications Administrator, were welcomed on board a Gwennili Trust day sail in July to experience one of the trips first hand.

Gwennili Trust is known for providing voyages out to sea for disabled people, who get a whole new sailing experience that is much different to the regular lake/reservoir sailing that many are used to at their local clubs. So it’s not only newcomers who get the opportunity but through advertising the voyages to Sailability clubs, we help regular sailors experience the open sea too.

Steve Coleman, a regular dinghy sailor from Northampton Sailability at Pittsford Water, made the journey down south to experience the sea: “I had the best day. I arrived at 9am and was escorted down to the yacht and given a cup a tea. They were extremely friendly and helpful and made me feel right at home. It was absolutely wonderful. I would recommend it to anyone, and would really love to go again.”

We also met Zak, 20, one of the full-time crew working as first mate taking disabled people out on each voyage. Zak commented on how rewarding it is that he can volunteer but also gain experience and training while helping disabled people get on the water.

Our trip was from Port Solent Marina in Portsmouth on Spirit of Scott Bader, an 11 metre catamaran particularly suited to wheelchair users with accessible walkways and hydraulic lifts. It is owned by RoRo Project, an association that charters accessible yachts for disabled sailing.

There are always opportunities out there for disabled people to experience sailing, with the help of associations like Gwennili Trust organising the voyages and RoRo Project providing accessible yachts.

For further information about Gwennili Trust and the voyage programme please visit http://homepages.rya-online.net/gwennili-trust or call Rex Hawkins on 02380 616559.

For more information about chartering accessible yachts through RoRo Project please visit www.disabledsailing.org or call Keith on 07976 560 914.
2sail 2012

Last year Tideway Sailability produced four home-grown instructors, three of whom have developed a taste for sailing in exciting dinghies – our beloved Access 303’s suddenly seemed a little tame to them ... and slow, reports Clare Gray.

It seemed very important to the life of Tideway to maintain the enthusiasm of our instructors so we came up with the idea of a project specially for visually impaired people. We already have a VI member who has given much but had begun to drift away as he no longer found the Access a challenging sail. He has been crucial in designing 2sail 2012.

An additional inspiration was to set our sights on the 2012 Paralympics and develop more ambitious sailing. We revelled in entering the international sailing scene and our place in London is important for that.

This is the way 2sail 2012 was born. A five year project to teach 20 young Londoners between the ages of 16 and 30, ten visually impaired and ten sighted, to sail together from scratch aiming for world standards. The cost to the young people will be one down payment of £250 to nail their commitment. We know of several small charities who will help those who would find this difficult – they will in effect be sponsored.

We started with a launch event at the end of April which was well attended with interested young people. We offered them a free Level 1 course borrowing Surrey Docks Watersports Centre’s Omegas. We’ve now done two of these using our own voluntary instructors and paying an RYA Senior Instructor to oversee the scheme. So far we have eight firmly committed members - three totally blind, one VI and four sighted – and a dog. The age range is 18 – 30. We would like to have 20 and will go on recruiting for as long as it takes. The formal training will start this month with a Level 2 course, again using Tideway instructors.

The costs have so far not been high – we have not had to apply for grants yet. We did not want to make any applications until we knew we had committed participants. Now we have to find the money for drysuits so that they can continue their training and racing right through the winter. We also want to offer our instructors further training so that they can be confident in their ability to teach VI and sighted people together. Their experience will be unique as far as we know.

The next stage will be race training, beginning with the Watersports Centre’s winter series. This will be very much a team event. After that we have to construct highlights in the programme to keep the enthusiasm red hot. We would like exchange visits with other similar groups from anywhere in the world. We think that we will get grants for these relatively easily so that we can subsidise the members. The project, even at this early stage has been a huge stimulus to Tideway. We have a lot to learn about ‘blind’ sailing but all the members, whatever our disabilities, enjoy having these new young enthusiastic people with us and the standard of our sailing and the width of our friendship can do nothing but go up.
Philip Rayner celebrates his 84th birthday on the water

Philip Rayner has been a keen dinghy sailor most of his life. He started sailing at Thames United Sailing Club, which later became Laleham Sailing Club and was Commodore, sailing Firefly and Enterprise dinghies.

He later moved to Thorpe Bay Yacht Club then London Corinthian, Hammersmith where he also became Commodore. When Queen Mary Sailing Club on Queen Mary Reservoir opened in 1972, he soon joined - and he sailed Albacores and, for more than 20 years, the Yeoman Keelboat, as well as continuing to sail a Laser at London Corinthian. As his mobility began to decline he converted to a 2.4 mini Keelboat in the very active Queen Mary fleet at that time.

Sadly, before his 80th birthday Philip had to give up sailing completely after several operations on his knees and a hospital infection that left him close to death. He was elected an Honorary Life Member at Queen Mary and London Corinthian but thought he would never sail again.

However, later that year he was introduced to Queen Mary Sailability, a group within the club which actively promotes sailing for most forms of disability. He was soon sailing his old Yeoman Keelboat, adapted for people with physical disabilities with wheel steering and a central seat instead of a tiller. Since then he has been sailing regularly and on his 84th birthday, he celebrated with two hours on the water with other disabled sailors.

Afterwards he was presented with a card and cakes to mark the occasion by all the volunteer helpers.

Philip is now driven to the club by his 81-year-old wife Evelyn, who sailed with him for many years but now prefers staying on dry land with a good book. He is full of praise for the many volunteers who give up their time to prepare the boat for his sail and assist him and the many others with various disabilities get on to the water.