

ROYAL VISITOR WOOS DISABLED SAILORS



HRH The Princess Royal in her capacity as Patron of RYA Sailability visited the East Anglian Trust at Suffolk Yacht Harbour to help celebrate their 15th birthday at the end of September. Earlier in the day she had opened the new super container berths at Felixstowe Docks South.

During her visit she met trustees and funders of the charity, volunteer staff and disabled sailors. She also christened a keel-less keelboat, which will be used for introductory dry-land training.

Among the people she met was 15-year old visually impaired schoolboy Max Hatfull, the 2010 National Blind Sailing Champion, who has designed and built a new type of personal audio compass for use by blind and partially sighted sailors. Despite his impairment he has just got 10 GCSEs all at A or A star and one a B. Maths, Science, chemistry and technical drawing are among his favourite subjects. He sails regularly with his father Frank on their 38 ft Najad out of Ipswich.



Max Hatfull, 15, is the 2010 National Blind Sailing Champion. Still at school he, with help from his father Frank, has designed and constructed a new type of audio compass for blind sailors.

It was in 1993 that a group of local sailors organised the first of what has become an annual cruise for blind sailors. East Anglian Sailing Trust was formed in 1996 to be responsible for an ongoing development programme. Last year the Trust won £50,000 on The People's Millions lottery programme and has refurbished a redundant building at Suffolk Yacht Harbour as a new community centre. Facilities include a class/lecture room, galley, disabled toilets and showers, a large boat maintenance and service area, which also doubles as a practical hands-on classroom.

The Trust now has a fleet of 12 Squib, Sonar and Yeoman keelboats plus two RIB rescue/support boats. It is a recognised RYA training centre.

Each year EAST offers "Taster Weekends" at SYH to enable blind adults to try sailing on a fleet of cruising yachts, provided by members of the regular team. At the same time a number of keen but apprehensive new skippers sail their own craft from SYH with a sighted crew and one of the experienced visually impaired EAST sailors,

gaining valuable experience in order to consider joining the main EAST coast cruise for visually impaired sailors. This week-long East Coast cruise has been run every year since 1993.



Sam Honour is senior dinghy instructors and gave the youngsters an impromptu workshop while they waited for HRH to arrive. Sam, who is studying law at Essex University, is himself disabled and sailing has helped him overcome his impairment.



RYA East chairman Fiona Wylie was part of the official greeting party.



HRH talks with Des Cowen, Commodore HPYC and Jonathan Dyke, MD of SYH and Tim Thomas chairman EAST.



: Bill Smith (R) a founder Trustee of the charity presented HRH with a history of SYH and EAST as she left.



Members of the workshop support team explain what's involved with maintaining the Trust's sailing and support boats.



: HRH listens as Brian Honour (R); EAST's facilities manager explains how the keel-less Squib will be used to introduce first timers to the boats