



MAJOR INCREASE IN NUMBER OF DISABLED PEOPLE WHO GO SAILING



“Sailing is highly suitable for people with disabilities,” declared Rod Carr OBE, CEO of the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) opening the third annual Sailability National Conference at Wyboston Lakes near St Neots, Beds on Saturday (20.2.10).

Speaking at his last public engagement before retiring at the end of the month, Rod Carr told the 130 delegates from all over the UK that Sailability and Sailability groups could be proud of their achievements. “The penny is dropping in the right circles that sailing is good for people with a wide range of disabilities. Disabled people realise they can

do it and benefit from it. A lot of the success of sailing for disabled is down to the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers who run groups. Without them it doesn’t work.

“Today we have properly designed and adapted boats, a burgeoning number of Sailability groups enabling people to sail within their own locality. Most don’t want to sail across the Atlantic,” he added.

The need for Sailability lay in the need to give guidance in what was a risk sport. “There’s too much regulation. It’s more fun to achieve your goals through following best practice and training. A well-trained sailor is one who gets most enjoyment from the sport and far less stressed, but above all it’s got to be fun,” he said.

“We live in a risk-averse society, but people need a frisson of excitement to get turned on to the activity. We mustn’t frighten them but if we didn’t give them a few buttock-clenching moments they’d never know their boundaries or experience the joy of the sport,” declared Rod.

RYA Sailability Manager Debbie Blatchford told the conference that nearly 25,000 disabled adults across the country sailed regularly. Between 2006 and 2008 the number of disabled people sailing jumped by 47 per cent from 16,000 to 24,000. Cruising and windsurfing were now being added to the mix of sailing offered by groups.



Debbie revealed that a new volunteer reward scheme was being trialled with 20 centres across the country. “Volunteers will get a logbook and can progress through three levels, Bronze, Silver and Gold within their chosen activity within the group. We need to help them build up their expertise,” she explained.



James Stevens, RYA Training Manager, told the conference that the sequence of learning to sail was the same as it was 40 years ago. The RYA was now the world leader in teaching people to sail and was helping some 2,300 training centres in 40 countries establish courses and standards.

James, who was also making his last public appearance before retirement, told the audience: “It’s far more fun if you know what you are doing. It’s good for you and it’s good for the sport. It also helps keep accidents down; our record is second to none. And because of it the MCA recognises this and gives yachts an exemption from safety regulations that would require us, for example, to carry a fire extinguisher in a Topper.”

He said the RYA was removing the upper age limit for instructors. Instructors would find themselves having to re-evaluate every two or three years depending on their ability. “The older you are the shorter the time between re-issue of your certificate. You may also have to be re-tested. At the least you should be able to accomplish the syllabus and if there are particular activities you can’t do physically then you must demonstrate you can delegate this to someone who can. We don’t want to lose your experience,” he said.

He also revealed changes to the Powerboat 2 certificate – 22,000 people in 1,100 centres across the UK took PB2 last year. He was keen to see more disabled people taking the qualification. “If you’re running a course you can now send your applications in on-line, we’ll send you back an unique identity number for each student. You send the completion of the course back to us digitally so we can build up an accurate central record of passes. It will greatly speed up the re-issue of lost certificates. The certificates themselves will carry a photograph of the holder and include an identity hologram for increased security,” explained James.

The Sailability Beginner to Winner Pathway had been under continuous development throughout the last year, Disability Racing Coach Matt Grier, told the conference. “We came across a number of brick walls, but we always managed to find ways over or round them. Our aims this year are to increase participation and build on the solid foundation we achieved last year.

“Centres are the grassroots of our Olympic squads. Our eventual aim is to get disabled and able-bodied sailors to compete on level terms in the same events. We are trying to use the 2.4R as a pathway class. The SKUD 18 is being completely redesigned and although there are delays in delivering the new boats, we’re confident we can bring them into the pathway as well.”

He called for more sailors with disabilities to aim to compete in Sail for Gold. He wanted to see more class structured sailing. Sailability would be looking to provide more instructors; was now giving advice to boat builders on the needs of disabled sailors and adaptations needed to meet their needs, and was introducing a new fast-track training scheme for the 2.4R.

“We want to encourage more physically disabled people into racing,” he said. “We’re talking with the injured servicemen’s charity Toe-in-the-Water to develop strategies for getting them afloat. They can link into our pathway scheme at any stage. A lot of these guys are highly motivated and we can help them develop new goals. We need more people racing and more disabled people to become instructors,” he added.



John Crosbie, a Trustee of the Sailability Trust, said the past four years had seen phenomenal strides forward for the organisation. The best thing to happen to the Trust was its closer links with RYA. In 2006 RYA had taken over the staff, supplied offices and support services, and had freed up the Trust itself to fulfil its role as fundraiser and facilitator. The Trustees were currently developing a rolling five-year plan to give Sailability a firm foundation for the future. “Our ultimate aim is to get to the position where everyone can go sailing on an equal footing. Our role would then cease,” he declared.

Sailing for the blind and visually impaired is growing, and Lucy Hodges, the Sailability Regional organiser for the South East and herself visually impaired told the conference that plans this year included introducing keel boat racing, helping organise weekend and longer cruises, as well as continuing to develop race training.

The 2010 Blind Nationals were being hosted by the East Anglian Sailing Trust (E.A.S.T.) on the Orwell in Suffolk in May, a team was being put together to represent Britain at the Anglo Italian Match Racing regatta in Italy, plans were in progress for a European Blind Sailing



Championship in the summer and selection and training for the Worlds in New Zealand in 2013 were underway.

The development of audio compasses, highlight charts, audio instruction books and even coloured ropes were making sailing easier for blind people. The key she said was to leave them open to the elements so they could feel what was happening round them. “Give us clear instructions and communicate clearly. Learn the level of visual impairment, allow the VI time to familiarise themselves with their surroundings. VIs like to be pushed. Don’t be afraid to stretch them, they’ll learn a lot quicker than you realise,” she said.



Geoff Holts wife Elaine receiving a bouquet of flowers from Sailability Manager Debbie Blatchford



82 year old David Campbell from Grafham Water Sailability was presented with Sailability’s top award by Robyn Griffiths-Jones for making an exceptional contribution to sailing for the disabled



Geoff Holt who told the 100 guests at dinner that he wouldn’t change anything in his life



Wolverstone Project Trustee Hugh de Las Casas gave Rod Carr a send of eulogy



Rod Carr OBE, upon his retirement, was presented with an engraved plaque in recognition of his work in reshaping and developing Sailability



Delegates listening intently to various speakers