

Hannah Stodel to take on Vendee Globe

Hannah Stodel (32) was born missing her right forearm. Growing up on the East coast, she learned to sail as a way of coping with the bullying around her disability and it provided her with a sense of freedom and a 'can do' attitude.

She learned how to race from her parents, both fierce competitors: her mother narrowly missed out on selection to the 1988 Olympic Games in Korea while her father was a strong player on the Hornet and 505 circuits. As a 13-year-old Hannah sailed with, and was inspired by, Dame Ellen MacArthur.

With a sports scholarship to the Royal Hospital School, Ipswich, Hannah took on the 29er, Laser 3000 and Laser 4.7 racing circuits. She went on to represent Great Britain at Youth and Junior levels in World and European Championships in the Mirror and 29er Classes for the able-bodied.

In 2002, coached by Andy Cassell, Hannah began sailing a Sonar and went on to compete in multiple World Championships and four Paralympic Games.

Hannah's current target is to become the first disabled athlete to take on one of the toughest challenges in the sport – the 2020 Vendée Globe, an unassisted and non-stop circumnavigation of the world.

To prepare for the challenge, Hannah recently took her RYA Yachtmaster Offshore exam. Although an experienced Sonar sailor, Hannah had to acquire and utilise new skills to successfully complete the course, and to succeed in the exam where the range of skills required as the master of a larger vessel are somewhat different from those of a successful single or double handed dinghy or keel boat racer.

Not only did Hannah exhibit 'impeccable' sailing skills, she was completely confident on the boat and showed great empathy for the others on the course, supporting and encouraging them throughout.

Hannah beat 3,500 entrants from all over the UK for the award.