



# FUTURE

ANDY RICE looks at the changing face of our

What will sailing look like in 10 or 20 years from now? Are you happy with sailing as it is? Or do you think it could be better? And if so, what do you mean by 'better'? For many people, 'better' translates to 'more bums on boats'. There has been a general feeling that recreational sailing has been in decline for at least the past couple of decades, and the best and brightest minds are scratching their heads trying to work out how to reverse that decline.

When you relate dinghy sailing today to where it was half a century ago, it doesn't seem to be in as healthy a place as the era of the DIY, build-it-yourself period of constructing a sailing dinghy from a flat pack. That was back in the early days of television when DIY guru Barry Bucknell got together with Jack Holt to produce designs like the Mirror and the Enterprise. Once people had finished all the DIY on their two-up, two-down house, the next thing to have a go at with the saw, hammer and screwdriver was building a dinghy in your front room; and once you'd done

that, the next obvious thing was to put it on the water and try to learn to sail it.

No wonder there was such a boom in recreational boating back in the postwar period, but are we kidding ourselves if we can ever get back to those halcyon days? Back in the 20th century, families used to pick a hobby or a sport and throw themselves all-in, whether it was messing around in boats, playing football, or playing with Hornby train sets. You did one thing, and stuck to it. These days we want to experience it all: we want the ski trip, the weekend of

These pages  
From dinghies  
to keelboats,  
and from local  
sailing clubs to  
international  
class events, the  
future for sailing  
is up for debate

carry out some in-depth research for the trade body, to get a detailed idea of how recreational boating is faring in the UK, both on its own terms and compared with other leisure activities.

The resulting report is called 'Futures' and it's an enormous piece of research that would interest anyone who cares about where our sport is going. One of the headline figures is that 91 per cent of the British population don't participate in watersports. That's a pretty scary figure, or an encouraging one, depending on whether you view the glass as half empty

“ These days we want to experience it all. And in between, the sailing somehow has to fit in ”

mountain biking, we might have a go at a Tough Mudder assault course kind of challenge. And in between all that, the sailing somehow has to fit in too.

Liz Rushall is a marketing and communications consultant, and a top-class former Olympic campaigner in the 470 so she also knows one end of a boat from another. She was commissioned by British Marine to

or half full. The scope of the findings is enormous, but when Rushall was asked to identify one thing that almost every sailing club – and class association for that matter – could do better, it was this:

#### BE YOUR OWN CUSTOMER

Rushall's obvious but seldom-followed tip is: "Be the mystery shopper, put yourself in the shoes of a new potential



# PROOFING

sport and what can be done to boost sailing for the future



customer, and ask yourself, what's it really like coming to the club for the first time as a prospective customer?" She highlights the difference in terms of the welcome signs on the front gate of sailing clubs. Lyme Regis Sailing Club, for example, says: 'New members always very welcome. Please come in.'

Another well known sailing club on the south coast's sign says: 'Members only. Please keep gates closed. No dogs allowed on the premises.'

Rushall asks which sign you'd prefer to be greeted with. And so the process continues, where you re-assess every part of the experience that a first-time visitor to the club or to the club website would go through. "Also, how well do you understand the profile of your membership?" adds Rushall. "How many 20-, 30-, 40-somethings do you have? Do you have a waiting list? How many members are you losing each year? And if you are losing members, have you asked them why they left?"

#### AND THE SURVEY SAYS?

In terms of copying an organisation that's already turned its membership around, there's the RYA, says Rushall. "In the space of four or five years, the RYA has turned its membership around from a gradual decline, and has seen its numbers grow from about 100,000 to over 110,000. The RYA really started to ask a lot of questions about how it was perceived, what it was doing well, what it needed to improve, and it has a much better understanding around acquisition and retention of its members."

The RYA's director of sport development, Alistair Dickson, says the Association is now putting together a package of tools to help sailing clubs

and class associations copy some of the same processes that have grown the RYA membership. "You don't need to wait for us to give you something," says Dickson. "There are all sorts of online tools like Survey Monkey that you can use, and it's quite straightforward for anyone to put a survey together."

"But we're putting some things together that will make it even easier for a small organisation to achieve some of those quick wins."

**Below:**  
The RS100 fleet has a buddy system for encouraging newcomers

national champion in the RS100, but he's also very aware of what drives the success of the fleet. "We've been fortunate to have a strong class chairman who has a clear vision for the fleet, and he's been quite adamant about putting more focus on people throughout the fleet being represented at the national championships."

"We had gold, silver and bronze fleets and more prizes were given to those who were new to the class, which proved

## “ Millennials want quick and convenient... Ownership is not high on their list of priorities ”



#### FOCUS ON THE BACK OF THE FLEET

It's an in-built instinct for all of us to focus on and celebrate the winners, and it's often the frontrunners in a fleet that end up having a disproportionate influence on how a class or a club is organised. However, it's the clubs and classes that really work hard at focusing on the back of the fleet that tend to thrive.

Alistair Dickson is the 2017

very successful. We also had a buddy system and so I was buddied up with one sailor from the silver fleet and one from bronze, and we raced as a team against the other gold/silver/bronze teams to see who was the most improved during the week. This is a great way of sharing the knowledge and also for everyone to get to know each other better in the fleet."

#### A CHANGE OF PRIORITIES

One of the strong trends that Liz Rushall discovered when researching other outdoor activities was that people – and particularly millennials in their 20s – want quick and convenient. They don't want to make big commitments, in terms of time or money. Ownership is not high on their list of priorities, and many of them have no intention of learning to drive. And if you can't drive, you can trail your own boat anywhere! The trends are going against boat ownership, so the sport is going to have find other ways to engage people.

One of the great benefits of team racing and match racing is you don't

# Our dynamic sport

**Bob Fisher** considers the pros and cons of change, and predicts what impact current trends may have

Every move in sailing seems to have a counter move – ideas are considered both good and bad depending whose opinion is sought. There is a reaction to change – we have a sport wreathed in tradition – and with that comes a natural reaction against any move that upsets what has been deep-rooted. Generally we react badly to suggestions that we should alter that which

has been in place for years.

But we can't say "no" forever. We must progress, but as an ageing Brahmin once told me as we were watching the America's Cup races off Newport, RI: "Progress Robert, progress is a mighty slow process!" I laughed at this statement at the time, but as the years have rolled on, the realisation has dawned on me of the depth of that wisdom he sought to instill.

#### FROM THE OUTRIGHT CRAZY TO THE NORM

The trouble is that there are so many different facets of sailing that one cannot generalise in matters of progress – some things simply will not change. That's due to the people who are happy with what they are doing – the Old Gaffers and people of that ilk – and sailing needs them as much as it does the 'progressives'. They perpetuate

the traditions of our sport and while they may be viewed as eccentric in this day and age, the foiling sailors of today may well be seen as odd eccentrics in another hundred years, so allow them their eccentricity, they are part of sailing's rich pattern.

After all, multihull sailing is universally accepted now, but the very thought of doing what came naturally to the natives of



need to own a boat. You just turn up with your sailing kit and race in borrowed boats. Of course, those boats still need looking after, but overall the cost of ownership is lower and there is the potential for centrally owned boats to be used much more often.

In just the past five years, the launch of National Sailing Leagues has taken off like wildfire around Europe. The concept started in Germany, with a fleet of 1/70 sportsboats that are

driven around the country for regional qualifying events to be held. Each yacht club puts forward a team of four or five sailors who represent their club and compete in a round robin competition. Again, the beauty of the concept is that the boats are centrally owned and managed, making it very easy for the competitors to just roll up and race.

The 1/70 wasn't specifically designed for this purpose and it's fairly expensive for what it is. RS obviously thought the

Above, clockwise: Millennials have different demands; the Moth has led the way for many; the iconic DIY dinghy, the Mirror; team racing fun; pro sailing in the 49er

same thing because the British company has just launched the RS21 sportsboat, which is designed squarely at this league sailing market. With removable keels and a clever design by Jo Richards that enables the keel-less hulls to be stacked one inside the other, it's possible to fit six RS21s into a 40ft shipping container.

#### PAY AND PLAY

Queen Mary Sailing Club is one example of a number of clubs that →

the Asian islands was so repulsive to the American sailing hierarchy that they banned catamarans from all racing. I watched very closely when the change of heart arrived in Britain almost 70 years ago. The Prout brothers in Canvey Island were manufacturers of folding canoes and obviously the shape of their hulls led to experimentation and the day sailing catamaran was born. They had a disciple in John Fisk, a local enthusiast, who carried the message abroad. Fisk's enthusiasm knew no bounds and he championed designers and builders to produce

increasingly fast boats, among them Rod MacAlpine-Downie and Rodney March. Reg White built and sailed the boats and the International Tornado was selected as an Olympic class for the Games in Canada in 1976.

Bigger classes sprang up with development going apace in the C-class. It was here that wing masts and eventually wing rigs developed and look what happened from there - the America's Cup went multihulled (the courts indicated it could) and since then it has become foil borne. That was a natural

for lateral thinkers, and only the beginning perhaps.

The speeds of which these boats are capable was unthinkable only 10 years ago except to a few who understood the physics of the possibility. These few were derided by the majority, dyed-in-the-wool sailors protecting their investment (a failing which is all too common by the rank and file - and totally understandable).

Not all racing dinghies were one-designs, there were the restricted classes which allowed individual designers the freedom to experiment, and these

were equally successful - the National 12s, Merlin Rockets and International 14s are proof of that today, even if there does appear to have been a levelling at the top end of each of those classes.

But look at the International Moth - it goes from strength to strength with constant improvements centred on the foils. So great is this development that even America's Cup designers are looking twice in this direction. I am assured that the foils of the AC35 winning Kiwi boat had their genesis from the foils of a Moth - certainly they were trimmed →



SPECIAL REPORT FUTURE PROOFING

have adopted a 'pay and play' model of club membership. General manager of QMSC Tony Bishop comes from a background working in the leisure and fitness industry, working for companies like Virgin Active. "Can you imagine being told that to use your treadmill, you can buy a secondhand one for £2,500, then you've got to pay £350 a year for access to the gym, but you're also going to have to pay £150 to park your treadmill in the gym? So that will be £3,000, thank you, before you even start running on your treadmill. Oh, and please don't touch any of the other treadmills. Can you imagine proposing that to a prospective customer?" asks Bishop. "People would laugh at you, but that's effectively what we're asking people to do when they join a sailing club."

Queen Mary SC introduced its Select membership back in 2003 and it has proven to be one of the great cultural and economic successes of the club. Just like gym membership, Select members

pay £70 per month on direct debit, with options for with or without tuition. Benefits include:

- RYA training courses in sailing and/or windsurfing included (optional)
- Unlimited free equipment hire
- Discounted 1:1 tuition
- Use of wetsuits, buoyancy aids, harnesses and helmets
- Support and advice from

## 👍 The income from Select is pretty impressive and should make other clubs take notice 👍

the Select team + Weekend launch and recovery team

Select members favour the hassle-free nature of this option, without the time and costs involved in owning their own equipment, says Bishop. QMSC has over 140 Select members sharing the use of 16 boats that are professionally maintained by a bosun. The income from Select is pretty impressive, and should

Above left  
Moths racing at Queen Mary, where they have introduced a pay and play model

Above right  
Francis Joyon setting a new round the world record of just over 40 days

make other clubs sit up and take notice when Bishop says: "Around 30 per cent of QMSC membership income comes from 4 per cent of our boat park space."

### TROJAN HORSES - CLEVER WAYS OF REACHING THE CLASSROOM

In France, sailing has the benefit of being on the national curriculum where every child has the opportunity

to try sailing while at school. In the UK, sailing is a long way from most teachers' minds, but by proposing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) programmes, sailing projects can manage to sneak their way into the learning curriculum, as a former teacher and watersports consultant Dan Jaspers explains: "In the UK there is funding for learning outside the classroom. →

by an expert in small boats.

And we will have that technology all over again in AC36 with the 75ft monohulled foilers. Performance predictions are truly phenomenal. At a recent New York Yacht Club symposium, the predicted figures were staggering. Upwind, speeds of 35kt in 20 knots of true wind, and downwind 50kt in 22 knots true!

#### TUMBLING RECORDS

One only has to look at the figures produced offshore to see the development of speed in mono and multi-hulled boats. It's not long

back, in January 1994, that Peter Blake and Robin Knox-Johnston, broke the mythical 80 days around the world with 74 days 22 hrs 17 mins 22 secs - but since then the French have made it their province in giant trimarans, remorselessly reducing the time until just over a year ago Francois Joyon and his five man crew in Idec 3 completed the circumnavigation in 40 days 23 hours 30 mins 30 secs and left the target (and the new mythical 40 days) for the next crew.

Meanwhile the singlehanders are running them close, again with big trimarans - 90 ft - with

Francois Gabart recently clocking a remarkable 42 days 16 hours 40 mins 35 secs. Remember, when Knox-Johnston became the first to record the non-stop time it was 313 days!

And the monohull race records are tumbling too, with the 60 footers now foil assisted. What time might Alex Thomson have achieved in Hugo Boss had he not suffered damage to one of his foils?

But what of the average sailor's racing? The changes there have not been as sweeping because regulations have deliberately curtailed drastic development

and it is races that normally breed development. As that is stifled, progress is a mighty slow process. True, hulls and rigs are 'cleaner' and that alone means faster. But the true progress offshore has been towards bigger boats.

Whereas not so long ago 65 feet overall was considered massive, that size is now run of the mill. The ultra-rich have entered the sport with them a win-at-all-costs attitude. The effect has been both dramatic in the numbers of bigger boats (85-105ft), and stimulating to designers, builders and sailmakers. Most of the new →

so taking kids and putting them into a classroom that isn't a classroom, especially for kids that don't learn very well in formal settings, these kind of outdoor programmes can be great for engaging their interest." Jaspers, recently appointed by RS Sailing for international business development, says that teaching children about how ropes and pulleys work, about marine life in the sea, measuring the area of a sail can all be a lot of fun, and then only at the very end do you draw all the different elements together and introduce them to sailing.

Indeed Land Rover BAR has a STEM project which you can find out more about at [stemcrew.co.uk](http://stemcrew.co.uk). Queen Mary's Tony Bishop, the brainchild behind



## “ Sailing needs to be more creative about how to engage adults as well as children ”

Bart's Bash which set a Guinness World Record five years ago as the biggest ever sailing event, has now launched another project called the Plastic Bottle Boat Challenge. "We want to set another Guinness World Record," says Bishop, "this time to launch the most plastic bottle boats simultaneously." Not only is the project, aimed at classrooms around the UK, helping educate children in the environmental impact of plastic, it's a way of getting thousands of kids interested in boating.

### BE LESS SERIOUS

Young children being taken sailing for the first time, when you tell them to sail around a course, are generally not that interested. But throw a few rubber ducks in the water and tell them to collect as many as they can

before the whistle blows, and they'll go into a frenzy! Sailing needs to be more creative about how to engage people of all ages, adults as well.

For children, the Open BIC class is lighting the way with its so called 'UN-regattas', where races are short and quick, the course changes regularly and can include crosswind legs and freestyle moves or an adventure race. Sometimes it's about standing up in the boat, capsizing, or finishing underneath a blow-up bridge where you have to lean the boat on its side to be able to cross the finish.

The large amounts of funding from UK Sport that goes to the RYA for helping win medals at the Youth Worlds is a double-edged sword. The RYA youth programme runs like a finely oiled machine that generates

Top  
Combining  
learning, sailing  
and fun

Above  
Youth racing in  
the 29er fleet

numerous world-class sailors in their teens, but is it all too serious too soon?

This is a question that the RYA has been asking itself for some years already, and one that new director of racing Ian Walker has been thinking about since joining the organisation a few months ago.

### INSPIRING MORE GIRLS

With the International Olympic Committee insisting on a 50:50 gender split between men and women competing at the Games, this is driving change at all levels of sport. Even some women like former Olympian and RYA coach Penny Clark are sceptical about driving for 50:50 representation when it's clear that girls and adult women generally take more convincing to go sailing, and serious racing in particular. Clark believes that a step change of, say 70:30 ratio of boys-girls might have been preferable, with an ongoing push towards 50:50. But the RYA is already starting to go 50:50 with its youth squads; this means there is enormous opportunity for any girls who want to take part, while competition for places in the boys' squads will become much harder.

### A SPORT FOR LIFE

For those that never make it through the RYA squad system, there is life in sailing beyond a squad! It could even be that the young sailors who never venture into the squad system might stay in the sport longer.

One of the best aspects of sailing is you can take it up at any age and you can keep on doing it for the rest of your life.

But you know that already, now go and tell someone else about our amazing sport.

brand of designers bear little relationship to the once go-to firm of Sparkman & Stephens. Today's designers can best be found at the big races - they make themselves known to the owners where it counts and watch what their rivals are doing, so that they can go one better, quicker.

That attitude began in the 1970s; designers like Doug Petersen and Ron Holland broke into the scene in the level rating classes, which was a hotbed of development. Will we see the like of that again? Not until major changes are made in the way we categorize our

divisions. Failing boats must be separated, and rules considered.

The America's Cup is going through a catharsis currently, moving from the control of one ultra-rich syndicate head to that of a technical sailor in harmony with a genuine sailor who is rich aiming to produce a rule which is generally acceptable.

The outline of the intended boats indicates the technical design groups within the teams will have the greatest influence on possible success.

And don't expect to see it happening immediately - the

Land Rover BAR team learned the lesson of peaking too soon, as did Oracle. The Kiwis, who kept their powder dry - not using their number one foils until they were necessary - won easily. I think the other teams have learned that lesson too, so that the results of the pre-event racing will not be of value in the event.

### FUTURE PROGRESS

Looking into my crystal ball, at least for the next 10 years, I see no great developments (outside of foils) in the dinghy classes but there should be some better use

of materials to provide lighter, stronger boats, with perhaps even a weight reduction, which those developments could provide. For offshore boats the progress is in the hands of the designers, but the trickle-down effect see the cruising community benefit from lighter, more stable boats. The 'ultimate' crowd will continue to find ways to go faster and further, presumably still led by the French (but that can't go on forever).

Maybe that of Brahm in Newport RI was right, but progress is happening, and all the time - even if it is a slow process. □