

Re: Disabled Racing in the UK

Here's a brief insight to the racing side of disabled sailing in the UK.

Club Racing

There are two classes of boats for disabled sailing at club level, these are the Challenger Series and the Access Travellers Series.

The Challenger Series comprises of 6 race venues thro'out the UK covering England, Scotland and Wales, some serious mileage covered. These are normally over three days of racing so can work out rather expensive.

The Access Travellers Series comprises of 10 race venues in England, covering Cumbria in the north, Bristol in the west and New Forest in the south. These are day events with 2 races in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, quite exhausting when you include the travelling.

There are 3 more events during the calendar year, a National Championship event for both the Challengers and Access classes and the Multi-Regatta covering all classes of disabled boats, all these events are over three days.

Elite Racing

We then go onto the elite racing incorporating Para-Olympic class boats. All participants who enter are classified regarding their own particular disability, this ranges from a 1, (tetra/quad), to a 7, (below knee amputee).

There are three boats, 2.4R, 1 pers, Skud 18, 2 pers. and Sonar, 3 person crew.

The 2.4R is a delightful little boat, but rather wet when sailed. It is either steered by hand or feet and is quite a technical craft. The competition is very good with many fleets within the UK and Europe.

The Skud 18 has been around for 5 years but has not been taken up by many clubs in the UK. It's main problem is its draught being nearly 6ft! therefore restricting it's use on the majority of our inland waters. It's a fun and fast boat to sail and has an asymmetric to play with. The cost is expensive with a new boat costing 20K. There are about 10 boats in the UK with only 4/5 sailed on a regular basis.

The Sonar is a 23ft keel boat and the largest of all Olympic boats. A beautiful sailing craft for its 3 crew members and is raced in a 2 sail format. There is only 1 fleet in the UK and that is in Cowes but there are a few boats around the country including 2 at Levington. Again there are very few disabled crews and only 2 boats have been involved in 'campaigning' over the last 6 years. The cost of a new boat is 30K making it out of reach to most clubs plus the restrictions on many inland waters as this boat exceeds permitted length allowed to sail on many reservoirs in the UK.

RYA Sailability Multi Regatta, Rutland - August 2011

This Regatta is an annual event held at Rutland for disabled sailors in various classes, with racing takes place over three days finishing with a handicap race on Sunday. I took along a 303 to sail in the Access singles class. On arrival I was approached by the GB coach Matt Grier to sail in the Skud class as the Rutland boat wasn't being used and with only 6 boats in the fleet they wanted to maximise the class. Having never sailed is type of boat I'm always up for a challenge and persuading Rutland Sailing club that I would be competent to sail this boat. A crew was needed so I hijacked a friend Bruce Dudley whom I've sailed with before but like myself he had never sailed in a Skud. After much deliberation Rutland finally gave way and permission was granted, this boat had not been used since last year and is the oldest in the fleet. It has fixed seating and lacked the electric cambered tilting seats that other boats had, plus other small refinements.

Fridays racing was cancelled due to high winds and lots of rain so off we went back to our digs which we had booked for our 4 day stay. Saturdays racing started at 10am and the start line was way down at the other end of the lake, over a mile away, so we had time to familiarise the controls layout and to play with the asymmetric tacking back and forth. In the 1st race we had a poor start and turned at the top mark in 4th but over the next lap we were able to pick up a couple of places and finished 2nd. The next race we were on the line for our start and played follow the leader finishing 2nd again.

lunch was on the agenda next so we returned to shore for much needed refreshments. The afternoon produced mixed results and in the first race after an excellent start at the committee boat we led the race from start to finish, with a 2minute lead.

Our start in the last race was good and we turned at the top mark in the lead and went to launch our asymmetric but found that a knot in the sheet had jammed in a block and watched the fleet sail past but were eventually able to free our kite. Over the next lap we managed to claw our way back to finish in 3rd position. With results of 2,2,1,3. we finished in 2nd position overall, quite pleasing for our first time out.

That evening RYA laid on dinner and over 150 people sat down for their meal.

Sundays weather was sunshine with winds of 7/10 knots and the event was the handicap race over 2 legs. In previous years this event was a pursuit race over 2hrs with an 50 min. difference between the slowest and fastest start time. This year all 70 boats would line up for the start. As you can imagine mayhem pursued at the start but with so many of these little boats sitting on the line we ventured to the middle of the fleet and out of trouble and got our nose on the line for the gun. Within 100m of the start a wind shift came in and left us halfway down the fleet and due to the number of slower boats to windward were unable to tack off. With the rest of the race playing 'dodgem's', we finished way down in 28th place. In the 2nd race we decided our start position was to be at the committee boat end and went over the line 5secs after the gun but this allowed us to tack off immediately into free air. We turn the top mark in 4th place and held this until the 2nd lap when our steering became rather sloppy and difficult to control the boat. We persevered on and tacking turned into huge arches as were turning at the marks. We finished in 8th place but overall finished way down on handicap. Our steering in our Skud is similar to access dinghies, with 2 bits of string controlling the rudder which had come loose, a common fault and was easily rectified, but not good on the racing course.

We had a super weekend with 90 fellow disabled sailors competing on a level platform in various boats all designed for those with the most severe disabilities.



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