



Charity No. 1105212
www.newforestsailability.co.uk

UK National Sailing Racing for Disabled Sailors

On the last weekend of April 2012, New Forest & District Sailability (“NFDS”) hosted the UK national championship racing for disabled sailors in the Access 303 and 2.3 and Liberty classes.

The Access 303 dinghies are designed specifically for disabled sailors and can be sailed either singly by the disabled sailors or by a disabled sailor with a helper. The 2.3 dinghies are smaller, single sail, single handed boats. The Liberty is slightly larger and can be sailed with full servo controls for both main and jib. During the season, NFDS uses the dinghies for volunteer skippers to take out people of all disabilities, or ensures a safe environment for disabled sailors to sail independently.

However, on Friday 27 April 18 disabled sailors turned up at NFDS host club, Spinnaker Sailing Club, Ringwood, to take part in the Access National Championship racing. They were joined by 5 members of NFDS and practicing took place. Just like any sailing event (and similar to motor sports), the sailors were testing the conditions of the lake and ironing out any “bugs” in their boats.

On Saturday, the racing started in earnest! 23 boats started the races with a mixture of the Access 303s, the slightly larger Liberty’s and the 2.3s. There were two races in the morning in conditions of 17 – 20 mph winds and rain, and a further two races in the afternoon – in slightly better conditions.

The morning and afternoon races were interspersed with a high degree of excitement as a small fire broke out behind the clubhouse and everyone was evacuated – fortunately just about everyone had finished lunch. So whilst the fire engine was called and the clubhouse was sealed off, the intrepid sailors just went back to their boats and carried on racing! By the time they had finished the fire brigade had isolated the cause and made everything safe. It was discovered that there was an electrical fault in the mains cable which meant no hot food or beverages on Saturday afternoon. But, to their everlasting credit, Southern Electricity fixed the problem on Saturday night, by Sunday morning power had been restored and bacon rolls and hot drinks were back on the menu!

This was just as well, because Sunday morning brought winds of around 35 mph with gusts of up to 50 mph. Looking out at the lake from the clubhouse, the horizontal rain made the conditions extremely unpleasant and the hot bacon rolls even more welcome.

The race director, Marcus Frith, having checked the conditions every hour from 8.30 am onwards, eventually conceded that conditions were not likely to improve sufficiently to enable sailing to take place on Sunday and the races were abandoned.

The class rules require a sailor to register 4 races in an event, and the races which took place on Saturday were enough for the event to be officially recognized by the Access Association.

The results were:

Access Liberty

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1 st place | Alex Hovden |
| 2 nd place | David Durston |
| 3 rd place | Vince Barton |

Access 303 single

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1 st place | Margaret Foreman |
| 2 nd place | Paul Phillips |
| 3 rd place | Monique Foster |

Access 303 double
1st place Ian Clements
2nd place Chris Atkins
3rd place Jason Meakers

Access 2.3
1st place Lindsay Burns
2nd place Christine David
3rd place Keith Harris

On Saturday night, a dinner for 70 competitors, their “crews”, and NFDS volunteers was held at Sandy Balls with disabled sailor Geoff Holt, MBE, as the guest speaker. The prize giving was held on Sunday afternoon with Sainsbury’s providing the food.

NFDS sailing captain, Rory Morrison, MBE, commented “It is amazing how many Access sailors love to race. Their disabilities make life very difficult for some of the sailors but the huge grins on their faces when they return to shore – whether they have won, lost or been somewhere in the middle of the fleet – makes the work put in to organizing an event like this well worthwhile. You would think that those who have won would get the greatest pleasure, but just competing in these races is an achievement and a great joy to all the sailors”.

She continued “But my thanks must go to all those who have made the event possible. Without wanting to sound like an acceptance speech at the Oscars – thank you to all the volunteers who helped the sailors into their boats; to the safety crew on the water; to the “back room” people who manned the reception and made sure the sailors knew the timetables etc; to Paul for the food and bacon rolls; to the fire brigade who got us back into the clubhouse as soon as possible; and to Southern Electric for their sterling effort in working overnight to get the power back on. An event like this cannot take place without all those concerned working as a team – and we have a superb team at NFDS.”

It is back to “normal” at NFDS and anyone who wants to volunteer or anyone with disabilities who wants to sail with NFDS, please contact Eric Blyth on 02380 867438 or chairman@newforestsailability.co.uk



Getting the Sailors into their boats



Racing to the Mark



Fire Engine arriving at the Access Nationals