

Thom Dyer (AKA. Dylan)

Boatbuilding apprentice at IslandRIBS



I have been an apprentice at Island Ribs for almost 2 years now. I've learnt so much in my time here, every day is an opportunity to learn more and improve my skills. After being introduced into the workplace, one of the most valuable skills I've learnt here is how to work well in a small, successful team of people.

Island RIBs are a small team and although each person has their strengths, we are all expected to gain knowledge of all of the different roles involved in boat building, from toolmaking and laminating to electrical fit-out, engine installation and sea-trialling the finished product ready to handover to our customers. This makes my role extremely varied and means that I am always learning something new.

One of the projects that I have enjoyed the most here has been making seats, I am now able to produce a jockey seat from setting the GRP mould with release agents to ensure the moulding releases easily, to fitting the seat out with upholstery and bonding them to a boat. Of course I have learnt from my mistakes in the process but making seats has greatly improved my skills in laminating but also in other areas such as understanding technical drawings and working to a small tolerance. The thing I have struggled with the most about this project is getting the chop strand matt into the radius' in the first 2 layers, this results in voids between the gelcoat and fibreglass which requires gel repairs. The photo on the right shows one of the seats that I have made.

The skills I have picked up from laminating seats have helped my performance in bigger team lay ups such as hull and deck builds and improved the quality of my work. In the photo below, I am using a bolt roller to push the glass fibre cloth into the radius of the keel.



At college recently I have been studying fibreglass repairs in grp hulls, this involves making a 30mm hole in the hull of a dinghy below the waterline. We then seal the hole with tape and rebuild the structure from the outside in, starting with layers of gel coat and then progressing onto layers of grp. The knowledge I have learnt from this will also help me in other types of repairs I might undergo at work, such as repairing air blisters in a piece of fibreglass.

I have enjoyed my apprenticeship so far and I am pleased with the experience I have gained. Some of my favourite parts have been working with outboard engines and learning the engineering side of boatbuilding. After my apprenticeship has been completed I hope to go to university to do a maritime course such as naval architecture in order to further my education and gain more qualifications that will help me later in my career.

