

SHIPWRIGHTS AT THE ENGLISH OPEN CHALLENGER CHAMPIONSHIP, 20TH/21ST MAY 2023

With the sun shining and the wind blowing, Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, is a fun and exciting place to sail. And with those same conditions prevailing on Sunday 21st May, I was delighted to attend the final day of racing at the *English Open Challenger Championship 2023 (EOCC)* on behalf of the Company.

When you arrive at an event to which you have been invited as a special guest and everyone you meet from the first minute onwards wants to thank you and the organisation you are representing so sincerely, enthusiastically and delightedly for your support, you sense you're in the midst of something special.

So it was, as I walked up to the club house of Oxford Sailing Club (OSC), on Sunday morning two weeks ago, to be met by Lizzie Newton of Oxford Sailability and OSC, together with a small gang of volunteers working at the EOCC.



“David is out on the water at the moment. Ooh, he’ll be delighted you’re here. I’ll radio him and let him know.”, Lizzie enthused quickly and brightly. “Would you like to go out on the RHIB and watch the racing? You must go out and watch the racing.”, she continued.

Within 20 minutes or so, I had been welcomed warmly by Lizzie, met and briefed intently by a father of one of the young sailors racing at the event, chatted to three other volunteers working as shore crew, and whisked out on a RHIB to the centre of the race course by Lizzie’s husband, David.

The Shipwrights English National Trophy

David Newton has been at the heart of the Challenger Class Association, Oxford Sailability and OSC for three decades. A knowledgeable sailor and instructor, he is a passionate champion for disability sailing and the Challenger trimaran that makes it a reality for so many disabled and less mobile sailors. That much was evident in the time it took us to motor two-thirds of the way across the 247 acres of water that is known locally as “Farmoor 2”.

At the beginning of this year, David wrote to the Company on behalf of Oxford Sailability and OSC, applying for £1,500 towards the operating costs of running the EOCC in May. In February, the Education & Charities Committee agreed to award Oxford Sailability and OSC a responsive donation of £2,000, which was subsequently uplifted to £3,235.

I have been a member of Education & Charities Committee for a few years now, initially as a member of the Responsive Donations working group, and now as Chair of MentorShip. Over this time, the Committee has disbursed many tens of thousands of pounds to charities and causes more than worthy of the Company’s support. However, being present at the EOCC was the first time I had experienced in person how meaningful

the Company's giving is; to see, feel and understand what a profound difference it makes to the organisations and people who benefit from it.

Out on the course was a Challenger named *Dan Buoy*, being raced by Simon (helm) and Mark, Simon's "Buddy". David pointed out *Dan Buoy* to me with a smile. It was the Challenger that his and Lizzie's son Daniel sailed and raced until his death due to cancer in 2003, aged 21.

Lizzie had mentioned Dan briefly while we were waiting for David to come in and pick me up. I knew then, without equivocation, why David, Lizzie, the sailors and volunteers were there; and why the Company's support, as well as the donation, mattered so much.

The sailor placing 1st overall at the EOCC and thereby "English Champion" is awarded *The Shipwrights English National Trophy*. Yes, you read that correctly. The Company's connection to the EOCC and the Challenger dates back to at least 1993, when Anglo Marine of Clacton-on-Sea, Essex took over production of the Challenger, under its Managing Director, Nevill Towler.

Nevill is a Shipwright, having been admitted to the Freedom of the Company in 1959 and it was Nevill who presented the The Shipwrights English National Trophy to the Challenger Class Association in 2001. It was awarded for the first time that year to Dan Newton, and Dan won it again in 2002; both times helming *Dan Buoy*.

There were 18 Challengers racing at the EOCC this year, competing in 3 fleets (Gold, Silver and Bronze) The Gold and Silver fleets for solo sailors. The Bronze fleet for sailors who, for various reasons, need a "Buddy" to sit alongside them in "Buddy seats" and assist in sailing or navigating the boat.

The Challenger is a 15' single-handed trimaran, conceptualised and designed originally in the late 1970's. The first Challenger – sponsored by British Petroleum and the Royal Yachting Association Seamanship Foundation – was delivered in 1980 by Cheesman-Rollo Ltd., to Oxford Sailing club at a cost of £750.

Almost impossible to capsize, and now benefitting from more than 40 years of innovations in sailing technology, modern Challengers have control pad wings, high performance hulls, rudders, masts and sails. It has recorded a top speed of 13.4 knots – which, if you know anything about dingy sailing, is far from shabby.

Placing 1st Overall and English Champion this year was experienced Rutland-based sailor, Graham Hall. He was presented with *The Shipwrights English National Trophy* by Sara Sutcliffe, CEO of the Royal Yachting Association (RYA).



*Graham Hall being presented with
The Shipwrights English National Trophy*

It was a privilege to represent the Company at this year's EOCC and to play a small role in re-connecting us with *The Shipwrights English National Trophy*, Challenger sailing and David and Lizzie Newton.

Lizzie told me that before Dan died, he implored her and David to carry on with the EOCC (and Challenger sailing). "Don't let it end, Mum." Dan said and they haven't.

With the Company's financial help and support, this year's EOCC was, by common agreement, Challenger sailing at its best.

Further information on the EOCC 2023 and Challenger sailing can be found here:

<https://www.yachtsandyachting.com/news/262255/English-Challenger-Championships-at-Oxford>

<https://www.challenger-sailing.org.uk/index.php>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OxfordSailability/>

https://www.facebook.com/ChallengerClassAssociationCommunity?locale=en_GB

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