

English Open Challenger Sailing Championship – May 2026



EOCC 2026 - © Alyx Bedwell

It was a pleasure once again to attend the English Open Challenger Sailing Championship (EOCC) at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, on behalf of the Company.

The EOCC is a flagship event in the Challenger Class Association's calendar and this year's regatta was held over the weekend of 16th and 17th May 2026.

The sailor placing 1st overall at the EOCC – thereby earning the title "English Champion" – is awarded *The Shipwrights English National Trophy*.

The regatta is organised by **Oxford Sailability** (a charity dedicated to enabling people with disabilities to experience the fun and adventure of small-boat sailing), with technical and additional volunteer support from **Oxford Sail Training Trust**, itself a sail training charity based at the reservoir.

In June 2024, the Education and Charities Committee (E&C) awarded Oxford Sailability a 5-year Outdoor Activities Bursary from the Charitable Fund, in particular to support the continuance of the EOCC at Farmoor Reservoir. The bursary also reaffirms the Company's connection to Challenger Class sailing through *The Shipwrights English National Trophy*, which dates back 33 years.

A Very Important Weekend for the Challenger Class Association

The EOCC is always a special event. However, this weekend was especially important, as Hannah Stodel (Para Sailing Manager) and Thomas Jatsch (International Measurer) from **World Sailing** attended the regatta to continue their assessment of the Challenger for International Class status and with the ultimate goal of the Challenger being proposed as the para inclusive multihull design for the Brisbane 2032 Para-Olympic Games.

Also attending was Liveryman Professor Alan Murphy, Head of the Maritime Engineering Group at **Southampton University**. Alan is one of the supervisors of the *Challenger Redesign Project* currently being undertaken by a number of students on Southampton's Master's degree in Maritime Engineering.

There was also a **RYA** film crew on site, and afloat, shooting a promotional video about disabled sailing.

On Sunday, Alison Rooke, Deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire attended to present the prizes and spend time on the water to view the racing at close quarters.

Given the number of VIPs in attendance, the pressure was on the sailors to show just what a superb boat the Challenger is, and they did not disappoint.



Race Report (with thanks to Marion Edwards of the Challenger Class Association)

There were six local sailors and seven visiting sailors racing this year. There should have been more visiting sailors, but two were reluctantly forced to drop out. Caz Jeromes from [Rutland Sailability](#) was grateful to Oxford Sailability for the loan of Challenger 117 and it was brilliant to see a four-boat *Bronze Fleet* this year (Bronze Fleet sailors are unable to sail solo so have a "buddy" onboard to provide whatever assistance is needed).

On **Saturday** morning the briefing was given by the Race Officer, George Barker, who clearly, but concisely, explained the course and start sequence for the benefit of some of the less experienced sailors (and also as a reminder for the experienced ones).

The wind was mainly F3, gusting F4 occasionally F5 (particularly in the afternoon). Unfortunately, it was also a lee shore, making life tricky for the valiant shore crew launching the fleet.

There was something of a contretemps at the start of Race 1 which severely disadvantaged Diana Faulks (288) and Val Millward (312). Alex Hovden (304) also suffered, but managed to extract himself from the confusion.

Graham Hall (270) and Nick Bett (261) were the main beneficiaries, and Graham led until the final beat of the four-lap race. He then managed to find a number of headers which allowed Nick through to take the win. Alex was third. In the Silver fleet, local sailors Lydia Johnston (258), and Nicholas Bishop (272), performed well to come home in fifth and sixth. Oxford Sailability's race training sessions had obviously paid dividends!

The sailors then came in for lunch and in some cases to add an extra layer or two of clothing as it was unseasonably cold.

At the start of Race 2 Val Millward decided to keep out of everyone's way and executed a superb port tack flyer. She held the lead until the approach to the third and final windward mark when Graham tacked below the lay line and got lucky. He was lifted to cross ahead of her and rounded the mark first. He held the lead to the finish with Val and Nick following in that order.

Alex suffered rudder problems and although they were resolved on the water he was forced to retire from the race.

In the Silver Fleet Diana capitalised on Alex's misfortune to take fourth followed by David Craig (263), in fifth. In the Bronze fleet, Jack Alderdice and Marion Edwards (292) achieved a remarkable sixth place.



EOCC 2026 - © Alyx Bedwell

Race 3 was another three lap race. Val, Nick and Graham all went left while most of the fleet went right. Right was the way to go. The windward mark was very congested but Diana and David were first round. Unfortunately, Nick touched the mark and was seen executing a penalty turn which set him back.

By the leeward mark the Gold Fleet was starting to exert its authority with Val and Alex rounding it first. Graham overtook them both at the start of the second lap, but had lost the lead to Val by the windward mark. Val held the lead to the finish with Graham taking second. The Silver Fleet was led by Diana in fifth, followed by Lydia.

So, at the end of Saturday, Graham had a two-point lead over Val, with Nick just one point further behind. In the Silver Fleet, Diana had a two-point lead over Lydia, with David in third. In Bronze, Jack was clear ahead followed, by Bill Poupart and Iain Smith (125), with Jamie Wright and Bex Foulsham (231) one point further back. There was everything to play for on Sunday!

Most of the sailors and volunteers remained at the club for the event dinner. Before the meal, Hannah Stodel explained the intention of World Sailing to get sailing back into the paralympics for 2032 and the potential role of the Challenger in achieving that aim.

Sunday still a lee shore, still cold and the wind still F3, gusting F4 occasionally F5. The Bronze Fleet was joined by Neil Bartlett and Murray Palmer (232).

Race 4 was three laps for the leaders. Val was ahead for much of the race, chased by Nick and Graham. Graham fell out of contention when his boom touched the wing mark on lap 2, and after his penalty turn, he was playing catchup. Nick managed to pass Val at the final windward mark and held the lead to the finish. Lydia closed the gap on Diana as they finished fifth and sixth respectively.

Race 5 was another three lap race for the leaders. Graham was early at the start and had to sail down the line. Alex got the best start and was the controlling boat on the first part of the beat. He tacked on a header and Graham followed, whereas Nick and Val went further left. At the windward mark it was Nick, Val and Graham. Alex lost out as he overstood the windward mark. The positions remained the same until the approach to the third windward mark when Nick and Val went to the lay line and Graham under tacked and got lucky (again) and was lifted to the mark and held the lead to the finish.

The fleet returned to shore for lunch. For some there was an "exciting" lee shore landing!

The last race was critical. The overall winner could be one of Val, Nick or Graham. Diana led the Silver Fleet but only on countback from Lydia. However, Jack had the Bronze Fleet sown up and he decided to sit out the last race.

At the start of Race 6 Val was involved with an incident with a buddied boat, which put her on the backfoot from the word go. Graham led up the beat but was initially controlled by Alex to windward of him. Graham's luck held and he was first round the windward mark. On the final lap Nick split tacks with Graham but it didn't help him. Val, sailing with her usual determination, came through to take third but it wasn't enough. Lydia had the courage to do a port tack flyer. It paid off as she was fourth and Diana was sixth.

Therefore, in the Gold Fleet it was a one, two, three for Graham, Nick and Val respectively. Lydia's performance in the last race gave her victory in the Silver Fleet. Diana was second and Nicholas in third. Jack was the clear winner in the Bronze Fleet. Jamie (and Bex) was second and Bill (and Iain) third.



The Shipwrights English National Trophy - © James Wilkes

Prize Giving

The prizes were presented by Alison Rooke DL.

The winner this year of *The Shipwrights English National Trophy* and English Champion was Graham Hall (1st in the Gold Fleet).

The full results and prizes are set out at the end of this report.

Vote of thanks

David Newton (Chair of the EOCC organising committee) and Rose Todd (Chair of Oxford Sailability) asked me to pass on their profound thanks once again to the Company for its continued charitable support of Oxford Sailability, the EOCC and Challenger sailing. I do so accordingly here.

James Wilkes
Court Assistant
May 2026

Trophies awarded:

The Shipwrights English National Trophy (1st overall) - Graham Hall

Anglo Marine Plate (1st Silver) – Lydia Johnston

Bronze Barometer (1st Bronze) – Jack Alderdice (and Marion Edwards)

Oxford Sailability Challenger Championship trophy – Lydia Johnston

Pam Gee Endeavour Trophy – David Craig

Overall Results:

Pos	Fleet	Sail No	Helm	Crew	Club	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	Pts
1st	Gold	270	Graham Hall		Rutland SC	2	1	2	-3	1	1	7
2nd	Gold	261	Nick Bett		Rutland SC	1	3	-4	1	2	2	9
3rd	Gold	312	Val Millward		Rutland SC	-4	2	1	2	3	3	11
4th	Gold	304	Alex Hovden		Papercourt SC	3	(RET)	3	4	4	5	19
5th	Silver	258	Lydia Johnston		Oxford Sailability	5	-7	6	5	5	4	25
6th	Silver	288	Diana Faulks		Rutland SC	-7	4	5	6	6	6	27
7th	Silver	272	Nicholas Bishop		Oxford Sailability	6	-9	8	7	7	7	35
8th	Silver	263	David Craig		Oxford Sailability	10	5	7	-11	8	9	39
9th	Bronze	292	Jack Alderdice	Marion Edwards	Rutland Sailability	8	6	9	9	9	(DNC)	41
10th	Silver	117	Caz Jerromes		Rutland Sailability	9	8	-10	8	10	8	43
11th	Bronze	231	Jamie Wraight	Bex Foulsham	Oxford Sailability	-12	10	12	10	11	10	53
12th	Bronze	125	Bill Poupart	Iain Smith	Oxford Sailability	11	11	11	-12	12	11	56
13th	Bronze	232	Neil Bartlett	Murray Palmer	Oxford Sailability	(DNC)	DNC	DNC	13	13	12	70
14th	Silver	271	Ray Andrews		Chelmarsh SC	(DNC)	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	80
14th	Silver	238	Lynn Steward		Wigan & St Helens SC	(DNC)	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	DNC	80

Further information on Challenger sailing can be found here:

<https://www.shipwrights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/JEW-English-Open-Challenger-Championship-May-2023.pdf>

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

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

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

<https://www.sailing.org/>

<https://oxfordsailtraining.org.uk/>