

Why a name does matter



Geoff Holt

The former professional yachtsman who was paralysed in a swimming accident and inspired sailors when he became the first quadriplegic to sail the Atlantic.

WHAT do you think of when you hear the word Sailability?

A charity? The RYA? Disabled sailors on your local lake? Or maybe some well-intentioned, nebulous concept that brings disabled people and boats together? Does it actually matter?

I think it does and here's why: The word Sailability means all of the above, but all are quite different entities and if you are to support any with your time or money, then you should make it your business to differentiate between them.

● **Sailability: The concept.**

Sailability is the bringing together of disabled people and boats. The word is used in dozens of countries around the world to describe their national disabled sailing programmes.

When the question arose in 1995 as to whether the RYA should Trademark the word "Sailability", it was agreed not to in order to spread the concept far and wide.

● **Sailability: The local disabled sailing club.**

There are approximately 150 Sailability clubs and groups around the UK. Most are autonomous groups with their own charitable constitutions and they often piggy-back an existing sailing club's facilities.

All of these Sailability groups have been assessed and accredited by the RYA.

Sailability clubs are run by volunteers and they raise their own funding locally.

● **RYA Sailability: The National Charity.**

Founded in 1995 with HRH Princess Royal as patron and bearing the RYA's prefix, the charity is regarded as the "RYA's charity".

In its early years, the charity raised most of the seed-core funding required to establish the 150 Sailability sites mentioned above. Substantial grants were given to help groups acquire boats and make material improvements to sailing clubs.

Participation has risen from less than 1,000 disabled sailing sessions a year in the mid 1990's to nearly 25,000 sessions provided in 2010 across the 150 sites.

With the vast majority of the charity's development grants awarded



Photo: RYA

and completed between 1995 and 2008, the charity now has no direct sport development role and confines its activities to making a number of modest grants to clubs and groups for small equipment items.

It also makes a more substantial grant each year to the RYA itself with money going towards the RYA's disabled sailing development programme.

● **RYA Sailability: The RYA's disabled sailing division.**

Just as there are RYA divisions for racing, cruising, power-boating etc.,

it formed its own disabled sailing division, RYA Sailability. Sailing for people with disabilities is now all but integrated within the RYA's core activities for which they should be congratulated.

It is my hope that the RYA, as the National Governing Body for our sport in the UK, will not need "charity" to help offset the cost of running any of its divisions.

Only then will disabled sailors feel valued by the RYA as equally as our able-bodied counterparts. After all, the governmental, lottery and sport

foundation grants that flow into the RYA are given on the basis of equal provision.

Footnote

Now that disability has been almost completely integrated into the RYA's mainstream sailing programmes, the charity's development role has ceased to exist. It continues to play a useful role in raising funds, but with grants to clubs and groups totalling less than £40,000 last year, the charity's role in the future is open to debate.

So next time you hear someone mention Sailability, ask them to clarify exactly which Sailability they are talking about, because it does matter.

Diary date

RYA Sailability (the RYA's disabled sailing division), hold its Annual Conference on Saturday 12 February at Wyboston Lakes, Bedfordshire. For further information contact RYA Sailability on 02380 604 100.

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