

# GEOFF HOLT

YJA YACHTSMAN OF THE YEAR 2010

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



## Sailability challengers converge on Rutland

MORE than 60 boats and 150 disabled and able-bodied sailors converged on Rutland Waterlast for a weekend last month to compete in the annual RYA Sailability Multiclass Regatta.

Competitors came from as far afield as Holland, France and Canada as well as the UK and battled it out in nine classes- Stratos, SKUD, Access, 2.4mR, Challenger, Sonar, SQUIB, Kinsman and Neo 495.

The racing began on Saturday with each class competing in four class races. While the wind decided which direction it wanted to blow in racing was held up. Once it made its mind up the clouds parted and the sun shone, creating perfect sailing conditions.

Sunshine and wind continued throughout Sunday which was all about the prestigious Ken Ellis Trophy and saw 150 sailors all contesting in the two-race Trophy general handicap series, creating quite a spectacle out on the water.

Competing for the first time in the regatta was the Neo 495 class which had two new entries. Alain Inzerlac, the designer of the boat, came from the South of France to compete. "It is great to be here this weekend. This boat was built in 2005 and is designed especially for disabled people to race," he said.

"I have really enjoyed sailing here at Rutland Water and it has been a fantastic opportunity to introduce people to my boat".

Amy Oulton, 22, from Ringwood Sailability, who suffers with a rare disability was competing in an Access 303.

"I am so excited to be competing this weekend, even though my chances of winning are not very high. This is event is amazing as it provides competitors with chance to sail alongside sailors of all levels of ability and experience. Some



Photo: RYA/Fotoboot

people have been sailing for years and years whereas I am very new!" said Amy. "The social side is fantastic too and I have even met another lady with the same disability as me. It's a very special event."

Wilma van der Broek, sailing in the Access Liberty fleet, was revealed as the overall multiclass champion and the winner of the Ken Ellis Trophy at the official prize giving.

"I am very surprised and couldn't believe it when I heard I was the first person of the day," said a delighted Wilma from the Netherlands.

Alex Hovden was also announced as the winner of the first UK Open Skud 18

National Championships.

Matt Grier, RYA Racing Development Coach said: "Another successful year. The weather has been perfect, with less wind and we have seen some great tactical racing.

"It's fantastic to see the development of the people coming back each year as well as the development of the Paralympic and disabled sailing."

The event was also extra special this year as it invited disabled sailors to come along and have a go on a variety of different boats under the watchful eye of a qualified instructor in the 'try a sail' area which was running throughout the weekend.

The Model Yachting Association (MYA) also attended the event and invited sailors to come and try something a bit different- sailing without getting wet!

"Once again we have had a spectacular turnout at this year's event, making it our biggest regatta yet" said Debbie Blachford, RYA Sailability Manager.

"Not only is the Multiclass a great showcase of the talent we have within the disabled community, but it is also a great social event too with many spectators coming along to the support the sailors and meet other disabled people who share a common interest in the sport".

### THE WINNERS

**2.4mR Fleet:**

Iain Stowe

Rutland Sailability

**Challenger Gold Fleet:**

Val Millward

Rutland Sailability

**Challenger Silver Fleet:**

Pauline Shaw

Grafham Sailability

**Artemis Fleet:**

Dean Abra/Tim Bell

Even Keel Project

**Laser Stratos Fleet:**

Lucy Hodges/Gary Butler/

Liam Catternale

Blind Sailing

**Access 2.3 Fleet:**

Lindsey Burns

Frensham Pond

**Access 303 2p Fleet:**

Chris Emmet/Malcolm Kirk

Rutland Sailability

**Access 303 1p Fleet:**

Ian MacNair

Rutland Sailability

**Access Liberty Fleet:**

Vera Voorbach

**Kinsman Fleet:**

John Vickers/Chris Ball

Rutland Sailability

**Neo 495 Fleet:**

Andrew Sheath/Kate Lintott

Frensham Pond

**Skud 18 Fleet:**

Alex Hovden, Kate Mannering

Papercourt Sailing Club

## SAILORS FIRST TO BE SELECTED FOR PARALYMPICS GB

THE British Paralympic Association announced the first selection of sailors who will compete for Great Britain at London 2012.

The athletes are the first to achieve selection and the first to be officially selected for either ParalympicsGB or Team GB.

The five athletes are John Robertson, Hannah Stodel and Stephen Thomas - Sonar in the three-person keelboat, Alexandra Rickham and Niki Birrell in the SKUD 18 two-person keelboat event.

John Robertson, 39 lives in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear and started sailing aged 11.

Hannah Stodel, 26 from West Mersea, Essex started sailing aged three in Brightlingsea in a Mirror.

Stephen Thomas, 34, from Cardiff started sailing with Jon Robertson in 2003, aged 26.

Alexandra Rickham, 29, was born in Kingston, Jamaica and lives in Epsom, Surrey. Following a diving accident in 1995, she first sailed on a day out while rehabbing in Miami but didn't start taking the sport seriously ten years later.

Niki Birrell, 25, was born in Manchester and lives in Knutsford, Cheshire, has Cerebral Palsy. He is the youngest member of the British sailing team and

enjoyed significant success sailing with his brother, qualifying for the 420 Worlds when European Junior Mirror champions as well as making the 470 Worlds, before switching into the Paralympic Classes.

Stephen Park, Olympic Manager at the Royal Yachting Association, said: "Over the past three years we've been trying hard to move our sailors forward from being medal possibles to medal probables. These two selected teams have managed to deliver consistent medal-winning performances that gave the RYA's Paralympic Selection Committee great confidence in their early nomination."



Hannah Stodel, Stephen Thomas and John Robertson



Niki Birrell and Alexandra Rickham

Photos: onEdition