

RYA RACING INITIATIVE: PROMOTING CLASS RACING AT CLUBS

The first priority of the RYA Racing Committee is to make sailboat racing more fun: to increase the quality of racing and the numbers taking part.

Handicap racing is fun because it provides an opportunity to see how your boat performs against other designs, and it enables you to compete in your boat against friends who sail different boats. However for the majority class racing is more fun because the racing is closer, the gaining and losing of places, and the final positions, are immediately apparent on the water, there is no question of conditions favouring one type of boat ahead of another – and there's usually more to discuss in the bar afterwards.

The challenge with class racing is that it consistently needs enough boats on the start line to provide interesting competition. Particularly in club racing, where the range of ability may be wide, there needs to be enough boats to provide each sailor with close racing, whether he or she is in the front, middle or back of the fleet. Many would say it matters less what boat you sail than that there are lots of others at your club sailing the same.

The development of new classes has brought many advantages and keeps the sport popular and the equipment up-to-date. There is now a much wider choice of styles of boat, and many of the new designs are faster and more exciting. However the older designs don't go away; they retain their appeal and support. The higher the number of classes, the greater the challenge of smaller class fleets and an increase in handicap racing. The current national championships attendances table in yachtsandyachting.com identifies over 200 classes!

The challenge is: how do we take advantage of this increased choice of classes to attract more people and at the same time increase the quality of fleet racing in our clubs? If we can do this, then the sport and the clubs will continue to grow.

If in your club you take initiatives that encourage people into specific adopted classes, we believe that you will be able to provide more enjoyable class racing, in addition to handicap racing, and thereby attract and retain more members. Those loyal to their particular choice of boat will still be able to race it in handicap racing, but the club will benefit by also providing good class racing in a carefully selected and supported set of classes.

Lack of local class racing has produced the breed of good sailor who goes only to open meetings and does not support his local club. The impact of this is reduced for those clubs that take initiatives to promote larger class fleets: there is less need to travel for good class racing, and there are enough sailors behind at the club for good class racing even when the open meeting sailors are away.

RYA Racing is therefore, as part of the Racing Charter, developing best practices for building class racing at clubs. (There is a parallel initiative on best practices for handicap racing). All details on the class racing initiative will be posted to the Charter website at rya.org.uk/racingcharter. The RYA's initial recommendations are summarised below; if your club has implemented other good ideas, please email them to racingcharter@rya.org.uk and they will be added (with due acknowledgement) to the list on the web.

Recommendations

1. Clubs should take active steps that encourage their members to race specific classes, for which the club provides class racing.

2. Club classes should be selected according to the existing interests of their members and the need to provide a range of boats: junior and adult; easy and challenging; single handers and two or more crew; traditional and modern. Clubs should increase their support for their existing established and thriving fleets, whether or not they are among the most popular classes nationally.

3. Where possible, clubs should give priority or preference to admitting boats in their adopted classes. Possible means of encouraging existing and new members into the club's adopted classes include:

- More racing for the adopted classes and less racing for the handicap boats
- First choice of start times for the adopted classes
- Additional personal handicap scoring for the adopted classes
- Schemes or events to encourage young sailors to move from adopted junior classes to adopted adult classes
- Training in the adopted classes.
- Best berths for the adopted classes
- Specific social programmes for the adopted classes
- Inter-class competitions (on and off the water)
- Lower entry or annual membership fees, or concessionary family membership, for adopted classes

Finding good Fleet Captains is the key to successful classes. Fewer classes in the club means fewer fleet captains to find. The relation between the Club, the class and the fleet captain is key to successful classes in your club.

4. If selecting a new class to support, criteria which should be considered include:

- Does the class have a nucleus in the club's handicap fleet and is there an enthusiastic local fleet captain?
- How popular is the class nationally? What type of sailor does it appeal to?
- How suitable is the class for the club's water?
- What is the cost and availability of boats, both new and secondhand?
- What support does the class offer the local fleet captain?
- Will the class support local club training?
- Does the mix of classes cover the spectrum and minimise overlap? The RYA website includes a table that categorises the more popular classes by type of boat.
- What is the appeal of the class to new members, especially young and family? Will it help recruit new members?
- Will the class support open days to attract new members into the club, or that make class boats available for trial by handicap fleet sailors?

Visit the class stands at the RYA Dinghy Show and discuss how it would support the development of your club's class racing, whether it runs buddying schemes, and what other initiatives it runs to encourage people to go racing.

In addition to the list on the RYA website, a very comprehensive listing is published by Yachts and Yachting in their annual racing classes guide. This has a paragraph on each class giving its statistics and secretary contact details. More up to date information is on their website, www.yachtsandyachting.com.

5. Adopted classes should be kept under review and replaced if their turn-outs are consistently too low, or a more suitable class becomes available and becomes dominant in the market for that type of boat.