

Footy Class Association

Annual Report 2007



When I inherited the job of Footy Class registrar from Bill Green and the jobs of Class Captain and Class Secretary from nobody in particular there were 24 boats registered in the UK. Apart from slightly irregular events at Southwater Dabblers there was no regular Footy racing anywhere. No open meetings had been held and none were in prospect apart from the Championship to be held in Gosport at the end of July 2007.

Since then things have changed a little. There are now 124 registered boats - and rising. Apart from the Gosport Championships, there have been five open meetings. Gosport was a tremendous success with, I think, 31 entries, although the number of actual starters was rather less. The winner was Bill Letten sailing a Micron. Colwyn Bay Model Yacht Club's Slithey Tove Trophy in Llandudno attracted entrants from Sweden and the United States and was won by Graham McAllister of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. A healthy Footy community, most of whom are new to model yachting, is beginning to build up north and east of Birmingham with another enthusiastic cluster south-west of London in the general region of Guildford.

An embryonic class organisation is now in place – albeit on a largely informal basis. I must extend my particular thanks to Gary Sanderson who has faithfully turned up to every open meeting, lent other people boats, and helped uncomplainingly with everything he has been asked to do. He is the very deserving first winner of the Traveller's Samovar, one of the association's first perpetual trophies, an unlikely looking Russian portable tea kettle. What could be better in the back of the mighty Peugeot People Carrier?

I must also offer my sincerest thanks to Charles Smith. This is a man who can only be described as urbane. As his brand-new Bobabout sank during the practice race in Gosport, he turned to me, the poor little boat's sails still waving pathetically above the water, and asked, 'What do I do about a sail number? Shall I just keep that one or do you want to issue a new one?' He has (been) volunteered to act as the 'leg man' for southern England and is acquitting himself nobly.

And so the list goes on to the point of boredom – of the reader if not myself: Bill Green, Trevor Thomas, Keven Jackson, Paul Trendell, John Cadenhead, Richard Althorpe, Alex Tulloch and all the merry men.

There are also two people, essentially outside the class, to whom we all owe a huge debt of gratitude – Roger Stollery and Robert Hobbs. When I had this job descend on me, I had virtually no experience of model yachts and none of their administration. Roger and Robert have both been eternally patient advisers, answering my phone calls, some of which must – almost by definition – have been at thoroughly awkward times, with great patience and kindness. Our thanks.

Now to some more mundane things. The class registration information is fairly minimalistic – we do not keep a great deal of data about our members – so accurate statistics are difficult to derive. One reasonably hard number is that the 122 registered boats are spread across about 81 owners. I say ‘about’ here because some multiple ownerships may be the result of a whole family’s boats being registered in a parent’s name. It is very difficult to say, but I think that around 50% of the registered owners are new to model yachting. I have no information on MYA membership rates, but it is early days yet. The class policy is to cooperate with and back the MYA in every way reasonably possible, but we feel that the most important thing is to get the bums on the seats first: get the boats registered and part of the Footy community and think about the MYA later.

We have also taken the trouble to produce a Google map showing the location of every Footy, as defined by the owner’s post code. This has huge benefits. From the planning point of view, venues can be assessed in terms of average mileage or travel time for the target audience. The system can be used as part of an open meeting entry system (although this has yet to be done live) with flags posted for ‘entered’, ‘entered and have seats in car’, ‘would enter if could get a lift’ and so on. This combines the extreme portability of a Footy with the virtues of modern technology. It is difficult to see how it can fail to raise entries.

As a sideline to this, it is interesting to see how far people are in fact prepared to travel to race Footys. The two longest in practice (apart from the American and Swedish visitors to Llandudno) are Keven and Adam Jackson who made it from Burnley in mid-Lancashire to Gosport and Gary Sanderson, who trekked all the way up to Llandudno from somewhere round Chatham with his span of Peugeot horses. In aspiration this was exceeded by Alex Tulloch who proposed to come down from Edinburgh to Llandudno by motorcycle in about three hours. Mercifully ill-health intervened!

One interesting feature of the membership is that a fair percentage of the more active members of the class have been actively ‘trawled’ off Internet forums. Having become part of a community, people who originally set out to build a Footy as an alternative to yet another model aeroplane are now turning up to open meetings, volunteering help in all directions and so on. I am aware that many people dislike Internet forums, but they are currently an essential part of the Footy Class’s existence. A little known class, plans easily downloadable off the net: there are certainly thousands of Footys out there, built as one-off hobby projects. Unlike any other class, the trick is to bring this diaspora in and meld it into the body of radio sailing. The only practical way of doing this is Internet forums. I totally agree that forums can at times be intellectual sewers. However, they also have some people who are worth talking to. Much the same can be said of your local pub!

Internationally the class is thriving. Growth in the USA roughly parallels that in UK. There are some 20 boats in Australia, 30 in Canada and 10 in New Zealand. Elsewhere serious things have begun to happen in Sweden and Italy as well as rumblings in South America, South Africa, Finland, Spain and Holland. Generally international relations are good.

Commercially the class is changing. Although it is very much the land of the home builder/home designer (at least 20 new UK designs in the last year), it is now also being penetrated by well-made, competently marketed kits. The class policy is to be ‘manufacturer friendly’. We are prepared to include reasonably factual publicity for commercial products in class documentation, newsletters, etc. The UK class newsletter is copied to all known suppliers with a specific interest in Footys. It is very much to be hoped that the snazzy kits and the home designers can co-exist happily.

Next year

We should have a national series of open meetings. If people do what they say, some 9 or 10 clubs should have regular Footy racing. At current rates of growth we will have around 250 boats by this time next year. The increasing availability of kits should increase this. The Euro Grand Prix event will be repeated, hopefully in Liverpool. This time it will probably get some non-UK entries. It is hoped that the class has a very bright future. But ..

This can only happen with your help. I'm not just talking about the hard slog of shuffling paper – although help there is always welcome. What is really important is feedback, feedback and feedback. From time to time people come up to me and tell me I'm doing a great job. They really mean 'we', but we'll leave that one for a second. What frightens me is the number of people who are NOT telling me what a lousy job I am doing. I would like to see Footys as the best run model yacht class there is. There is NO WAY we can do this unless we know what you want and where you think we are going wrong. All ideas are welcome – they don't have to centre on racing, ultra high performance boats and so on. Nobody is going to castigate you as an ungrateful sod if you complain. The very worst that will happen is that someone will say "What a good idea. Can you help make it happen?"!