

# Craftsmanship

YARD NEWS · BOATBUILDER'S NOTES · TOOLS

## On course for success

Launch Day at the Lyme Regis Boat Building Academy; *Nigel Sharp* went to meet the craftspeople of the future



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**Above left:** Fiona Molloy, in blue, launches her Tammie Norrie with help from BBA graduate Gail McGarva

**Left:** Champagne moment for Chris Smith (stern) with girlfriend Colleen and dog Cally

Everyone hopes for good weather on launch day. But for the students of the Boatbuilding Academy at Lyme Regis, the forecast for the first Tuesday in June seemed to take on a particular importance. Twelve of them had – as part of the course and with the help of all the other students on the course – built boats for themselves, and were due to launch them that morning.

During the first three weeks of the nine-month course, group discussions take place – led by the Academy's principal Yvonne Green and her staff – regarding the boats the students would like to build. The Academy operates a rota system to ensure that all students get a chance to work on every boat. However, any of them can opt out of the rota if they feel they would prefer to concentrate on their own project.

The aim is that the boats should represent a variety of types, materials and construction methods. And the students themselves – many of them 'mature' – add to that variety with their vastly differing backgrounds and previous careers. Three months into the course, after the students have completed various tasks to learn a range of boatbuilding skills, work on the boats begins. Launch Day is already on the calendar and the pressure is on.

"We try to teach them a sense of timely working and that's the idea of Launch Day," Yvonne explained.

The largest boat this year was Martin Nott's Charles Sibbick-designed Victorian Half-Rater at just under 21ft (6.4m) LOA (see p36). She needed Martin's full attention, as well as that of fellow student Alistair Munro.



NIGEL SHARP

Another who opted out of the rota was former property developer Gary Thompson, who wanted a ‘stable family daysailer’ and chose to build a Haven 12½ – originally a Nat Herreshoff design, reconfigured with a centreboard, a shallower keel and bermudan rig by Joel White in 1987, and now re-created in GRP and foam.

By contrast, Jim Little (an ex-marketing man) decided to build a GRP rowing boat designed by course tutor Justin Adkin. This was much less demanding in terms of man-hours, which meant that it was possible to build the whole boat in the last five weeks before Launch Day. “I’m really glad to have had the experience of working on all the other boats and to have built my own as well,” Jim told me.

### PROGRESS REVIEW

A couple of times a week throughout the build process there is a ‘boat round’ which enables the students and tutors to review progress and discuss what needs doing next. This involves every student and gives them an appreciation of the importance of planning.

A week before Launch Day the situation was very similar to how it would be in a real boatyard – there was still a daunting amount to do on most of the boats! Many of the students – including non-boat owners – were working very long hours. But there was a very positive charge to the atmosphere with discussions about how much painting and varnishing was still needed, for instance – on most of the boats drying times determined that it was no longer an option to miss any opportunity to apply a coat of something.

The big day arrived and the weather wasn’t great, but on a positive note the early morning strong winds had eased a bit, and the occasional showers had started to give way to sunny periods. The boats were paraded in line from the Academy’s workshop the few hundred yards to Lyme Regis harbour where they were then launched one at a time to the sound of great acclamation from the three hundred-or-so onlookers.

The first cheers were for Ollie Rees’s 10ft (3m) traditional clinker dinghy *Wally*. Ollie (formerly a chef and guitar teacher) and fellow student Tim Herman set the celebratory tone for the remaining launches when the champagne was opened and the boat was toasted.

Another clenched clinker boat followed – a 14ft (4.3m) German lake boat to a century-old design built by Uli Killer, who had previously run a property development company with “a stressful number of employees” in Munich. His wife and daughter had come over from Germany especially for the occasion and they must have been delighted to see the expression of joy on his face as he began to put the oars and bronze rowlocks – specially made for him by Classic Marine to a 1900 design – to good use.

Then it was the turn of Chris Smith and his 14ft (4.3m) Selway Fisher strip-planked Canadian sailing canoe. “I wanted a boat big enough for two people and a dog,” he had told me, and that seemed to be the case – just! Another canoe followed when Dan Stone (a former occupational therapist) launched his Iain Oughtred-designed *Wee Rob* and paddled away with a smile that said it all.

**Above: Sean Quail’s YW Dayboat and Chris Smith’s Selway Fisher strip-plank canoe in the workshop a week before Launch Day**

## “The core of the course is to send people out into the industry”



PHOTOS BY NIGEL SHARP

**Top left:** Gary fitting coamings to *Lashanna*

**Top right:** Uli's German lake boat

**Above left:**

Hannah's outrigger canoe

**Above right:** Dan's

*Wee Rob* - all a week before Launch Day

Hannah Jenkins was particularly worried about the wind. “I’ve sailed all my life but I just don’t know what this boat will sail like” she told me. “I’m nervous and excited at the same time!” Her outrigger canoe *Olive* was based on a 1,000-year-old Polynesian design.

Next in was Jim Little’s rowing boat, quickly followed by Tom Sargison’s 16ft (4.9m) Cayman Catboat *Firefly*. James Higson (former industrial product designer and financial adviser) then launched *Alessi* - his 12ft (3.7m) Paul Gartside-designed standing lugsail traditional clinker dinghy. Another clinker boat followed – of glued plywood construction – a Tammie Norrie yawl built by former management accountant Fiona Molloy.

### SETTING SAILS

Up to now, no-one had dared to put up a sail – but that was about to change. Encouraged by experienced sailor Justin, Sean Quail’s Yachting World Dayboat was launched with the sails already up. As soon as the crew climbed aboard, the boat raced out of the harbour into Lyme Bay. This, and the fact that the wind had moderated a little, encouraged others to follow. Hannah paddled out of the harbour and set her small bright blue sail and Chris hoisted his “Mylar scrim and Kevlar yarn” sail to the top of his Canadian canoe’s carbon fibre mast.

Ten boats afloat and two still to go – but the Half-Rater and the Haven 12½ needed to be launched by a boat lift, and the harbourmaster decided it was still too windy to do so. So Martin and Gary put on a brave face as they stood next to their boats watching their fellow students enjoy themselves on the water. Gary, who had

only had a total of 5 hours sleep in the previous three nights, was very philosophical about it. The name of his boat – *Lashanna*, which is Irish for “wisdom which comes with age” – seemed poignant.

As it was also graduation day all the students were given their City and Guilds and Academy certificates. During the presentation, Tim Gedge, who founded the Academy in 1997, referred to the number of boats that had been built. “Some would say we bit off a bit more than we could chew but by golly you’ve achieved it.”

As the students disbanded over the following days – some via the Beale Park Boat Show where they displayed their boats on the Academy’s own stand – some had finalised their plans for the future. Gary, for instance, was starting work at Wessex Resins; Uli was going back to Germany to start a one-man boatbuilding and restoration business on the shores of Lake Tegernsee; Hannah didn’t mind what she did, or where, as long as it involved woodworking; Jim is building the Adkin dinghy commercially as the Fox 14; James is working at Henwood and Dean, and Chris is doing a marine-based MA in Southampton.

“The core of the course is to send people out into the industry,” explained Yvonne. Tom Richardson of the Elephant Boatyard, who employs two previous graduates, attended Launch Day and commented: “The college has set the benchmark for the future of training craftsmen which has long been the biggest worry of traditional boatbuilders and repairers.”