

New Year, Time For A New Challenge?

2016 is set to be an eventful year for sportsScotland National Centre Cumbrae, not least because it's the centre's 40th year!

We like to challenge ourselves at Cumbrae and this sense of challenge and adventure prevails within our customers. This is especially true for those undertaking our **Professional Yachtmaster Training (PYT)** programme with participants understanding the commitment and dedication needed to see this to completion. So, if 2016 is the year you're wanting to set yourself a goal-with-a-difference then why not consider signing up for PYT?

There are two PYT options to choose from this year; one beginning on 13 March and one on 5 August. Both last around 17 weeks, with about 75 days on the water and 25 days ashore, working towards RYA/MCA DoT Yachtmaster (commercially endorsed). This qualification can create opportunities for work on board yachts and is essential for aspiring skippers, cruising instructors and anyone looking to undertake yacht deliveries.

Is it also great personal training for confidently cruising your own yacht worldwide!

Last year, Mike Comerford from Johnshaven completed his PYT and had this to say about his experience at Cumbrae:

"The instructors are a diverse, talented and professional bunch. I learned from all of them in their diversity, and all were great company to sail with too."

Also completing their PYT last year was Malcom Lord from Thurso and Rob Geisler from Vermont, USA. Both sum up their experiences below:

"The programme includes self sails without an instructor to gain required skippered passages and this was a particular highlight for me. However, I also enjoyed sailing with the range of instructors, in thoroughly testing conditions!" (Malcom Lord).

"I was unable to find a similar comprehensive sailing programme in the US and that's why I chose to go to Cumbrae for my training. The entire RYA Training Scheme is the best I was able to find anywhere" (Rob Geisler).

For more information on all

of Cumbrae's 2016 courses, including PYT, visit www.nationalcentrecumbrae.org.uk or call 01475 530 757. (It is worth noting that Cumbrae is hosting two PYT 'information days'; one on 7 February and one on 2 July).

David Jack, PYT student, 2014

Tempted by Cumbrae's PYT programme? In 2014 David Jack decided to undertake this challenge. Here's his story:

It was Mallaig. It was not raining. It was a Saturday in late July 2014. I did not have much of a clue what to expect, and so trepidation was a pressing emotion.

Whilst I wasn't confident operating a winch, I did think I could probably steer a boat, but all the sensory perceptions of being afloat with the elements were either heavily rusted or frankly non-existent. A steep learning curve was about to rise in front of me just like, as then unknown to me, the steep curves of the waves at the Mull of Kintyre.

We proceeded to the 38ft Salona named Santa Vey. At about five tons she was a well built comfortable yacht and I met the other two candidates for this professional yachtmaster training course run by the Scottish National Sailing Centre. Give or take some brief periods of downtime this, or the 37ft Salona, Somerled, was essentially to be my own base for the next 18 weeks, right into the darkness of November.

The other candidates were substantially younger than me and they possessed a lot of miles/skills/strengths and knowledge, which led to a first few weeks of floundering and 'catch-up' by this older guy taking a break from the relentless rigours of life's own tidal set, rate and drift.

I had of course experience of extricating myself (and others) from the odd close shave, but interpolation, extrapolation and the seeking of secondary ports with some degree of forethought and calculation, well, they were new concepts. Frankly, it was great.

I had attended an open day in January 2014, purely to find out what this 'course to steer' might involve and on that day, on the ferry back to the mainland I turned to Gillian saying 'I am doing that..that is going to be my home for a while.' Quietly she replied 'I know'. And so, matters at work had to be organised, the



Rob Geisler



Malcolm Lord.

children and their needs had to be considered and met, and I had to overcome the expected hesitations of my own thinking.

In that first week we covered over 340 nautical miles; got utterly soaked, got pinned in, on the west coast at Lochinver and went to some wonderful anchorages at Portree, Flowerdale, Ullapool, the Ascrib Islands and Loch Scavaig. Even the world midge convention in Scavaig was a challenge. We were introduced to 'night sailing' - a practice that I found puzzling at first.

Over the weeks the courses mounted up with shore based theory and navigation studies; from radar and diesel engine to first aid; from rigging to sail repairs. Even I was gradually drawn into the world of 'bowlines ashore' prusiks and rolling hitches, and all the terminology of an offshore yachtmaster candidate.

What was important was that at no stage were we presented with a dogmatic approach. We were introduced to the many ways of setting warps and springs, or of taking fixes, for example, and thereafter we were allowed to try and test the various methods that might fit a particular situation. Valuable knowledge and expertise was gradually transferred from one expert instructor after another. It was up to us to adopt or consider that information.

It is noteworthy that I always felt comfortable about re-approaching any instructor for further advice, or a further explanation on any matter. Whilst the process of osmosis in such a continuous

situation does occur, this course is 'hands on', and it can be tailored to focus on the candidate's needs.

It was week three when we brought the boats south and rounded the Mull of Kintyre for the first of many times. Never was there a rounding that did not throw up (!) some kind of intricacy or adventure.

It was enthralling. The miles progressed and slowly I began to be able to move the yacht at least into the vicinity of the mooring buoys we were aiming for. Gradually I could get close enough to at least shout abuse at the fender overboard. There were times I struggled, and my colleagues clearly were then exploring new levels of patience as they were asked to 'lasso' something 10 metres to windward, or

their hands froze around the boat hook that was a silent bystander in my mooring shenanigans. Thanks are due to them.

Then came the 'self-sails' and the skippered passages that are a necessary component of this course. It is highly insightful of those at Cumbrae to allow us to undertake these passages truly 'as skipper'. No instructor now, and no knowledge that if it all goes wrong then someone else can step in. The learning curve continued.

From trips to Ballycastle, Belfast, Bangor, Stranraer, Gigha, Crinan, (just to name a few), together with the upper reaches of the Firth of Clyde, our experience advanced - not always without incident but always with learning.

It was around this time

of the course that we were entering October and the night hours began to increase. I came to hugely enjoy these dark adventures into visitors' moorings or a marina under the stealth of night. The weather also was turning and the temperature dropping. All these changes helped reinforce the meteorology we had been taught.

Actually watching the barometer fall was a useful learning tool. The essential drills of seamanship continued apace and with increasing regularity until polished. Then we polished them some more, and then more as the date of assessment loomed.

All was to be well as the three of us successfully concluded the course and assessment; manoeuvring the yacht with

more fine control and finesse than was evident months previously; or in my case, than was considered likely!

From a personal perspective the time period moved fast. It was an intense course, though wholly rewarding for many reasons. There was downtime, as required. Would I recommend such an experience to others? For sure, indeed I might suggest...stop talking about it and stop reading about it...just go and do it.

With thanks to all at Cumbrae.

40TH YEAR

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Photo used in advert shows PYT students David Jack and Mike Comerford.