

News & Views

The latest news from the boating world, edited by Alison Panes

Sunsail employees charged with manslaughter

Five Sunsail employees are to appear in a Greek court over the death of a girl in a dinghy-sailing accident. The four men and one woman are accused of manslaughter by negligence following the death of 11-year-old Laura Morgan at Club Vounaki three years ago. Laura, from Nottinghamshire, drowned when she became trapped by her trapeze under a capsized Hobie Cat.

Sunsail are also accused of breaching Greek port regulation number 20 which, at the time, forbade the hire of catamarans to under-16s without an adult on board.

The trial was due to take place in Lefkada Town last month, but was adjourned until March next year when

it was discovered that one of the defendants had not been served with a summons.

The accident happened in August 2002 when Laura and two friends were trapezing on the 16ft catamaran. The boat capsized and Laura became caught in her

harness. The vessel, which did not have masthead buoyancy, inverted and dragged her under the trampoline. It took the efforts of two safety boats to free her, by which time, tragically, she had died.

The postponement is devastating news for Laura's mother Lynne Morgan, who had flown out to Greece hoping to get some answers.

'I have lost the most precious thing I have and nothing is going to bring her back,' she told PBO before flying out. 'There are three things I want to



▲ Laura Morgan

inexperienced sailor.'

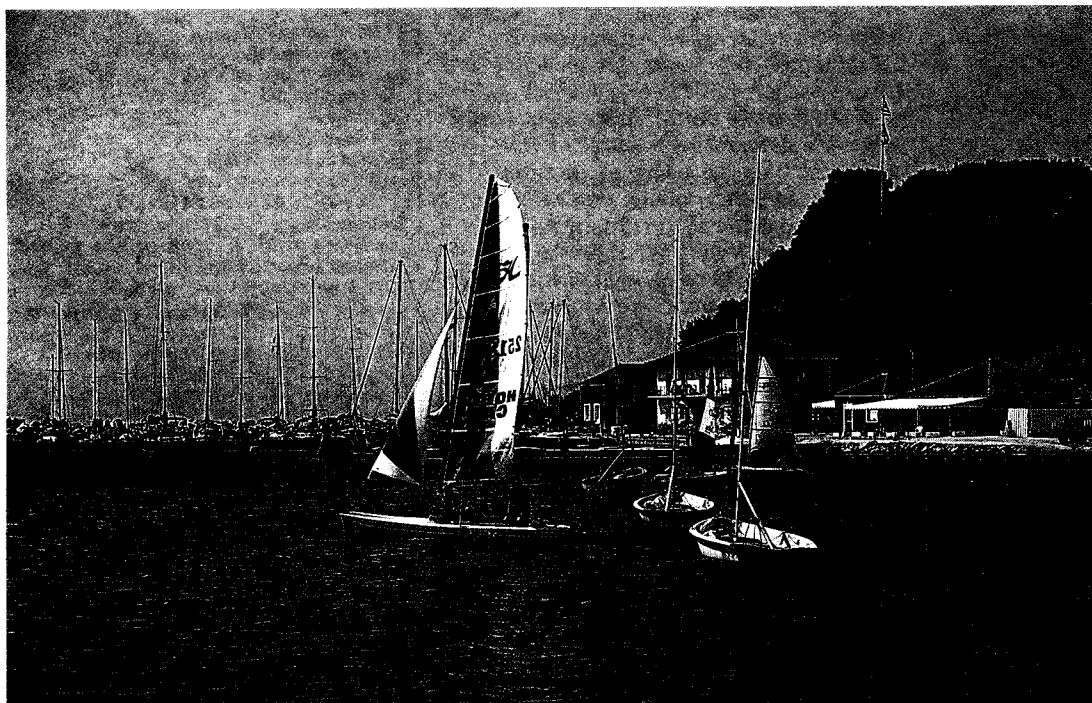
An inquest into Laura's death was opened by Nottingham coroner Nigel Chapman, and adjourned pending investigations by the UK police.

Knives and floats

It is not known whether or not there was a rescue knife on board the safety boat, and Sunsail were unable to comment. However, managing director Matt West did say: 'We are co-operating fully with the investigation. Laura's death is a tragedy that has deeply affected us all... We regret that proceedings have been postponed, as we want to work to a conclusion for the sake of Laura's family.'

In a previous statement he said: 'The safety of our customers is a number one priority. The company meets all the rigorous standards laid down by the RYA, and operational procedures are constantly being reviewed.'

In February this year the RYA made it mandatory for all sailing school rescue boats to carry a sharp serrated knife, such as the Gerber race rescue knife (pictured above right). National Sailing Coach David Ritchie, while refraining from comment on the Sunsail incident, said that in the event of a catamaran inversion where the individual was trapped under the trampoline he would slash the trampoline



▲ A Hobie Cat at Club Vounaki, near Paleros in Western Greece. The photo was taken in 2002, before the tragic accident

RYA Motorboat Muster

The RYA end-of-season Motorboat Muster takes place on the weekend of 29-30 October at Cowes, Isle of Wight. The event is open to all motorboaters, including motorcruisers, RIBs, sportsboats and personal watercraft, and includes sessions on close quarter boat handling and electronic navigation. For the first time, Robert Avis, a

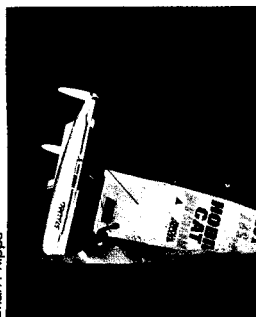
Ramar International radar instructor, will be running a 'How to get the best out of your radar' class. There will be welcome drinks, a buffet and disco, as well as plenty of opportunities to put your cruising questions to the RYA. To book, call Katie Wales on tel: 02380 604233 or email katie.wales@rya.org.uk.

to allow the casualty to breathe (as there is no air pocket between the trampoline and water) and then right the boat. 'The instructor's instinctive reaction is to remove their



buoyancy aid and dive under the boat to free the casualty, but it's better to try to right the boat,' he said. 'The chances of being able to work out what the victim is caught on under the water are very slim. It's an incredibly difficult rescue environment.'

Normally Sunsail's modified Hobie 15s carry masthead flotation, but the ones in Vouvaki did not. Although a masthead float might have prevented Laura's Hobie Cat from inverting, the RYA say floats are not mandatory. If a



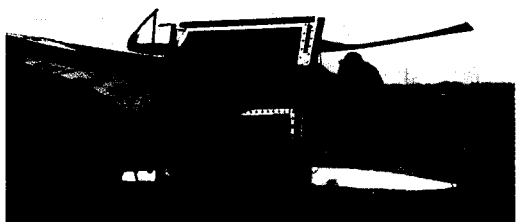
Brian Phipps

▲ Pitchpole capsizes

centre does have masthead buoyancy it must be removed for the RYA level II sailing course so students can practise righting the boat.

When asked about harnesses, David Ritchie said the RYA are perfectly happy for beginners to use them in the right conditions, and stressed that entrapment by the harness is very rare. 'It is an issue where people have become very nervous,' he said, 'but people need to keep it in perspective. Entrapment accounts for about 1% of boating incidents. Alcohol or not wearing kill cords would be far better targets to hit.'

Lynne, along with Laura's father Graham, who was divorced from Lynne shortly before the tragedy, has set up the Laura Rose Memorial Trust to support needy children across the world. 'It's something we feel Laura would have approved of because she loved children, and had even talked about opening her own nursery when she left school,' said Lynne. Donations can be made to The Laura Rose Trust, 26 Smalls Croft, Woodborough, Nottingham NG14 6EY.



▲ Righting a dinghy is an important part of RYA sailing courses

Vote for your yachtsman of the year



▲ From left: Rod Carr of the RYA, Shelley Jory, Steve Curtis, Sarah Ayton and Will Howden

Nominations are now open for the Raymarine YJA Yachtsman of the Year and Young Sailor of the Year. The ballot box was opened at Southampton Boat Show last month by representatives of the British Olympic Sailing Team, including Olympic Yngling Class gold medallist Sarah Ayton.

The current title is jointly held by nine British Olympic sailing medal holders, including Shirley Robertson, Sarah Ayton, Sarah Webb and Ben Ainslie.

A hot favourite for this year's award is Dame Ellen MacArthur, who smashed the record for the fastest, non-stop, solo sail round the world. In the Young Sailor category, the field is wide open, with the 13 RYA regional winners automatically going forward as nominations.

The awards recognise excellence in power or sail, and acknowledge achievement such as breaking a world record, overcoming adversity, or showing exceptional courage. To vote, log on to www.yja.co.uk, or pick up a nomination form at sailing clubs nationwide. The closing date is Friday 4 November 2005.

Jon White

Dolphin comeback

A Sea Watch survey conducted off the South West coast has revealed encouraging numbers of whales and dolphins. Two Minke whales were spotted in St Ives Bay, Cornwall,

2,000 common dolphins were seen off the Pembrokeshire coast while a further 50 were seen near Berry Head in south Devon. Bottlenose dolphins and porpoises were also seen off Lundy in north Devon and off north Cornish coasts.

The survey comes just weeks after a similar one in Wales revealed that Bottlenose dolphins exist along the length of the Welsh coast and not just in Cardigan Bay as previously thought. PBO readers have enjoyed the wildlife show. Harbour patrol coxswain John Brockhouse was accompanied by dolphins during the Fastnet race with friend Pip Dywer, and Ray Cope saw some while sailing with his children through the Looe Channel near Bill, Chichester.

John Brockhouse