

Broadening your horizons

During the Barton Charter Yacht Regatta on the Norfolk Broads, yacht hirers can enjoy a week's convivial racing on Barton Broad, as local sailor Richard Johnstone-Bryden explains

Broadland regattas are among the area's finest and most colourful spectacles. But with racing barred in most yacht hire contracts, anyone hiring a yacht on the Norfolk Broads is usually sidelined to being a mere spectator. Except for once a year. During the Barton Charter Yacht Regatta, restrictions are lifted so yacht hirers can enjoy a week's convivial racing on Barton Broad.

In my opinion there is no better way to experience the thrill of racing or sailing on the Broads than from the deck of a gaff-rigged traditional Broads yacht, although defining what constitutes a classic Broads yacht has been the subject of intense debate among local sailors for many years.

However, all such yachts have a low freeboard and a pivoting mast mounted in a tabernacle. They usually also have a lifting cabin roof to provide extra headroom below, and carry more sail than their coastal counterparts. Otherwise, Broads yachts are built to differing designs, using various types of materials and sporting a wide range of rigs. Most of the recently-built Broads yachts have GRP hulls fitted out in wood and follow the general lines of the Broads yachts built during the inter-war years.

Hire yachts normally have smaller rigs than their private counterparts so they can be handled safely by less experienced sailors – but don't be fooled into thinking that hire yachts are slow, lumbering vessels.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Johnstone-Bryden is an author and photographer who sails a Pegasus 800 with his wife Aline and son Edouard around the Norfolk Broads. The couple also enjoy charter holidays in the canals of Europe



A week of fun

The regatta fun begins on the Saturday afternoon, when competitors can join their yacht and head off towards Sutton Staithe in time for the Sunday night carvery at the Sutton Staithe Hotel.

This event not only marks the opening of the regatta but also the start of an enjoyable social programme of events including an evening of music on Tuesday and the prizegiving dinner on Thursday. Monday and Wednesday evenings are kept clear so competitors can visit one of the other nearby pubs such as The White Horse at Neatishead, or enjoy a quiet evening at anchor on the Broad.

Plenty of trophies are up for grabs, including one for friendliest crew

The action begins on the Monday morning following the skippers' briefing on the Norfolk Punt Club's pontoons.

Many of those lining up on the start line will have attended the regatta for several years running, but a lack of previous racing experience is not a barrier to participation. Hirers should however have a reasonable level of sailing ability, with the confidence to handle a yacht in close proximity to others. A number of experienced sailors assist the organisers as volunteers, so it may be possible to arrange for one of them to join a less seasoned crew.



A mixed fleet sails away from the Norfolk Punt Club pontoons on Barton Broad

With three races a day competitors have a good opportunity to improve their racing skills. To minimise the likelihood of accidents – especially in the build-up to the start – the fleet is split into smaller groups, but boatyard staff are on hand to carry out running repairs should the need arise.

Like most regattas there are plenty of trophies up for grabs, including one awarded to the friendliest crew and one for being the worst at getting to the start. In between the action, competitors drop their mud weight and catch a lift on one of the

launches to the NPC pontoons for a warm drink and a bite to eat.

At the end of four days of good-natured racing, the competitors begin the relaxed voyage back down the Rivers Ant and Bure towards either Upton Dyke or Horning where they hand their yachts back on Saturday morning.



Bootlegger was built by Walter Woods in 1923

A typical Broads hire boat

Before attending the regatta, competitors have the enjoyable task of choosing the right boat. This decision will be influenced by the combination of your previous sailing experience, the number of crew and the level of creature comforts you require.

Those attracted by the prospect of competing in a true classic could opt for the 9.1m (30ft) gaff-rigged *Bootlegger*. She has been part of the Eastwood Whelpton hire fleet since it was established in 1959

by the late Tim Whelpton and his wife Anne, who continues to personally manage the business.

Bootlegger was built by Walter Woods in 1923 and remained in hire until the outbreak of WWII when she was moved to the safety of a nearby boathouse, thereby avoiding years of neglect as a block craft moored on a deserted Broad.

When peace returned, the riverside plot was put up for auction along with the boathouse and *Bootlegger*, and Tim

Taking part in the regatta

There's still time to join the fun at this year's Barton Charter Yacht Regatta, which will be held on Barton Broad from 10-13 October. This allows hirers who join their yacht at either Upton Dyke or Horning on Saturday 8 October enough time to reach Barton Broad in time for the first race.

A number of vessels were still available for hire as PBO went to press, but please check with the boatyards to assess current availability.

Eastwood Whelpton Ltd (Tel: 01493 750430, www.eastwood-whelpton.co.uk) has four boats for hire at £780, ranging in size from *Dawn Wind*, an 8.2m (27ft) 4-berth vessel, to *Spindrift*, a 9.4m (31ft) 6-berth boat with Bermudan rig.

The Norfolk Broads Yachting Company (Tel: 01692 631330, www.nbyco.com) has five boats for hire, ranging from *Zoe*, an 8.2m (27ft) 2-berth vessel with gaff rig (£594) to *Palace*, a 10.7m (35ft) 7-berth gaff-rigged boat (£1,168).

BARTON BROAD

Barton Broad has been a popular venue for racing since the 19th-century 'Water Frolics'. Its biggest annual regattas are held over the August Bank Holiday weekend and attended by a cross-section of indigenous sailing craft from the Norfolk dinghy through to the mighty wherries.

The Broad is described by some as the jewel in the crown of the wetland's northern rivers following the extensive five-year programme of suction dredging carried out by the Broads Authority. The completion of the work in 2001 resulted in a dramatic improvement in the water quality and an increase in the depth on both sides of the marked channel.





Zoe, built in 1897, may be the oldest Broads yacht still available for hire

Whelpton's father joined forces with Walter Woods Junior to make a bid and split the costs. Events flowed in their favour and Tim's family cruised the Broads in *Bootlegger* until she re-entered hire fleet service.

The wooden yacht's features include two separate two-berth cabins, a two-burner gas cooker, grill and oven, gas heating, a fridge and a 10hp Yanmar diesel.

Alternatively, you could follow the example of Dame Ellen MacArthur by choosing the Norfolk Broads Yachting Company's pretty little counter-sterned *Zoe*, which is believed to be the oldest Broads yacht still available for hire.

She was built as the Lugsail-rigged yacht *Jubilee* in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897). According to the inaugural Blakes brochure of 1908, *Jubilee* could be hired for the princely sum of £3 5s for a week at the height of the season.

Nowadays the 8.2m (27ft) two-berth

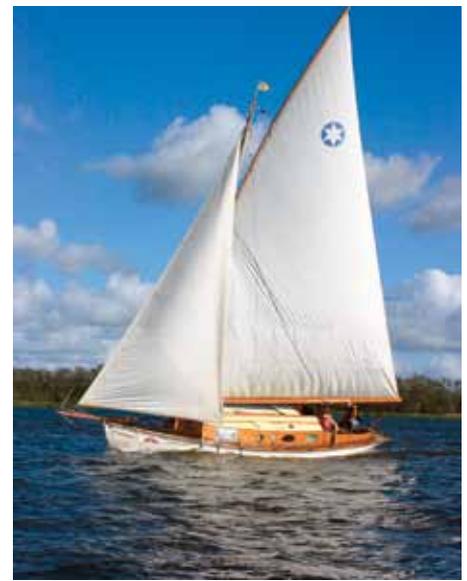
yacht sports a gaff topsail rig, while a 10hp Yanmar has replaced the quant pole for those occasions when the wind dies. Down below, her spirit stove has been superseded by a gas cooker with oven and grill.

Those attracted by a solid racing pedigree could opt for the 10.4m (34ft) gaff-rigged *Leda*, which is one of the fastest yachts available for hire.

She was built for Len Funnell by the Potter Heigham boatyard of Herbert Woods in 1999 as a gunter-rigged racing yacht. At the end of her second season of competition, in which she was powered by a towering bermudan rig, *Leda* was converted into a hire yacht: the mast was reduced in height by 1.2m (4ft) while more lead was added to the bottom to make it finely balanced for ease of use. The lifting cabin roof was also modified to increase headroom to more than 1.8m (6ft).

Leda's forward cabin contains the heads, shower and wash basin: moving aft, the galley with its gas cooker and stainless steel sink is on the port side opposite a single berth, while the aft section has a settee/double berth on the port side and a settee/single berth on the starboard side.

If size is more important, then NBYCo's 11.3m (37ft) gunter-rigged, eight-berth *America* could be the answer. She was completed in 1994 by NBYCo to a design inspired by an Edwardian 13m (43ft) gaff-rigged yacht of the same name. The original yacht remained in hire until WWII and was exported, appropriately enough, to America in 1947, later being spotted at anchor off Martinique in 1959 by which time she had been re-rigged as a ketch.



NBYCo's eight-berth 11.3m (37ft) America



Leda started life as a gunter-rigged racing yacht

Up forward in the present *America* there are two double berth cabins. Immediately aft, the shower and heads compartment can be found on the port side ahead of the galley with its sink, fridge, four burner hob, oven and grill. On the starboard side, the saloon features a large settee and table.

The internal layout is rounded off by pilot berths in the aft port and starboard side quarters. For cold weather cruising she has gas heating and hot water, while a 20hp Nanni fulfils the role of 'iron mainsail'.

A more leisurely pace

Those with more time could, of course, extend their break by spending a few days exploring the Broads at a more leisurely pace.

The autumn is a great time to sail on the Broads, not least because there are fewer boats on the water. On many stretches, the only sounds to disturb the peace will be the local wildlife or the wind in the reeds.

CHARTS AND BOOKS

The Broads – GEOprojects (UK), £4.95.
The Broads Ordnance Survey, £13.99.
Broads Sailing Made Easy by Gordon Catling, Blakes Holiday Boating, £4 (via Eastwood Whelpton, www.eastwood-whelpton.co.uk).
The Green Book, Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association, £4, www.thegreenbook.org.uk.

Broads sailing tips

■ Lowering the mast for shooting bridges should be straightforward – although it's a good idea not to try it on the move until you've mastered the knack as it's easy for the unwary to get in a muddle. It might be stating the obvious, but make sure your mast is on the right set of crutches for the conditions, eg low crutches for low air draught.

■ With the exception of Breydon Water, speed limits ranging from 6mph to 3mph apply throughout the Broads. Each speed limit is clearly marked by signs along the riverbank and apply to all powered craft including yachts under motor. They are rigorously enforced and breaking them could result in a significant fine.