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LITTLE BIG BOAT

The 2.4m offers just the right balance of little and big boat racing

BY ALEX FOX

Sailing is sailing, a boat is a boat, or so they say. I've certainly sailed and raced my share of boats and I would mostly agree with that statement. There are, however, basic principles of good sailboat design, basic truths that cannot be overridden, that provide just the right mixture of design elements that somehow make the boat sing! How does one recognise a good sailing boat? It's partially opinion, personal experience and preference for sure. I can say for instance, without hesitation that the T-Bird, my current boat, is a great boat! There are of course some say the "T" stands for torture—as in uncomfortable cockpit combings—but few will dispute that the boat sails like a dream. I recently had the pleasure to revisit

another great sailboat for a chance at a second dance, and indeed that boat might surprise a few of you...Yup, I'm talking about the 2.4m, my favourite little big boat.

I first saw 2.4s sailing way back in 2001 while coaching a Sonar team at the Paralympic Worlds. I had the opportunity to watch the 2.4s sailing in everything from five to 20 knots of wind, and it was impressive. The proportions and the motion of these boats defy their real size, especially from a distance when they behave and look like a much larger vessel. I remember thinking,

dinghies don't heel over like that... and they definitely don't point like that!

The 2.4m is, in fact, a true keelboat, featuring a good amount of keel and rudder area and ample ballast and stability in a narrow, deep hull form. The 2.4m, it may surprise you, is not a strict one-design. There are subtle variations within the 2.4m class measurement rule, not dissimilar to the 6m, 8m and 12m classes.

That being said the Norlin

mk III design makes up the majority of the international fleet, plus it's also the required boat for all Paralympic competitions. Swedish designer Peter Norlin was perhaps best known for his Scampi 30, a multiple World Half Ton champion back in the '70s, and later for his 6m designs. Norlin was also a great proponent and supporter of the 2.4m class, winning an Open Worlds and developing systems that would ultimately enable the disabled sailing community. A great part of the history of the class in fact is that the Open Worlds have been won by many disabled sailors including Canada's Paul Tingley—and that's very cool! This class is hugely popular in Europe and has a solid following elsewhere including in North America.

I had my first opportunity to sail a 2.4m around five or six years ago, in Royal Vic's Club Interfleet Championship. The idea of this regatta was to bring together representatives of various fleets, for a one-day competition, with the winner claiming the priceless booty of bragging rights for the year! That inaugural competition was championed by Bruce Millar, a Paralympian in both the Sonar and the 2.4m classes. At that time, he owned most of the club's 2.4m fleet himself, and a bunch of us racers got together for a fantastic day of competition. My main memories of that day were just how close the racing was and the smiling faces afterward. My other recollection was that had I not pushed the wrong foot pedal quite so often... grrrrh, I might have done better! Still I could see the attraction of tactical racing, a tuneable technical boat and ▶



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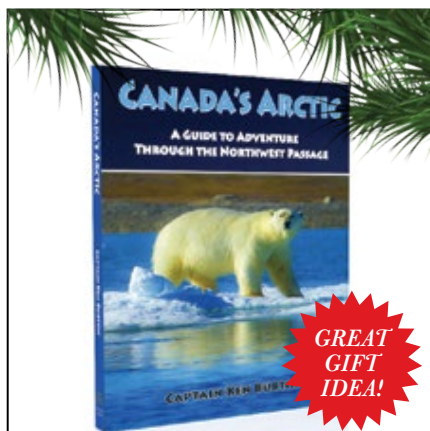
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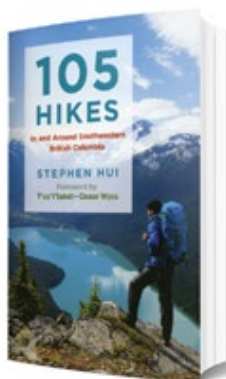




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the real sense of speed, with the close proximity to the water.

Fast forward five or six years, and the number of 2.4ms at the club has expanded to more than a dozen, with able bodied and disabled sailors alike joining the fleet, with new recruits appearing almost every month it seems! Bruce continues to be the driving force, buying new boats and facilitating purchases for the keenest in the fleet. His passion for the class is infectious, with some fleet members joining him in his almost yearly migration to the Florida winter circuit. As I write this, Bruce has just wrapped up an eighth-place finish at the 2018 Paralympic Worlds in Wisconsin. Good stuff!

really?!“I searched my memory banks for anything I might have retained from last time. BANG... boom in the head... right, I remembered that! Where’s that seat back adjustment? As a few zephyrs touched down on the bay, the sails filled easily and my quest for 2.4m redemption began.

Simple stuff first; jib sheet, mainsheet, jib lead controls, check. For the rest, the game is *pull the line and see what happens?* Boom vang, good. Backstay, yes. Cunningham... don’t touch. Outhaul, nice! Good progress, but there’s only 10 minutes to the first start. More exploration led me to the upper shroud adjustment that can be eased or tightened, which is interesting. Soften the rig in



This years’ club Interfleets were again hosted by the 2.4m fleet. I took advantage of a Saturday off a few weeks back, for a second opportunity to jump into one of these little boats again. The skippers meeting found eight different fleets represented; Melges 24, PHRF ATB, PHRF Distance, Laser, Radial, plus two mini 12 fleets, Deceptions and Illusions, and myself representing the T-Bird fleet, of course. After we drew for boats, I was pretty chuffed to get one of Bruce’s old ones. After sliding into my ride and pushing off the dock, I was quickly reminded of the challenge of the day: 18 multi-coloured lines and cleats. “Nothing is labelled...

general for light air, why not?

I knew my biggest sort-out was going to be transitioning from upwind to down and back again, and I remember just how critical it was to get the mast tip forward. A weather mark rounding goes something like this: smooth bear away, big ease on the main and jib, backstay fully released, the mast puller, full on. Whisker pole launch line... where is it? OK, got it! Jib sheet on weather side trimmed! Oh, and don’t forget to keep steering with your feet! The jib looks awful... need to get it up off the deck... pull the gross tune jib hal-yard... ease the jib tack... square the pole a bit more... now find the right angle to

get the jib flowing and flying properly. That was simple, NOT!

Time to gybe, pole deploy line uncleated to retract just enough to clear the forestay, gybe the main, re-launch the pole, find the new best angle. Now the leeward mark is coming up and time to undo EVERYTHING I just did in order to get back into upwind mode! Brain a bit numb at this point and again... nothing is labelled! Alright, pole away, puller off, jib halyard back to upwind position, wherever that is. Jib tack on, backstay on, enough, retention shrouds at the mark, heading up, trim the mainsheet and jibsheet, left pedal, right pedal aahhh?! Heading upwind again, more jib tack, less jib sheet, more mainsheet! What was that? Three-minute warning signal, time to race! Sailing is such a relaxing sport!


The critical control lines on the 2.4m keyboard seem to be the whisker-pole deploy and retrieval system, the mast puller that rakes the mast forward and the jib halyard and tack controls, which allow the jib to be raised downwind to fly more efficiently. Figuring out the efficient use of these controls ultimately had quite a bit of my attention during the racing, but once the routine became clearer it was mostly a matter of trying not to panic and working through the list.

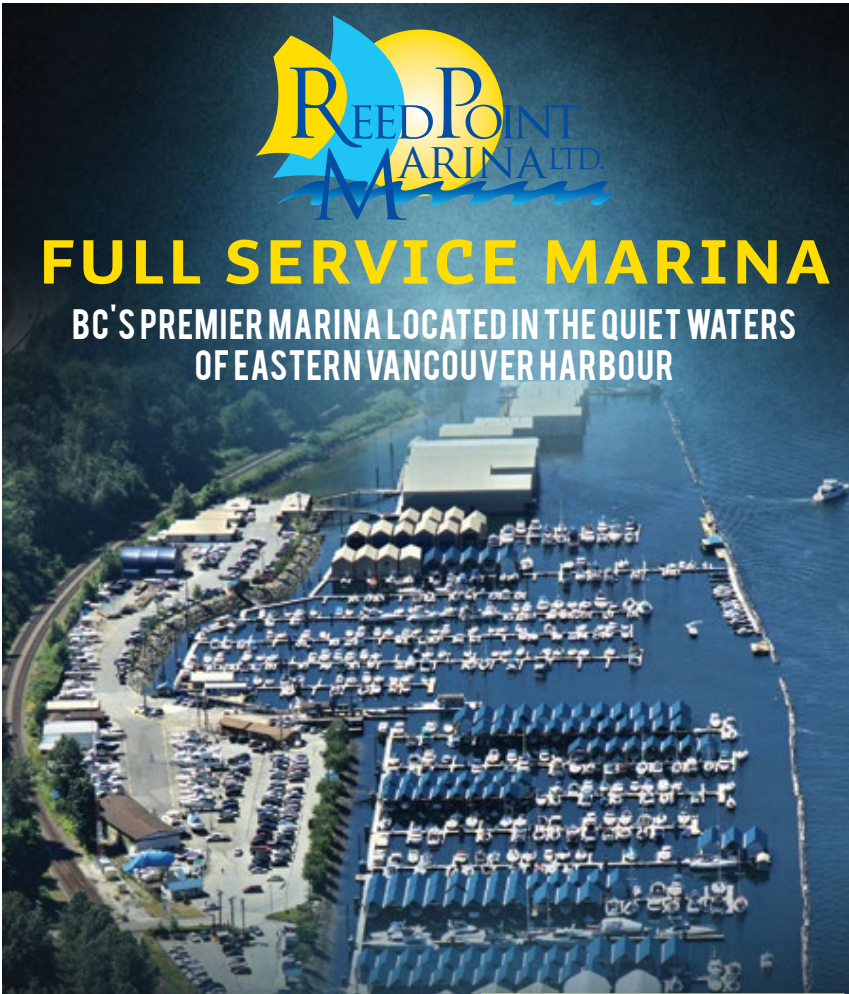
Here are some of the other things that I may have figured out during the seven light air races that day. As on any great sailing boat, small sail trim adjustments make a big difference. When I say small, in this case I mean a quarter to a half inch could be big. Scale has much to do with this and it took some time to zero in on the fast settings. The 2.4m is truly a little big boat, not a dinghy, so don't expect it to react like a Laser on the start line! I found that getting a good run at the line and making sure to be sailing fast at the gun was paramount. That seemed to hold me in good stead for the first portion of each race. This boat will also carry its speed well through a tack, again more like a bigger keelboat. I tried to be conscious of not overusing the sizeable rudder, keeping turns smooth and backing the jib slightly during tacks... that seemed to work pretty well.

In regard to steering with the foot pedals, I did my best to keep a light,

even pressure on each pedal and make minimal adjustments. Upwind I looked for a clean lane off the line with speed more important than point, while picking a side and looking for pressure. Downwind it was about getting in the fastest mode, being patient and sailing an economical course. Hey, I think these things sound pretty familiar don't they?

After all was said and done, I did the T-bird fleet proud, got a bit lucky and

somehow kept my 88 lines straight... OK my 18 lines straight, and earned bragging rights, until next year anyway. This is a great boat, I wish Bruce, Jackie, Louise, Doug, David, Chris, Delani, Rod, John and everyone else continued success in building their fleet and I'm grateful for the opportunity to have another go at playing with this magic little big boat. Good sailing, see you in a 2.4m sometime soon! 




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