



## A Brief History of Sailability Hong Kong

Words by: Mike Rawbone

Sitting in the HHYC bar one evening in April 2009, the then Commodore of HHYC; Mark Houghton commented to me that HHYC should consider doing more for the local community and in particular, for those who had a disability “rather like the RYA does in the UK with their Sailability program” he suggested. Seeing the chance to start something new and really worthwhile at HHYC (and for that matter - in Hong Kong) I got Mark to pay for my bar bill and volunteered to give Sailability a go!

Where to start? Taking advice from a couple of sailing clubs in the UK, my wife Kay and I rounded up a few members / close friends at HHYC and formed ourselves into a ‘Sailability Committee’. The inaugural meeting was held in June 2009 and came up with a list of several hundred things we needed to do; not the least of which was the formation of a legal Trust; finding an insurance organisation willing to cover the program (they thought we were raving loony’s when we first approached them). Other minor issues included the fact we had no bank account (and even if we did, we had no money to put it), no sponsors, an absence of sailing programs, no boats, no identity, no literature, no web site etc but - we did have a lot going for us in terms of enthusiasm though!

As if by magic, Mike Franco (now our ex GM) heard a rumour that the founder of ‘Access’ Dinghies in Australia was due to be in China regarding an order they had received for some 50 sailing craft. Seizing upon this visit, Mike contacted them and asked them to ‘drop into Hong Kong’ to visit us on the way!! Say no more – once they heard what we were trying to do - they did! Attending their visit were the Sailability Committee, Mark & Sara Houghton and daughter Elena. So impressed with their films and stories were we all that 'HRA Recruitment' purchased the first 2 Access 2.3 sailing dinghies on the spot (subsequently delivered about 2 months later) and Elena agreed to design our Logos. We were off!



The Sail numbers and sponsor logos on our first 2 boats....but what is the significance of the numbers?

Believe it or not, 1944 is the year Mike Rawbone was born & 1945 - the year Mark Houghton came into the world. A spooky co-incidence or what?

Subsequent to this visit, recognition for our Sailability program was given by 'Sailability World' in Australia, and HHYC gained the accolade of being the recognised Sailability 'Centre of Excellence' for Hong Kong.

A very hectic time followed. Insurance was put in place, a bank account opened a 'Trust Deed' was drafted by Mike Randall and gained approval, Trustees were appointed and our first 2 boats had arrived.



Elena Houghton (just finishing her Graphic Design Degree at the time) came up with our two logos. One for the Trust (left) itself and one for marketing ourselves (top of page).

By mid 2010 and mainly due to the considerable effort of Jackie & Ariez Vachha, we had our first web site up and running, dual language sailing brochures and individual log books for our sailors; we were on the map and motoring.....well , learning to sail anyway.

By July 2010 we had found sponsors for 5 Access 303 sailing dinghies and by this time, we also had many active week day sailors drawn from various NGO's and schools. Full of ideas to expand the initiative further, we planned a Sailability Launch & Open Day for December 4th 2010.....



***The Original Sailability Committee L - R***

Rob Allen - HHYC Chief Sailing Instructor  
 Mike Rawbone - Member & Chairman  
 Sandra Snell - Member  
 Mark Houghton - HHYC Commodore  
 Kay Rawbone - Member  
 Jackie Vachha - Member  
 Ariez Vachha - Member



***Opening Ceremony on 4th Dec ..... L - R***

David Nesbitt - The Nesbitt Centre  
 Deborah Wan - Government RAC  
 Dr James Lam - RAC & Paralympic Ctte.  
 Mark Houghton - HHYC Commodore  
 Shek Sze Ming - Pak Sha Wan Village Head  
 John McKinley - Home Affairs  
 Lorraine Cheng - Home Affairs  
 Mike Rawbone - Sailability Committee  
 Mark Newman - HHYC Vice Commodore

Our Open Day was also attended by the press, TVB and NOW news. The TVB news clip can be viewed on our web site [www.sailability.org.hk](http://www.sailability.org.hk) in the video section

By the end of 2010, our sailability program was attracting increased levels of interest and our thoughts turned to extending the program to the weekends during 2011.....and so 'Saturday Sailing' came into being and has continued on a regular basis since.

February 2011 saw us achieve charity status for 'Hebe Haven Sailability Trust ' - thank you Inland Revenue!

In March 2011, we had a 3 day visit by Debbie Blanchford who is the head of training for the RYA Sailability program in the UK. Debbie gave a 2 day 'Awareness' training course to 22 volunteers and then a further day was spent training the HHYC Instructors. Following her visit, we became affiliated to 'RYA Sailability' which brought with it some great ideas to help us take things forward in HK.



Debbie Blanchford RYA (centre) has all the Volunteers blindfolded in this exercise - the purpose of which was to provide an experience similar to those who have a visual impairment.....

In October 2011, we participated for the first time in the HHYC 24 Hour Charity Dinghy Race. As this was something of an unknown to us and of course the event organisers as well as our sailors, we stuck to daylight hours but it proved to be another milestone!

Later that year we obtained a sponsor for our 6th and last Access 2.3 Dinghy and the first of the 6 x Access 303 Dinghies we need; the latter being larger and a more tradition dinghy with a mainsail & jib.



***Our first Access 303***  
Sponsored by the Cathay Charity - "Sunniside". The boat has since been named 'Jack' after the founder.  
2 more of this class have been sponsored by IBI (Architects) & Team Danger. 3 more of this class required !

2012 saw 'Sailability' expand to participating in the Tuesday evening 'Sunset Challenge' where our students compete with other sailors and members of the HHYC sailing teams. By now, 120 students have participated and gained a sailing experience in our boats. Some want to come back time and time again and this has put huge pressure on our resources (number of available boats, volunteers & instructors). 2013 will see these numbers increase further.....

In October 2012, 5 sailability boats competed in the 24 Hour Race. One boat manned by 'Enlighten' completed the full 24 hours and rightly received due recognition for their achievement. Another first.

The first ever 'Sailability Regatta' was held in February 2013. 9 boats participated and David Campbell (our current Commodore) presented prizes to the winners of both the Access 2.3 & 303 classes. A full report on this event was included in the last edition of Hebe Jebes.

On June 8th 2013 (9.00am - 2.00pm) we will be holding our first 'International Sailability Regatta' at HHYC. We believe this is the first ever such event to be held in Hong Kong. Invitations have been extended to participant sailors from Hong Kong, Australia, England, Scotland, Macau & India. This event is already fully supported by external sponsors.

In order that our longer term objectives are clear to all, our goal remains to reach the stage where Hong Kong can be represented by 'Sailability Hong Kong' in the 2020 Paralympics. To get there, we need substantial funding for more boats, safety equipment, international competitions, our running costs (e.g. insurance, maintenance spares & repairs) and our own racing instructors. And yes, we also need more space and many more volunteers!!

Yes, I do believe we have come a long way since our chat in the bar Mark! We could not, however, have achieved this without the full support of many people and thanks must go to the HHYC sailing instructors & AI's; HHYC staff; members of Gen Com (past and present), the membership of HHYC, members of the Sailability Committee, our trustees, sponsors and last but not least - our volunteers who turn up in all weathers to support this very worthwhile and increasingly popular initiative. Thank you to you all.