

Gold fleet winner Scotty Stallman guns down the Weymouth speed strip. PHOTO Andy Stallman.



WEYMOUTH SPEED WEEK 2017

Words Pete Davis // Photos Pete Davis & Andy Stallman

The stars aligned for **Weymouth Speed week 2017**. With Hurricane Ophelia and Storm Brian on the horizon, the event's forecast had more purple than a Prince tribute concert. But would these strong winds be enough to break the existing event harbour records? With all the improvements in windsurfing equipment would the windsurfers smash it or would the kitesurfers have their time in the history books? It was back in 2008 that the event had such an amazing forecast and the big Swede, Anders Bringdal, and the UK's Zara Davis set the men's and women's event harbour records of 38.38 knots and 32.44 knots respectively. **Pete Davis** reports on how the action went down.

Weymouth Speed week (WSW) has become an institution with windsurfers, kitesurfers and wacky boats since the early seventies. Now in its 45th year, it is the longest running speed event in the world and has attracted some of the biggest stars in speed sailing over the years. In the 80s Fred Haywood broke the 30 knots barrier and Jenna de Rosnay set the women's world record of 22 knots here also. Weymouth is not the fastest site anymore, being superseded initially by the trench in Saintes Maries de la Mer in France and now the canal in Lüderitz in Namibia, but this has not diminished the attraction of Speed Week. Still super popular 45 years on, drawing in recent years the big stars of the sport like Bjorn Dunkerbeck and Anders Bringdal, who wanted to sail on the hallowed waters where speed sailing started. This year again it was like the who's who of speed sailing with Erik Beale, the 1st man to break 40 knots, Paul Larson of Sailrocket and outright world record holder at 65.45 knots and Farrel O'shea, British record holder, dropping in just to say hi.

WELCOME ALL

The event draws a big 100+ entry list most years, with big hitters from all over Europe, to the novice Speed week virgin and everything in between.

Of course the wacky boats and now sometimes faster Kitesurfers further enrich the mix. Weymouth area is also fortunate to have some of the fastest sailors in the country living locally (nature or nurture?) like Pete Young who was 3rd fastest of the week and Scotty Stallman who won the gold fleet sponsored by Simmer Style. At age 16, Scotty has been competing at the event since he was just 12 years old! The biggest group by far is the Amateur fleet, who attract the top prizes of the week - £250, £150 and £50 vouchers sponsored by Fanatic, North and Ion. These guys are no slouches, with this year's winner, Tim Lawes, a WSW regular achieving 33.32 knots. The top three places are moved up to the gold fleet each year to ensure fairness and give everyone a chance to win.

Its popularity is also helped by the fact that under the umbrella of 'Weymouth Speed Week', since 2007 it has been the host to the UK speed championships, now sponsored by Hey Dude footwear and the BKSA kite speed championships. The attraction being you get to go head to head with your fellow competitors on the same bit of water and at the same time. Unlike the GPS ladder, which runs all year and is dependent on you being able to drop work and go storm chasing around the UK, very often on your own.

“The wind came round to an almost perfect south-westerly direction allowing the speed hungry racers to start laying down some seriously fast speeds along the beach.”



Anders Björkqvist and Scotty Stallman locked and loaded.
PHOTO Pete Davis.

FAIR WINDS

As we all know strong winds cannot be guaranteed in the UK, we are dependent upon low pressure coming in on the week the organisers put in the diary. WSW is always in October to tie in with the autumn equinox and high tides in the middle of the day. This year the date set a year ago paid off in spades but was it going to be enough to break the harbour records both set on the same day at the event in 2008 by Anders Bringdal and Zara Davis? The opening Saturday and Sunday started off with fairly light winds, which was fortunate, as the organisers can't be seen to encourage youngsters to take time of school. So this is when the juniors have their chance to compete. The fastest of the bunch was local schoolboy, Samuel Anstey, with a very respectable 23.61 knots in only 12 knots of wind!

However everybody was anticipating Ophelia and what she could bring to the party. The Internet was awash with speculation of what havoc it could bring but the competitors were only interested in how fast it could make them go. Monday morning started very windy and the course was set to open at 10:00, then the unthinkable happened, the wind dropped to almost nothing, the sky went dark and the sun went bright orange. Speculation was rife, had the hurricane gone too far west and were we going to miss it? Had Donald finally had enough of Kim and pressed the button? To say it was eerie was an understatement, all the automatic lights at the Sailing academy started to come on and the air had a strange smell of burning.

FAST TRACKS

It gradually got brighter and the breeze started to build, initially from the south, then as the day wore on the wind came round to an almost perfect south-westerly direction allowing the speed hungry racers to start laying down some seriously fast speeds along the beach. But fast enough? With everyone using personal GPS to do the timing, the usual questioning of the other riders started with the familiar "So how fast have you gone?" chant. They all lie to each other of course, and some even cover up their devices so no one else can see. But it was becoming clear that no one, even the overconfident kitesurfers, was getting close to 38 knots let alone 38.44, the harbour record over 500m. The women though were potentially having more success with Zara Davis achieving 32.95 knots on her GPS over 500m, but was it on the course where it counted?

Reports of damaging storm force winds hitting Ireland were on the news and were heading our way also. So a plea to the race officer, Dave Sibley, was put in, could we keep the course open longer? Yes was the answer as everyone wanted the record to go, so an extension was granted but this meant that the results would not be known till the next day when all the GPS devices were handed in and the computers and the software did their thing. There were a lot of sleepless people that night!

RECORD BREAKING

The news the following day was good and bad; the boys had not done it. They were almost two knots away, with the Belgian Bomber, Patrick van Hoof, leading the charge on his 2018 Fanatic / North kit at 36.52 knots. Martin Carter on his kite speed board was just ahead at 37.04 knots. Zara Davis had much better news for the girls, breaking the long standing women's harbour record set by herself in 2008 by almost half a knot. Zara said "So happy to achieve this especially as it was on my new Simmer Speed Demon 43 which Faz the Simmer Importer brought down for me the day before and straight out of the box it gives me the new record, I don't know what the boys were playing at though!"

The next few days had good winds but nowhere near as strong. But could the men's record still fall? The event was due to close on Friday evening but a Storm called Brian was on its way on Saturday..... could it arrive a bit early and give a second bite of the cherry?

This time the race officer was taking no chances, on Friday he called the skippers meeting at 8.30 in the morning and first possible start 9:00 as the wind was coming but was forecast to drop by lunchtime and so was the tide. The prediction was spot on and at 9:00 it was howling and from a better direction, westerly with a bit of north in it. Which meant a starboard broad course on a high tide – perfect! Bang on 9:00 all the usual suspects were on the water, all trying various speed kit and as large a sail as they could hold. The morning wore on and the wind was easing minute by minute.

“ The event’s forecast had more purple than a Prince tribute concert. ”



All smiles for fastest lady – Zara Davis.
PHOTO Pete Davis.

Then the expected “What speed you got?”, “Well, have you done it yet?” But it was clear that they were all slower than Monday with the exception of the kitesurfers with Martin Carter again fastest of the day, tantalizingly close to the record with 38.04 knots, but no cigar.

It was bitterly disappointing for the top guys that they didn’t get the harbour record but speed week is not just about the top stars and fast guys and girls, it has a big following in the Amateur fleet that turn up every year come rain or shine, wind or no wind. Also recognised is the 1st timer award or the ‘Speed Week Virgins’ as they are known. The event attracts between 10 and 20 newbies every year who turn up to see how fast they can go and hopefully win some good prizes to boot. This year’s victor was Ewan Paterson with a very

respectable 33.81 knots, winning a pair of Hey Dude boots and together with all the other winners of the fleets, a free entry into the ISWC world Championships at the Dunkerbeck speed Challenge event next year.

The Prize-giving took place in Spinnakers bar at the National Sailing academy and all the winners were recognised with trophies for their hard work and skills over the week and the prizes from very supportive sponsors given out. The UK Speed Championship winners were also crowned, the champion is the one which is most consistently fast over the counting rounds of speed week and this year was won by Kev Greenslade and Zara Davis, who have both won it 6 times. This year for the first time a GPS challenge cup was also held, it runs all year and Jim Crossley picked up the inaugural prize.



Patrick Van Hoof, fastest windsurfer.
PHOTO Pete Davis.



Kevin Greenslade, UK speed champion.
PHOTO Pete Davis.

SPEED

The event site with our test HQ – the OTC – on the right hand side.
PHOTO Pete Davis.



It is also a chance to give out one special award each year, the Portland Pot. Put up by the Amateur Yacht Research Society, it is awarded to the person or persons that they feel encompass the spirit of the sport of speed sailing and Speed Week itself.

This year it was jointly awarded to two people. The first, a long time supporter of Speed Week, a brilliant speed sailor in his own right and very sorely missed this year due to illness. Secondly to someone who has gone beyond the call of duty in caring and supporting him, together with the brilliant NHS during this very difficult period and a great gutsy competitor when she took part in the event over many years too. This year's Portland Pot goes to Dave White and Pam Green.

The full results can be found on the website www.speedsailing.com and thanks to all the sponsors without whom the event could not happen. K66 Fanatic, North, Ion, Simmer style, Flymount, Starboard Severne, The OTC, Dunkerbeck GPS speed challenge, Hey Dude, Natural Design and AYRS.

TRIS BEST - OTC

It's always good to have Speed Week in town each year and have the action going on right outside the OTC's windows. If you've ever been down a speed course, you know it is subtly different to any other discipline in the sport and takes a lot of focus and mental strength to pit yourself against the elements, particularly when a certified storm is blowing! Stoked for three OTC superstars that claimed the youth podium on the weekend - Sam Anstey ahead of Tyler Baker and Lewis Limm in third. And hats off to Pat Van Hoof, the super friendly Belgian speedster who makes the pilgrimage with his wife Tania to Weymouth each year. He really impressed when the chips were down on the Monday. Just a shame Brian made a late show, as those that waited on were blessed with a spectacular Saturday after the event had closed. Scotty Stallman posted a peak of over 44 knots in one of Brian's mega gusts, leaving us to ponder what could have been. That said, there was still plenty of action during the week, plenty of smiling faces around the Academy and lots confirming they will be back in 2018 - see you then! 🍷

Overall Fastest Sailboard • 1st Patrick Van Hoof 36.520 knots • 2nd Jim Crossley 36.299 knots • 3rd Pete Young 36.253 knots

Overall Fastest Lady • 1st Zara Davis 32.826 knots • 2nd Jenna Gibson 31.603 knots • 3rd Sarah Jackson 28.949 knots



Jim Crossley, UK GPS Champion, at speed in front of the OTC.
PHOTO Andy Stallman.