

BEST OF BRITISH WINDSURFING

Zara Davis speed sailor

WORDS AND PHOTOS: PETE DAVIS

ZARA DAVIS IS ONE OF THE UK BEST KNOWN FEMALE WINDSURFERS, REGULARLY ON NATIONAL TELEVISION, IN THE NATIONAL PRESS AND SPECIALIST MAGAZINES LIKE THIS ONE. She was voted Windsurfer of the Year in 2011 and is in the Guinness Book of Records for her speed sailing achievements.



Zara's recognition is not down to just being in the press and on social media, but on the back of some very impressive results. She holds two official world speed records, the first women in history to have held both the Nautical Mile and 500m records at the same time, a double women's ISWC World Speed Champion, six times ISWC European Speed Champion and for fun she enjoys slalom and has won the UKWA Women's Slalom Championship three times.

These results are a testament to the hard work she puts in to her training and what makes her achievements even more impressive is she is not a full time windsurfer, instead working full time as an osteopath at her medical practice Walnut Grove in Portishead.

So what drives the Queen of Speed?

"I have been windsurfing since I was 13 years of age, initially taught by my dad John, in Bristol Docks. After a long break I took it up again in 1995 at Brogborough Lake where I met my now husband Pete. I started racing in 1999 and had reasonable national success in the UK with formula and slalom disciplines winning the UKWA Women's Slalom Championships in 2000.

"But In 2004 I turned my attention to the resurgence of speed sailing having always had good board speed even as a beginner. I am lucky that being six-foot tall with long levers and 80kg of weight helps me to get what I need out of a board. But if I am honest I love the adrenaline rush from going Mach10 with my hair on fire! I think going fast is in my blood, my father and brother were both good rally drivers and had no fear.

"In 2004 I entered Weymouth Speed Week for the first time and won. The following year Pete, my husband, persuaded me to go to Sotavento, Fuerteventura, for a Speed World Cup competition. I came fifth in the world and I was hooked. I had found my niche.

"Since then I have been privileged to travel the world taking part in speed competitions and speed record attempts with some fantastic sponsors like Simmer, AL360 and Sonntag who have really helped to make equipment that works for me which I think really benefits the regular windsurfers out there who are not 100kg super strong racers. I have also had some fantastic mentors like Dave White and Farrell O'Shea. Over the years their counsel and support has been invaluable.

"I make up for my lack of time on the water (why is it always windy when I have patients booked in?) with suspension and triathlon training with local club PAC Tri. This keeps me at a good level of general fitness but on the water is always the best so I get out locally

wave sailing at Weston Super Mare when the forecast is good. I go speed sailing at West Kirby and Weymouth whenever I can as well. Being bigger and heavier than the other girls really pays off. Weight really helps with momentum in the lulls. Lighter sailors get on the plane quicker for sure but on a speed strip that is not an issue as you are coming in at full speed anyway. The big gains come in the lulls on the course and extra weight gives you that inertia to plane through dead spots. This skill of gliding through lulls takes practice, especially for a lighter rider, and has made a big difference to me for sure.

As with the RYA Start Windsurfing course, the RYA Intermediate course is accessible via a number of different routes

"Highlighting one particular achievement is difficult. I think I have two. In performance terms it has to be getting my record back in 2017 at Luderitz, Namibia. This one really felt like I had earned my stripes. Taking the record back off Karin Jaggi who broke my record in 2015 in Luderitz, on the same canal that I broke the 45-knot barrier in 2012. Back then it felt a little hollow, as Karin who is a good friend was not there to keep me honest. This time Karin had taken the record to over 46.31 knots on a truly apocalyptically windy day in 2015 – the record was now set pretty high and it was a proper hard target to beat. Achieving this new world record by a

small margin in much lighter winds was a really meaningful accomplishment. The other big accomplishment, that was special to me, was being crowned UKWA Windsurfer of the Year back in 2011. It meant a lot as it gave me a real opportunity to encourage others – especially girls and women to take up this fantastic sport."

You can keep up to date with Zara's exploits by following her Facebook feed:
Zara Davis, Speed Windsurfer
[@Zaraspeedsailing](https://www.facebook.com/Zaraspeedsailing)

