

A few stories from Tops'I members about how they came to join Tops'I

My journey to Tops'I and beyond from Sarah who joined us in April 2015

Having spent a few hours in an Enterprise dingy as a teenager I was hooked on this sailing lark. During my time at university, I took part in some windsurfing sessions which I found exhilarating but very wet, spending most of the time in the water!

Later, during school holidays I went along with my two children to the Queen Mary Sailing Club where we took part in some courses and learnt the basic sailing techniques, which was great fun. However, sailing round and round a reservoir and frequently capsizing, I got to thinking that there was something missing – I want actually to go somewhere, I thought, without getting a dunking.

Yachts would be the answer, but how to get on one without having to pay huge costs? I hoped that somehow I might be able to crew for someone sometime. I was making this point (yet again) to new holiday friends whilst on a trip to Pompeii. 'Easy' – came back the answer – 'you need to join our club called Tops'I.'

On returning home I looked up this enticing sounding club and immediately contacted Andrea, who explained how it all works and arranged for me to take part in a trial sail, which made up my mind and I joined almost immediately.

I have now been a member for fourteen months and have spent around 20 days and nights on Jocalia and Carina. I am learning so much each time I go out as every skipper I have come across so far, is very willing to teach and let newbies like me get stuck in and have a go. I have become very familiar with the Solent and the Isle of Wight making so many new friends along the way. Post sail evenings with the crews are always very friendly and convivial with plenty of chat about the day's events and a lot more besides.

My latest venture has been to take part in Carina's cruise around the east coast. Such a splendid way to spend time and I look forward to many more cruises and club sails in what looks like a very rosy future for my sailing addiction.

What Brought Me to Tops'l - Murray who joined us in April 2016, writes

Having been a serial dabbler all of my life it will come as no surprise to those amongst you like myself that the garage at my home has become somewhat of a museum to all of my past hobbies and good ideas. Nothing I ever threw myself into ever sustained my interest for that long; hunting, shooting, fishing, cars... the list goes on... That was until I came upon a reservoir full of dinghies all jostling to beat each other to the next mark. "How interesting," I said to my wife. Her reply was, "you'd better get on a sailing course then" with that knowing look that said here he goes again.

I duly did and after a fantastic week of exploring the west coast of Scotland on an Ovni 43 chartered by the sailing club that I did my training course with, I'd found the thing that was missing in all of my previous pastimes and hobbies and I resolved to pursue the open water side of sailing. I did my day skipper theory and practical in November 2015 down in Hamble; a great nine days and learnt a lot but the key thing I came away with, however, was I needed more training and sea time with experienced people around me before I set off into the wild blue yonder on my own!

The responsibility of taking charge of expensive real estate and other people's wellbeing was a lot to shoulder and I wasn't prepared to take a gung-ho attitude to that. Enthusiastic I am, stupid I'm not. So where do I go from here I asked myself? Trawl the Apollo Duck web site, buy a yacht and beg crew to help me watch cash fall out of my pocket? Just at the point of thinking this adventure was going to stall Tops'l came on to my internet radar.

The Club looked and felt like the right fit for me so after a few more times of looking through the website I took the plunge and made contact. I took a call from Andrea and she gave me the low down on the Tops'l ethos; a friendly entertaining group of people who love their sailing, share the costs and responsibilities, and are welcoming of others.

From that point on I was pretty much hooked and after a great trial sail with Peter, Niall and Jeremy I knew this was where I was going to make my sailing home.

What Tops'l did by the bucket full, straight from the offset, was to make me, a complete stranger to most members, welcomed, included and engaged in the Club. Every sail I have done to date has been a real joy with something new learnt every time. Everyone I've met wants you to enjoy the experience and the soft touch approach to learning the Tops'l way keeps you engaged.

The next stage for me is to keep on with the Club sails, get myself into some longer passages, enjoy every minute of it, and keep learning

Mike an ex - boat owner, who joined us in March 2008, writes

When I retired one of my aims was to do more sailing however whilst I had a boat and the time, I often found myself without a crew on the days that I wanted to sail. My wife isn't particularly interested in sailing and most of my available crew still had work to go to and other family commitments. Not only that but I seemed to spend more days on the boat whilst it was in the boatyard than I ever did on the water. There had to be a better way.

Finding Tops'l not only solved my crew problem but offered many more advantages over owning my own boat. The manner in which the club is run ensures that all of the tasks involved in both running the club and maintaining the boats are shared by those who want to get involved and the use of standard business processes such as checklists, (the club was founded by a group of airline pilots) ensures that not only are tasks devolved across the membership but are also carried out to a very exacting standard – I would venture to say the boats themselves are maintained and presented to possibly a higher standard than many owners manage themselves.

The overall result is the ability to sail in three superb boats with very different sailing experiences in different sailing areas. This year for example it is possible to be sailing in the Solent one week and the next to be taking part in the summer extended cruise, exploring the Spanish Rias in Northern Spain. There are also opportunities to take part in the longer passages e.g. the delivery/return trip to and from Northern Spain if that is of interest.

The social aspect of the club is excellent with several on shore activities throughout the year. So if you enjoy sailing, would like to sail in a variety of excellent boats, in different areas of the UK and Europe, with some very convivial companions join Tops'l Sailcruise.