

Seabird Half Rater

- 2024 is the 125th Anniversary of the Seabird Half Rater class.
- Officially the oldest one design class still racing in Britain!
- See them at Wallasey Yacht Club on the Mersey, South Caernarfon Yacht Club, Abersoch, and Trearddur Bay Sailing Club, Anglesey.



Above: Seabirds at Wallasey Yacht Club.

Now entering its 125th year, the Seabird Half Rater was recognised in 1979 by the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest One Design Class still racing in Britain. They are 20ft carvel planked sailing boats and to date 101 have been built, with 75 surviving to this day.

The Seabird Half Rater was designed by Walter Scott-Hayward, Commodore of West Lancashire Yacht Club, and Herbert Baggs whose initial plans were drawn on the back of a cigarette packet under a streetlight in Southport in 1898. The first 8 boats were built in 1898/99 by R. Latham & Co., Crossens at a cost of £34 17s 6d each, with a suit of sails costing £3 19s 6d. Under the Dixon Kemp rule their rating was calculated to be 0.5 hence the name "Half Rater". To ensure the one design principles of the class were maintained the boats were only balloted for, once they were complete.



Left: *Goshawk* No.2 the winner of the first ever race shown in 1899 sailing off Southport pier and today where she currently sails in Abersoch.

The first race was sailed off the Southport Pierhead on 13 June 1899, when eight boats

participated over a ten-mile course, with *Goshawk* No.2, helmed by owner Mr Dudley Coddington taking the winning gun, ahead of *Fulmar* No.1.



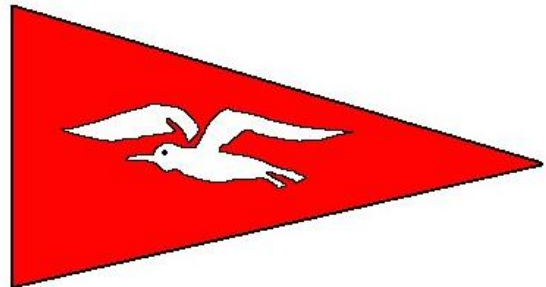
Left: *Eider* No.77 flying her spinnaker on the Mersey

The fleet rapidly expanded and within a couple of years the class had been adopted Donaghadee Sailing Club, on the east coast of Northern Ireland, who renamed them Seashells; Caernarvon Sailing Club who called them Cariads; and Gourock Yacht Club, on the Clyde, knew them as Gaels. As a result of these naming conventions many of the older boats have been renamed multiple times when they've moved clubs and this is

also why despite the class now solely being known as "Seabirds" some boats still have "odd" names that aren't named after birds, such as *Chila* No.18, *Valmai* No.25 and *Gael* No.38.

Inter club racing was first held on the waters of Belfast Lough during the summer of 1902 when a fleet of 17 Seabirds competed over a week's worth of racing which gained considerable praise from the yachting press as one of the first ever international sailing events.

The Seabirds, Seashells and Cariads One Design Association was formed in the autumn of 1905, at a meeting held in West Kirby Sailing Club. By this point 31 boats had been built by 4 different boat builders, so it was decided that a class should be formed, to stop any deviation from the original design. The class burgee of a white seagull on a red background was selected



Right: Seabird Association Burgee

In 1908 R. Perry & Son, Birkenhead, were appointed sail makers, their price being £3 19s 6d for a full suit consisting of a Main, Jib and Spinnaker.



In 1910 the entire Donaghdee SC Seabird fleet of 9 boats were bought by West Kirby Sailing Club, where they raced on the Dee until the 1950's. Despite having an impressive fleet of 24 boats at Southport when sailing resumed after the First World War, by the late 1930's they had all departed due to silting of their racing area. Sailing did briefly resume on the tide at Southport in the early 1960's however the loss of *Whaup* No.39 and yet more silting killed off the revival.

Left: *Seasnipe* No.33

The association was so strict in its principles that at a

meeting in October 1912 it was decided not to admit a Seabird built by Roberts of Chester. The entry was refused on the grounds that he had been given authority to build 5 boats, not 6. The rules were so strictly adhered to that this Seabird, *Seasnipe* No.33, was not recognised by the association until 1963.

Prior to the First World War, 41 boats had been built and were racing regularly at this time the cost of a new boat had risen to £60.

Below: Seabirds at Trearddur Bay.



The first Half Rater appeared in Trearddur Bay in 1921, her name was *Auk* and she presented a problem because, although she conformed to the design, she had broken the Seabird Association rules by being built singly for one specific owner, rather than part of a batch which would then have been balloted for, having red sails which were not permitted at the time and also using the sail No.1 despite that already being allocated to an existing boat, then known as *Seasnipe*. However, when they found that she was no better than the others the Association accepted her as legitimate and reallocated her the sail No.53. A year later in 1922 Trearddur Bay Sailing Club officially adopted the Class.

Below: Seabirds at Abersoch



In 1924 the newly formed South Caernarvonshire YC offered races in June for Seabirds. The first race at SCYC was held on the 9th of June between 5 boats of the Seabird class (four of them new). By the onset of World War 2 in 1938, 81 seabirds had been constructed with 17 sailing at Abersoch, 12 on the Mersey, 8 at Trearddur Bay, 7 at West Kirby, 5 at Southport, 4 in the Menai Straits, 2 at Lytham and single boats at Holyhead, Windermere, Torquay and Potter Heigham. *Osprey*, No.41, was in the Isle of Man and had been modified out of class

but she has since been restored to seabird association specifications.



Left: Light airs at the start of a race at Beaumaris for the Centenary regatta in 1999.

The 60's saw a revival in the building programme of ten new boats, by this time the price of a seabird had risen to around

£800. A news article at the time claimed there was a buyer's market for "at least one new seabird per year". In 1965 there were 56 seabirds sailing regularly, mainly at Trearddur Bay (24 boats), Abersoch (21 boats), 6 boats at West Cheshire Sailing Club on the Mersey and single boats at Holyhead, Rhyl and Conway, although *Cormorant*, No.9, was being used as a fishing boat out of Liverpool docks. The Association became affiliated to the RYA.

The class celebrated its centenary year in 1999 and the highlight was when the three Stations raced together in the Menai Strait Regattas, when 47 Seabirds out of a total fleet of 67 met. Many of the older boats had been lovingly restored over the years and the regattas saw *Goshawk* No.2, *Scoter* No.6 and *Dovekie* No.8 who sailed in the very first race in 1899, still racing 100 years later against the newest seabird, at the time, *Oystercatcher* No.100 which was built in 1998.

Despite now costing in excess of £40,000 for a new boat, 8 new boats have been built between 2005-17, bringing the current total fleet up to 75, the majority are based at Trearddur Bay (34 Boats), Wallasey (23 Boats), Abersoch (11 Boats), Wirral (2 Boats) and Anglesey (2 Boats).

Right: *Booby* No.108, the newest Seabird, having been built between 2014-17 sailing at Llyn Brenig

Seabirds can be seen on TV in:

- Sea Cities: Maritime Merseyside (BBC, 2015) featured Wallasey Yacht Club Seabirds racing in the club regatta on the Mersey, won by *Eider* No.77 and interviews about the rebuild of one of the



boats, *Osprey* No.41.

- Britain Afloat episode: 'The Sailing Boat' (BBC, 2017) featured a segment on the Wallasey Yacht Club Seabirds which included drone footage of the 2017 West Cheshire SC regatta and presenter Mary-Ann Ochota sailing on *Terek* No.94 on the Mersey.
- Safehouse (Season Two, ITV, 2017). The opening scene was filmed on board TBSC's *Rockhopper* No.105 sailing in Trearddur Bay.
- Tin Star: Liverpool (Season three, Sky Atlantic, 2019) which was filmed in Merseyside shows Wallasey Yacht Club's *Eider* No.77 on the Mersey.
- Great Coastal Railway Journeys (BBC, August 2022). Michael Portillo sailed onboard SCYC's *Penguin* No.40 in Abersoch but to date, this has not been broadcast.

Dimensions

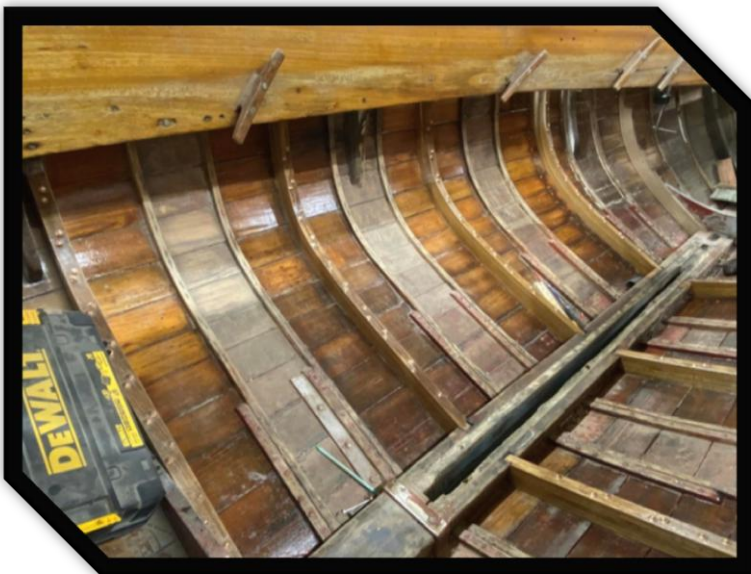
- Length overall: 20 ft.
- Length on load water line: 16 ft. 4in.
- Beam at deck: 6 ft.
- Beam at load water line: 5 ft. 6in.
- Draft: 1 ft. 3in.
- Sail area: 182.2sq. ft.
- Minimum hull weight 650Kg
- Ballast 240-263Kg



Materials

- Hull Planking: Pitch Pine
- Gunwale: American elm, Iroko or Mahogany
- Keel: American elm, Oak or Iroko
- Frames: Oak
- Knees: Oak
- Deck Beams: Yellow Pine
- Deck: Yellow pine, Agba or Silver

- spruce
- King Plank: Mahogany or Iroko
- Transom: Mahogany or Iroko
- Centre Case: Yellow Pine or Mahogany
- Thwarts: Mahogany or Iroko
- Combing: Mahogany or Iroko
 - Rudder: Pitch pine or Mahogany



Above: Seabird sail plan

Left: New frames being fitted to *Eider* No.77 during her rebuild, these have been laminated from strips of oak, steamed and bent into shape before being glued together with epoxy and fixed in position using copper nails and roves.



Above: Seabirds racing on the Mersey

Key Dates for 2024

- Seabird AGM & Dinner 9th March
- Wallasey Yacht Club Regatta 15th & 16th June
- Seabird Interstation race 30th June
- Abersoch open week 4th-8th August
- Wallasey open week 12th-15th September

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Trearddur Bay Sailing Club
Trearddur Bay
Anglesey
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Below: Seabirds racing in the 2018 WYC regatta

