

Report of LRSCA Working Party (WP) 29th March 2017

1. The brief:

“To consider how the Class might encourage growth in and beyond the Western Solent and to examine the options for increasing the appeal of the Class together with any safeguards needed to protect it.”

2. Composition: Claire Sowry (CLS), Dick Moore (DM)*, Jane Pitt-Pitts (JPP), Jon Harvey (JH), Mike Urwin (MU)*, Robin Taunt (RT), Rupert Scott (RS). Tim Robinson (TR), the new BRSC Scow Class Captain who succeeded RS.

(* Co-chairs)

Observer: John Evans (JE)

3. Method:

3.1. All LRSCA Members were invited to express their views by email, letter or direct contact with a member of the WP. Only 4 such responses were received.

3.2. A questionnaire was drawn up and circulated to all LRSCA Members (about 225), BRSC Members (about 100) and known owners and sailors of Lymington River (LR) Scows at Keyhaven and in the 3 Chichester Clubs comprising of Dell Quay SC, Emsworth SC, and West Wittering SC. A total of some 350 were distributed and 99 responses were received, one unreadable, a 28% response rate. The response rate from LRSCA Members was higher at 39%. The response rate from BRSC Members was 11%. A summary of the responses is attached as Appendix 1. A copy of the full analysis of responses will be available on the LRSCA website www.lymingtonriverscow.org/

3.3. Informal meetings were held with representatives of the following Clubs:

Keyhaven YC (KYC)

Hurst Castle SC (HCSC)

RLymYC

Lymington Town Sailing Club (LTSC)

Beaulieu River Sailing Club (BRSC)

Dell Quay SC, Emsworth SC and West Wittering SC (all together)

Yarmouth SC (YSC)

Christchurch SC (CSC) was approached, but declined to take part.

These meetings followed a common pattern and focussed on the classes sailed, perceived importance of the Scow fleet within the Club, nature of Scow activities (eg racing/pottering/juniors), opportunities and obstacles to growing Scow numbers. The reports of these meetings will be available on the LRSCA website

4. Findings

4.1 Opportunities for growth

4.1.1. Some 60% of respondents to the Questionnaire agreed that the Class should consciously try to expand. Only 7% felt it should not, the remainder falling into the "Don't know" category.

4.1.2. Almost all of the Clubs surveyed were not actively seeking to enlarge their Scow fleets but with the exception of Dell Quay SC all were enjoying a steady, but mostly small, increase year-on-year. The RLYMYC Scow Division had seen excellent growth in the last three years but currently this has slowed by a lack of dinghy parking spaces. Similar problems were reported at KYC and LTSC. Resolving this intractable problem will be the key to continuing the growth in these Clubs. Growth is possible in Emsworth SC, but there is strong competition from the locally-built Chichester Scow.

4.1.3. Growth in Clubs such as YSC, CSC, Bembridge and Brading Haven SC is not going to happen any time soon, in our opinion. In all these Clubs there are large and strong fleets of locally built Scows with which the members are very happy. A recent move to allow LR Scows to race with the Avon Scows at Christchurch was defeated because they wish to maintain one-design racing. The WP did not meet other Clubs in other locations but there are established fleets of Scows or Scow-type dinghies in most suitable locations.

4.1.4. The largest opportunity to expand the Class lies at Beaulieu, both in the short and the longer term. BRSC has a fleet of some 80 assorted Scows of which currently 35 were built by John Claridge on the LR Scow mould, to the LR Scow specification. Centreboard, rudder, mast, spars and indeed every detail is exactly as if they were LR Scows. These boats are LR Scows with the exception of the WS on many of the sails. Their sails are made by Sanders and every boat carries a unique sail number, in the same sequence as LR Scows. There are no duplicated Sail numbers. They are handed over to their owners with a LR Scow certificate provided by John Claridge.* Four of these boats are fully compliant with LR Scow Class Rules and display the Class insignia on their mainsails. The remainder have the traditional "WS" logo, as carried by the rest of the BRSC Scow fleet. In addition, a number still have the traditional un-battened mainsail. Two years ago the BRSC amended its class rules to allow the battened mainsail used by the LR Scow and today some 19 of the 35 have these sails. It is probable that, as owners replace their mainsails, more will adopt the battened main which is felt to provide better performance.

Concern has been raised by a Member of the WP about the validity of such certificates, in that they are apparently issued without any check on the sail insignia to be carried (LR or WS). This issue falls outside the scope of the WP. We mention it here and suggest that the LRSCA notes the concern and decides what action, if any, should be taken.

If the rules of the LRSCA were to be altered to allow boats carrying the WS insignia which measure as LR Scows in every other respect to sail in LRSCA events (currently only the National Championships but hopefully more in the future) then many of the BRSC owners might join the Association over time, resulting in a significant increase in Membership numbers and this should gather pace as older Scows are replaced by Claridge-built Scows.

The questionnaire asked: "*Many BRSC Scows use the sail logo "WS" but are otherwise identical. Should they be permitted to compete in LRSCA events?*" 75% of all respondents answered "Yes". If only LRSCA members were considered, the percentage supporting this dropped to 73%. There is clearly strong support from the Membership who responded to the Questionnaire in support of this move.

However there is strong opposition to any such change in Class Rules from some members of the Class Association, who fear that it will weaken the One-design status and image of the Class which are major reasons for its continuing appeal. They suggest that BRSC members should change their sail insignia to comply with current LR Class rules.

The BRSC Members are currently reluctant to do this, being emotionally attached to their traditional WS insignia and not perceiving compelling reasons to change at this time.

Both the LRSCA and the owners of the Beaulieu River Scows stand to gain from admitting the Beaulieu Scows to membership of the Association, the LRSCA from an increase in Membership and boat owners from confirmation that their boats are unequivocally LR Scows. A majority of the WP favour doing so, as we make clear in the Recommendations, below. Apart from the benefits already mentioned, by embracing the BRSC boats and their owners the Association will ensure that this significant fleet remains within the One-design rules of the LR Scow.

4.2 Obstacles to growth

4.2.1. Dinghy parking. As already mentioned, this is an intractable problem at RLymYC, KYC and LTSC and something of a problem at HCSC. There is no way to acquire more land in any Club and so the only way to resolve the problem would seem to be to apply strictly the Policy "Use it or Lose it". This is said to exist in all the 4 local Clubs but with small differences. Resolving this must remain a Club matter and so the WP makes no recommendation on the issue. However, the WP is keen that the Policy is implemented.

4.2.2.. Road trailers. 59% of respondents owned a road-trailer, all bar 3 were supplied by John Claridge (JC). The "old" design makes it very easy to load and unload a Scow and so simplifies trailing.

Recent requirements originating from Brussels/EU have caused JC to cease manufacturing his road trailers. The WP believes that not to have a trailer designed to match the launching trolley will be a disincentive to some owners/ potential owners. Accordingly, we have made representations to JC to come up with a suitable replacement and he is in discussion with various companies and expects to unveil a new design shortly. As at 22nd March he is awaiting delivery of a potentially suitable trailer from an established supplier and is also considering how best to adapt the current design to meet the new requirements.

Meanwhile it has been suggested that the LRSCA might seek to compile a list of trailer owners who would be willing to assist owners without trailers to get to Open events namely the National Championships when they are not held at RLymYC

5. Options for increasing the appeal of the Class

5.1. The boat

In general there was no great support for changing anything to do with the boat itself. The Class Rules were perceived as being about right. 54% of respondents supported having spinnakers with 25% against and the rest responding Don't know. On imposing a minimum crew weight for racing there was a majority in favour of such a minimum but no consensus on what it should be and the WP have made no recommendation on this point. Adding toe-straps, removing oars and anchors were mentioned by individuals but there is no consensus supporting any such changes.

A number of people commented that, if you put an LR Scow next to any other type of scow, the LR Scow stood out as the "better" boat. Asked to qualify "better" terms such as "better sea boat", better rig and better built were used.

It has been suggested that the name "Lymington River Scow" might limit the appeal of the Class outside the Lymington area. The WP found no evidence to support this view and does not consider it worthy of further mention.

5.2. Activities using the boat.

There were many suggestions for increasing the number and range of events available, especially those involving 2 or more Clubs.

Responses from individuals and from the Clubs consulted show that Pottering is as popular as Racing.

The WP received a number of suggestions for more varied Potters within Clubs, but as organising such events is a Club matter the WP has not gone further into how this might be done.

There is considerable enthusiasm for more inter-Club events, both Racing and Pottering. Here we feel the LRSCA has a role to play. In particular, we have been asked to consider organising an All-comers "Open" Scow event to which we would invite eg. Avon, Bembridge (IoW) Scows, Chichester Scows, Palace Quay Scows, Keyhaven Scows as well as LR Scows. Details need to be worked out but preliminary thinking has the event hosted by RLymYC and organised by LRSCA in 2018.

Jon Harvey has proposed that KYC, RLymYC and BRSC should nominate one or more of their regular Club races as being "Open" to Scows from participating Clubs. A visitor would be given a place but would be removed from the series score at the host Club. Instead his/her result would be recorded by LRSCA, added to other such results and a new Trophy would be awarded for the boat with the overall best results. (More work is needed here, especially on how the scores are to be recorded and by whom (LRSCA Secretary??) This is building on last year's friendly races between RLymYC and BRSC, both home and away and will take shape in 2017 before hopefully being launched as an LRSCA-sponsored event with a new Trophy in 2018.

5.3 Marketing activities

5.3.1. Publicity

While some (maybe all?) participating Clubs send reports of Scow races to their local press and to Yachts and Yachting and the LRSCA similarly sends out a report of the National Championships, the WP consider that more could and should be done to generate awareness of the LR Scow and its Class Association. In 2016 our Hon President Gordon Stredwick managed to get two articles on the boat accepted in Yachts & Yachting and All at Sea which was admirable and deserves to be repeated whenever the opportunity arises. In addition to Press publicity, we live in the age of social media and should consider how to use these to further spread awareness of our wonderful little boats. The WP believes that currently there is no-one on the LRSCA Committee charged with generating publicity and we address this point in the Recommendations.

5.3.2. Exhibitions

We have considered taking space at key Boat Shows, e.g. the Dinghy Show at Alexandra Palace in March and the Southampton Boat Show in September. After some research we dropped the idea of attending the Dinghy Show (too difficult logistically and too expensive for too little expected return.) However, we believe that we should consider supporting JC on his stand at the Southampton boat show in September 2017. With enthusiastic owners talking to visitors we should engender enough interest to warrant any outlay which might be required. Details are awaited from JC and the Recommendations contain the suggestion that we test the idea in 2017.

6. Recommendations:

6.1 Beaulieu River Scows

The LRSCA Committee should bring a resolution to the 2017 AGM amending the Class Rules for a defined period of time to permit Scows which comply with the Class Rules in all respects except the insignia on their mainsail (WS) to be accepted as Lymington River Scows. Additionally, provision should be made for a "Club" Insignia in addition to the existing Class Insignia.

The suggested wording of the Class Rule change is as follows with new text shown underlined:

Class Rule 8

c) Class Insignia and Sail Number

- i) A plan showing the size, style and position of the class insignia and sail number is available from the Class. The insignia shall not be placed back-to-back.
- ii) The sail numbers shall be 300 mm high and spaced 60 mm apart.
- iii) For a period of "n" (see * Note, below) years from 1st January 2018, boats may either display the Class Insignia or the alternative WS class insignia. A plan showing the size, style and position of this alternative class insignia is available from the Class. The alternative insignia shall not be placed back-to-back.
- iv) Boats displaying the class insignia may additionally display a club insignia to indicate their Club. The Class shall approve the size, style and position of the club insignia and shall hold plans for all approved club insignia. Club insignia shall not be placed back to back.
- v) The colour of the insignia and sail numbers is optional but shall contrast with the body of the sail.

Note: In sub-Clause 8.c) iv) above we introduce the suggestion of allowing additional letters below the logo to indicate the boat's normal Club or location - for example, WW for West Wittering

Welcoming the BRSC boats in this way will achieve the objectives outlined earlier in this report - growth in Association numbers, better support for Association events and ensuring that the BRSC Scows remain Lymington River Scows. Such a move has the clear support of 73% of respondents and of a majority of the WP. Our hope is that, with time, all parties will come to accept that the benefits of the new rules greatly outweigh any currently perceived disadvantages.

However, the LRSCA should be aware that it will be necessary to take positive steps to make BRSC Members aware of the benefits of belonging to the LRSCA. Tim Robinson, Scow Class Captain at BRSC, has stressed that it will take time for his members to start to want to belong to the LR Scow Community. He has suggested a number of actions to help raise awareness of the Association and of the advantages of belonging. Among them:

Appointing TR as a BRSC buoyancy tester using LRSCA-approved equipment, to be done as soon as possible (JE to arrange suitable training, ideally on 22nd April)

Encouraging as many members from Lymington as possible to visit BRSC in September for the friendly race against RLymYC. (Action: RT and his Committee)

Possibly inviting BRSC Members with Claridge scows to attend the evening event at the 2017 Nationals. In addition TR has asked to be included as an observer on the Race Team for the Nationals so as to better understand how the event is run. (Action JE and LRSCA Committee)

Arranging a talk to BRSC Members during the winter, possibly inviting Rory Paton and Mike Urwin to repeat their recent talk to the RLymYC Scow Division on ways to set up a Lymington River Scow and to tack and gybe more efficiently and on buoyancy testing. The occasion could also be used to explain briefly what the LRSCA does for its members.

Encouraging members such as Eric Williams and Jay Devonshire to chat to fellow BRSC Members about LRSCA when the opportunity occurs. (Action TR)

BRSC to consider hosting an open LR Scow event involving more Clubs than just the RLymYC at some future date.

*** Note: The Members of the WP were not able to agree how long this change in Class Rules should last. There was support for a period of 2 years from January 2018 and equal support for 3 years. One member wanted one year and one no time limit at all.**

6.2 Marketing and promotion of the Class

6.2.1. The LRSCA should adopt a more pro-active approach to publicising the Class. A Committee member should be given responsibility for this and should seek to generate favourable publicity in traditional media and also utilising social media. In addition, Clubs should be encouraged to ensure that the boats and the events in which they sail are always referred to as Lymington River Scows. This is to raise awareness of the brand.

6.2.2. The LRSCA should agree with JC to provide a presence at the Southampton Boat Show to take full advantage of all interest shown by visitors. A modest contribution towards the cost of an enhanced stand should be considered. JC should be given the right to approve the LRSCA Members who volunteer for stand duty.

6.3. Road Trailers

The LRSCA should continue to encourage JC to source a suitable road trailer. When JC has completed his evaluation of various options and has chosen one, the LRSCA should help promote it to all Members, so as to secure an initial order for 5 of the new model.

Meanwhile we suggest that the LRSCA compiles a list of trailer owners who would be willing to assist owners without trailers to get to Open-events.

6.4 More Inter-Club activities

6.4.1. The LRSCA should form a sub-Committee to organise an Open "All-Comers " Scow regatta in 2018, intended to bring together in one location representatives of the various types of Scows encountered locally. The hope is that, by allowing the superiority of the LR Scow to show itself more owners would become tempted to replace their own Scow with a LR Scow. Also, it should be good for publicity and good fun.

6.4.2. The LRSCA should encourage the growth of inter-Club racing along the lines described in Section 5.2 above and, if the initiative takes root, they should award a Trophy to the most successful "Traveller" to be awarded in 2018 and subsequent years.

.....

Dick Moore

.....

Mike Urwin

29th March 2017

Appendix 1

Summary of responses to the Questionnaire

1. 99 completed questionnaires were returned of which all bar 1 were readable 98 have therefore been used for analysis purposes.
2. While the average age of Scow owners is in their 60s, data on how long boats have been owned suggests that the Class membership is naturally renewing.
3. In excess of 60% of respondents replied that they both raced and pottered. This suggests that more emphasis could be placed on pottering and attracting new pottering members.
4. Close to 75% of respondents keep their boat in a club dinghy park. 9 of those without a club dinghy park space would like one.
5. Close to 60% of respondents own a trailer. The fact that the LR Scow trails easily is a significant beneficial selling point.
6. Having in excess of 60% of respondents sailing with one or more family members, there would appear to be a potential demand for family events.
7. By a large margin, respondents think that the class should consciously try to expand.
8. 75% of respondents considered that BRSC Scows should be permitted to compete in LR Scow events carrying the WS mainsail logo. This percentage was not significantly affected by excluding BRSC members and/or non LRSCA members.

This would appear to mandate a proposal for a change to the Class Rules.
9. Respondents were split on whether a Class name change would be acceptable if it was found that the current name was deterring expansion.
10. In excess of 50% of respondents thought that a spinnaker should be permitted. There was no clear view on whether the minimum crew weight to fly a spinnaker was correct.
11. There is some support for a minimum crew weight for boats crewed by children.
12. A number of suggestions for Class Rule changes have been made. These are detailed in the Analysis section which follows.
13. The boat appeals to the owners for a very wide range of reasons.
14. Respondents made a number of other comments.

Further detailed analysis may be found on the LRSCA Website