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The next level

Inspired by successfully achieving her RYA Start Sailing Level 1, **Dawn Hinsley** headed to Poole for a weekend of Basic Skills Level 2 tuition with Rockley Watersports...

Above (clockwise) At the start of the weekend, Level 1 and 2 sailors venture out in Wayfarers with instructors; the centre itself is by the water in the north-west corner of Poole Harbour; on the second day Level 2 sailors head out singlehanded; races are organised on the last afternoon for all levels; Level 1 sailors with their instructor.

I remember when I was learning to drive... every manoeuvre had to be carefully considered, and the elements involved thought through carefully then carried out with precision: check it's in neutral, start the engine, into first, remember your blind spots etc.

Many years on driving is almost second nature: but when I was learning it felt anything but natural! I was reminded of this whilst at Rockley Point Sailing Centre, one of Rockley Watersports' centres, in June last year. Enthused after my experiences taking RYA Level 1 at Sail Laser (see October 6, 2006 issue), I'd decided to continue with a weekend course designed to move me on to achieving Level 2.

Gybe-tastic

My biggest achievements of the weekend included realising that a gybe wasn't as scary as I'd believed, and sailing a triangle course all on my own and understanding properly what I was doing.

It's hard to remember what it is like to be a beginner when you become really good at something. So many assumptions are made: a competent person often takes for granted what a beginner understands, even including the simplest of things, when in fact it can take several attempts and much repeating of information for 'the penny to drop'.

Therefore, I was very pleased that Level 2 actually covers again a lot of what is included on the syllabus of Level 1. It was also great to have patient instructors, keen to encourage and never flustered by mistakes. I was equally as amazed – using sailing a triangle course as an example – how much of Level 1 suddenly made sense after taking a second weekend at Level 2. We had sailed triangle courses at Level 1, but if I'd been left in a boat alone I would have been totally lost!

We started the weekend in groups sailing in Wayfarers, with an instructor in each boat. Although separated into boats according to ability, the Level 1 and 2 sailors all went out in a fleet together.

We spent our time initially recapping basic skills, including tacks, wind direction, sail handling, and the dreaded gybes. We all took it in turns to helm our boat, with the instructor taking a back seat role and helping or prompting us where necessary.

I was reminded of how often I used to repeat the mantra 'mirror-signal-manoeuve' when I was learning to drive, as I carefully thought about my



PHOTOS: DAWN HINSELEY/RYA*

body position, the movement of the tiller extension, avoiding the boom, controlling my body weight, straightening up, and getting the mainsail back into the right position on my tacks. Also thinking carefully about wind direction and what was involved to round different marks.

Then came the fearsome gybe. Like an emergency stop or parallel parking, as a beginner this particular aspect of sailing fills me with dread. I sometimes find myself wishing a sailing boat does in fact have an emergency stop, to give me the opportunity to just hit the brakes and think about what I'm doing! Many deep breaths later I managed it... and was very chuffed when my instructor commented, 'You could video your gybes for an RYA instructional manual they are so perfect.' That definitely had me beaming from ear to ear!

Going it alone

Time in the boat with an instructor was followed by time in the boat without one, but still in groups. As Level 2s, our first task was to rig the boat with our crew. This seemed to go very well, working as a team and getting everything set up as we'd been shown. Until on the tow out to the sailing area we – raring to go – untied ourselves from the dinghy in front and began our sail... several seconds later the boom and mainsail fell

“ Like parallel parking or the emergency stop, as a beginner, gybes filled me with dread ”

down! A definite 'stall the engine at the traffic lights' situation. A RIB was on us immediately though and an instructor in the boat sorting out the situation swiftly, much to our blushes.

Drama over, we carried on sailing a triangle course with the instructors in a RIB in the middle, generally assisting and giving encouragement.

On Sunday, however, the Level 2 sailors were given the chance to go it alone in Laser Picos. In between taking my Level 1 and going to Rockley I'd been away on a Neilson holiday and spent a bit of time practising alone in a Pico, so I was quite looking forward to another chance at getting to grips with sailing in my own time in a boat alone.

As it turned out, sailing 'in my own time' actually became a bit of a hindrance. At first I had a panic of confidence and carried on quietly sailing up and down: worried about leaving my comfort zone. One of the instructors breezed over in a RIB and casually encouraged me to



Above The busy centre has a real holiday feel about it.

tackle the triangle course. I knew I had to, but seemed to be stuck in first gear. It came down to one thing... knowing I'd have to gybe again, but this time all on my own.

The wind was beginning to die down, and I realised how frustrated I'd feel if I didn't at least try. A few races had been organised for the afternoon, with the Level 2s in singlehanders and the Level 1s still in groups in the Wayfarers with instructors.

I bit the bullet and tackled the course – and the gybe – all alone. Needless to say, it was with a fantastic sense of achievement that I returned to shore that evening.

Facilities and location

On the Sunday it was great to see the centre buzzing with a Sailability group having an

absolutely fantastic time, and it's also used a lot for school groups and other children.

Rockley Point Sailing Centre is located adjacent to Rockley Caravan Park, in the north-west corner of Poole Harbour. The water used by the centre is secluded, sheltered and picturesque, just across from Brownsea Island.

The centre itself, a broad L-shaped cabin, seems basic but is adequate for the little time spent indoors. As with most training centres, classroom-based instruction was kept to a minimum. The only thing I personally would have liked was lockers: there were ample changing room areas for men and woman, with showers and toilets, but any valuables had to be handed in at reception. This in itself wouldn't concern me, but the atmosphere at the centre is quite laid back and relaxed and at times I was slightly concerned with my possessions being kept behind a sometimes unmanned reception area.

Some of the equipment also looked as if it was ready for replacement. However, I couldn't fault the instructors who looked after me, although it would have been nice to have the same person over the two days.

Healthy food was provided at lunch, and a little café next door was also a nice place to go and sit with a drink or ice cream by the water. There was also definitely a real beach holiday atmosphere about the place, so the weekend really felt like a mini vacation. ■

Contact information:

Visit www.rockleywatersports.com
email info@rockleywatersports.com or telephone 01202 677272. For accommodation call Rockley Caravan Park on 01202 679393, or Poole Tourism on 01202 253253. Prices for sailing courses start at £95.

Other Level 2s have their say...

David Brown and Mike Rogers were also taking Level 2, and we sailed together at the beginning of the weekend. I asked them about how they enjoyed the course...



Above David and Mike with an instructor during the first morning.

Why did you chose Rockley Watersports?

They have a good reputation and are well known in the area. They also have a very extensive range of courses and dates to choose from, I used them many years before for a short introduction to sailing, they are local to where we have a house in Poole – and they have access to the very large and safe expanse of Poole Harbour.

What were your motives for attending such a course?

To get to know if sailing was for us, to make more and better use of the fabulous harbour, to improve our sailing skills and confidence, to gain a recognised qualification to help us hire out sailing boats and/or to buy our own.

What was your impression of the facilities and location?

Very good location – in a quiet corner of the second-largest harbour in the world. Good facilities – plenty of kit for all sizes, large classrooms, and clean, though wet, changing rooms etc. Has practically its own beach and beach cafe for a picnic and break at lunchtime.

Were you happy with the instruction and why?

Yes, the instructors were very patient, and helpful.

What are your future sailing plans?

Our original intention was for us to see if we were keen enough to buy our own sailing dinghy, but instead we have graduated further onto sailing yachts! We are both now taking an RYA Day Skipper theory and practical courses to enable us to hire our yachts with friends in Croatia next year! Nevertheless, we will continue to hire sailing dinghies in and around Poole Harbour next year, now that we have the qualifications and confidence.