

POOLLE SLALOM & THE GYBE TURKEYS

Accurate weather forecasting and modern communication methods are changing the way the world's windsurfers meet. With this in mind, **Paul Griffiths** takes a closer look at one of the more successful 'on forecast' models. Pix by **Paul Beames**...



Participating in a sport that is reliant on so many variables makes windsurfing extremely frustrating at the best of times. But how frustrating do you think it is for those wanting to compete in our amazing sport? They travel countless miles to events where the wind might never show. Well, this is one reason why the 'on forecast' style of competition is becoming more popular. Another is simply down to modern technology. I can stand almost anywhere in the world, send a message out to a huge audience in an instant, and within a matter of seconds receive a reply from someone

way of getting it. Before long they reaped a few of their mates in, and would often meet up after work, go for a blast around the buoys, and then head down to the pub for a meal and general windsurfing banter. For reasons known only to them, these guys became known as the Gybe Turkey! Between 2005 and 2008 this merry band of brothers and buddies were quite happy racing each other informally, but being switched on, high-tech types they realised they could take advantage of ever-evolving communication solutions to make their Thursday evening meetings much bigger without too much more effort.

"Two simple emails sent to over 100 people, and it's all go!"

thousands of miles away. Windsurfers are taking advantage of this and we're seeing all sorts of people gathering at venues who've never met each other in person before. We've seen the 'WaveJam' for those who love to smack the lip, then there's 'Xpression' for those that hate going in a straight line — and now the guys that love to blast have an event too in the shape of 'Poolle Slalom'. Okay, it's not a national competition scene, but that's a big plus point for many, and the beauty of it is that there's nothing to stop the rest of us from creating something similar at our local beaches.

How it all Began...

Brothers Dino and Paul Matthews used to blast around Poole Harbour racing each other round mooring buoys. Being brothers they obviously needed some form of competition in their lives, and this was their

Poole Harbour is a hot spot for sailors that love to blast, so when Fred Willis (of this very organ) finally accepted that his planned career as a professional freestyler was going nowhere fast, he too decided to invest in some kit for hammering it round his local harbour. Shortly afterwards he bumped into the Gybe Turkey, along with Roger Clark and Ed Britnell from K-Bay. Together they sat in the pub and hatched a plan to create something that would resemble Wednesday evening club racing, but for windsurfers. On a Thursday, contemporary communications methods meant they wouldn't need a base, and it was decided that the call to unsheath the weapons would only be made if the forecast was good enough to get them all planing. And so, dear readers, Poolle Slalom was born.

It immediately became a hit, and others soon joined the crew, including Guy Cribb and local snapper Roger Turner. As the scene grew, new ways to improve comms were introduced, such as the e-mail subscription service through the UKWA (see www.ukwindsurfing.com/information/clubs).

How it Works...

It's pretty simple really. Five coordinators have taken on responsibility for organising the racing, and each one takes their turn to be chief for a few days a month. (Not that the chief's role is in anyway difficult due to the joys of e-mail and the internet.) They check the forecast and then send a message out to the 100 or so people signed up, all of which takes less than a minute of their time. When the day and venue has been called all they have to do is turn up early to make sure that all the buoys are in place, and the racing starts as soon as people arrive at the designated beach.





Sometimes it's not Poole Harbour – they simply go where conditions will be the best. Branksome, Deane, Chine, Baiter Park and Hamworthy are all good spots.

You can enter as many or as few races as you like, there's no score keeping (except in your mates' heads), and the super-simple starting system means muppets like me don't even need to remember to bring a watch! The racing finishes with a beer in the

car park, and then everyone goes off to The Hub for a debrief and food.

The buoys were all paid for by the five coordinators, so all anyone else has to do is turn up. Oh yes – I forgot to say that if you're already a member of the UKWA, then you're covered for third-party insurance, so these informal events are totally free!

To give you an idea of what it's like to be on the Poole Slalom mailing list, here's a message Guy Cribb sent a few weeks back to get everyone fired up for the start of the season,

"Gentlemen, start your engines, we have plenty of wind forecast for Thursday evening. Pump up the testosterone, rig big, and bring some beers to the beach for a night of full tilt racing!"

"I will be laying an insanely broad five-buoy downwind slalom course to blow your mind while the wind blows your tits off. Let's begin 2009 in style! All being well with the wind, the course will be laid just after lunch for anyone who wants to get their eye in early (although the official racing will be from 5.00pm

onwards). Usual format – a few competitive races and a variety of starts, but it will be mostly pursuit races, where the winner of a race starts last in the next race (second place starts second to last, etc) to ensure that whatever kit you're on, you stand an equal chance of winning or taking the lead. Final venue/timing decision to be made on Weds eve or Thurs morning. Watch this space.

"If you are unsure about joining us, believe me it's a right laugh and it really doesn't matter if you're on the latest slalom kit or a barn door. There's a massive variety of toys out there and anyone can win due to the staggered starts. It's a brilliant way to improve your windsurfing and to meet a lot of nice men in skintight rubber outfits!"

"Any questions, don't hesitate to e-mail me. BBQ on the beach afterwards, or down the boozier. Leave your handbags at home, this is the beginning of Poole Slalom 2009!"

I'm sure you can imagine the resulting e-mails full of banter sent between members to make sure everyone is fully psyched for the racing!

Two days after the first e-mail to confirm everything is going ahead, I received this:

"Forecast is looking really good for some balls-to-the-wall racing tomorrow off Sandbanks. Look out for the Animal gamble on the beach or me in white boardshorts. Yes, over the top of my tight rubber gimp suit! First race briefing at 5.00pm, but feel free to show up any time before or after, as racing will continue until sunset. Remember you do NOT need racing / slalom kit to join us. As it's pursuit racing slalom kit won't necessarily help you, so bust out the wave or freeride boards and join in!"

"On your behalf, we've invited the entire UK windsurfing industry to bring their toys down for Poole Slalom participants to try. Tomorrow night JP and Neil Pryde will have some fast freeride kit for you to test drive. More big news is that PWA boys Ant Baker and Mat Peatch will be there to show us how it should be done. So bring out the gimp suits and I'll see you down the beach."

Two simple emails sent to over 100 people, and it's all go!

On the Night...

After the pre-event hype you'd expect a good story or two from the evening's racing, so here it is from the horse's mouth again!

"Thirty windsurfers showed up for the first event, which promised to kick arse with a



gear! Ant rigged a 9.8m and Peatchy a 9.0m and they were still going strong, so some of my guests took their toys for a spin, but the wind continued to drop just as most of the Poole Slalomers arrived. Virtually all the sailors who arrived before 4.30pm took one long look at the grey onshore conditions and left.

"But Paul and Dino [the original but infamous Poole Slalomers formally known as the 'Gybe Turkeys'] who arrived just before 5.00pm saw a few gusts and rigged big. Before we knew it they were both flying and a scramble in Sandbanks car park saw sailors

500m along Sandbanks we'd gybe at Shore Road and return to the top car park, completing 8 or 9 races in total with Roger Clark, Paul and Steve from FC all winning races, and yours truly cleaning up the rest. We saw some sterling performances from everybody out there in very tough conditions, which involved a lot of pumping and fitness!

"Everyone who left early – you shouldn't have! We had a wicked time making the most out of our Thursday session, then all piled down to The Hub in Ashley Cross (Thanks Chris) and tucked into a great feast and some bevies. An extremely cool night: windsurfing, beers on the beach, then a really good social – just how we like it. Rock on Poole Slalom!"

"Many thanks to North Sails, Fanatic, JP and Neil Pryde for providing demo kit and especially to the Watersports Academy for laying the course (and collecting the buoys the next morning). Awesome, North Sails, Fanatic, Mistral, JP and Neil Pryde all intend to provide some demo kit at the Poole Slalom events whenever it's windy in 2009."

What Next?

If you like the idea of taking part in some fun social slalom racing, then either get yourself onto the Poole Slalom mailing list to join in (www.britishwindsurfing.com/links/poole-slalom), or start your own group of 'Gybe Turkeys' and get something happening in your area.

It doesn't take much effort to get people together these days, and with the modern forecasting models available to us, we shouldn't ever have a wasted journey again.

Anyone for a bit of Wednesday evening Hayling Slalom action? www.britishwindsurfing.com/links/poole-slalom

"The only scorekeeping is in your mates' heads..."

five-buoy downwind slalom course and plenty of wind forecast. I was running a specialist slalom clinic during the afternoon with my intuition guests overpowered on 7.0m race sails. However, by mid afternoon the wind swung round to dead onshore and dropped to almost nothing – just as PWA riders Ant Baker and Mat Peatch showed up with all their new

rig 8-9.0m sails and get on with the first slalom racing in the UK this year.

"The onshore wind made it impossible for a downwind course or beach starts, so on-water gate starts were held with me blasting towards the fleet and everyone starting by crossing my wake. I would then tack and bring up the rear. Blasting some

