

MY QUEST FOR X BOAT SUCCESS

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After selling my share in a Dragon three years ago I started discussing with friends what was next on the agenda boat-wise. We decided to look for something that was forgiving to sail, in which we could take our children sailing, be cheap to run by keelboat standards and provide excellent racing at various venues.

The X One Design boat, having been something I sailed in my youth in Cowes, ticked all these boxes, with affordable sails and relatively cheap mooring costs and no dry sailing.



I would share the boat as I always have done and got together with David Heritage, a Cowes boat builder, and Dr Jonathan Mortimer with whom I have shared boats for some time. We started looking in Autumn 2005, having decided on a Lallow-built boat because in XOD boat terms they are relatively modern, built in Cowes and have a good racing record. However, this turned out to be quite difficult because the boats that we looked at had a premium price and needed a lot of work.

After unsuccessfully looking at various boats in Lymington we met up at the Royal Solent Yacht Club to chat with local Yarmouth XOD boat guru James Meaning, who suggested that we look at local boat *Quest* that had been out of the water and dry stored for a number of years, was a 1936 boat built by Woodnut's yard in Bembridge and filled the criteria of being Isle of Wight built.

There is much myth and legend about XOD boats built by various builders and whilst not taking too much notice of this we realised that *Quest* was built at the same time as a number of other good boats from

the Woodnut's yard, particularly her sister boat XOD 52, *Anitra*, which has been very successful over the years.

After seeing *Quest* we realised that, despite needing a lot of work, she was basically sound and we pulled her out of her shed in Yarmouth and got her back to David Heritage's Cowes shed where the first thing we did was weigh her. This was the first shock as we realised that, despite being out of the water for nearly four years, she was 135 kgs overweight which would really slow her down. However we took the decision to restore her fully now rather than piece meal and we hoped that with everything replaced we would get her down to weight.

Quest had never been restored, which was a real advantage as we could do her once and right first time. The hull and ribs were basically all good, which is a testament to the original builder, but she needed a new deck, covering boards and cockpit coamings, and we discovered that the floors were all rotten and needed replacing. We could not get the original elm keel (deadwood) to dry out because of years of salt impregnation so decided to replace this with a new Iroko section - all allowed within the class rules.

We also replaced the rudder. The hull itself, which is pitch pine on oak ribs, was remarkably good but we decided to spline the hull and give it a full external epoxy treatment. The keel was taken off, which was substantially underweight, and we brought this up to maximum weight with the addition of some lead and had this reweighed by the class. It was refitted with stainless steel keel bolts meaning that this job will never have to be done again.

David Heritage spent nearly two years fitting work on *Quest* around other jobs and she was finally ready for her re-launch in June 2008 at Cowes Yacht Haven - and we had a bit of a party. We then took her to

Yarmouth for her first race in early June which was the Royal Solent Yacht Clubs Prince Consort Race. Having done so much work to a boat it was always going to be a worry that she was going to go okay, and we had just thrown the new rig in the boat and set it up to the best of our abilities. To our surprise we won this race on her first outing. I put this down to our being a bit light and a lot of beginner's luck.

We then had several frustrating weekends with no breeze before we brought her back to Cowes to race in the newly reformed Cowes Division's July series. We decided to have a crack at the XOD Central Southern Championship organised by the Hamble fleet in early July. There were XOD boat legends like Peter Baines along with Simon Russell and the Lawrence brothers from Itchenor. We put together a fairly good series and finished second, one point behind the winner, Peter Taylor from Itchenor. Again a bit of a surprise as you are not supposed to go that fast in the XOD on your first proper outing! For that weekend I had top crew in David Heritage and Thom Darcy from Yarmouth.

For Cowes Week and the Captain's Cup I had sixteen year old Anna Bailey doing the front with friends Chris Gilles and Paul Goldman sharing the middle. We also took my son Steven and David Heritage's daughter Sophie on some days as you are allowed to sail four up in the XOD as long as the fourth person does not 'hike'. The only one among us with real Cowes Week XOD experience was Anna. We did not expect much in an 80 boat

fleet but I quietly believed that a top 20 finish should be achievable and a top ten slot if we had a very good week was possible. Half way through the week, with a string of consistent top ten finishes and with all of the top boats having at least one bad result, we were in the lead. We managed to keep up this consistency and we finished second in the Captain's Cup which was way beyond my wildest dreams for a first attempt!

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Since Cowes Week we have won in the Royal Solent Regatta against 29 other XOD boats and also won the Bobby Bongers windward leeward series at Lymington. As the season draws to a close I could not be happier. *Quest* is an absolute testament to the work put in by David Heritage as not only do we believe she is now the best looking XOD boat in the fleet she is also quick straight out of the box.

Is there a rebirth of the Cowes XOD Division?

Quest was bought to sail in the Yarmouth XOD fleet and back in 2005 there was no sign of the re-establishment of the XOD division in Cowes. However things have changed.

Costs for the other traditional Cowes Keelboat fleets have spiralled and, with the appearance of more professional or semi-professional sailing teams, it is more difficult for the fully amateur team to get near the front of the fleet. The one fleet that seems to have bucked this trend is the Darings and interestingly they have strict rules which control the cost and rules which stop the boats being dry sailed. The Daring however is not for everyone.

Since buying *Quest*, quite independently a number of other keelboat sailors from Cowes have found the X One Design boat. This has caused rumours and speculation of an emerging Cowes fleet so that at the beginning of 2008 the Captain of the XOD fleet, Mark Hall, called a meeting to see if it was feasible to restart the Cowes Division. This was well attended and a small but successful July series was run with up to five local boats participating. The emerging fleet put together a team for the pre Cowes Week XOD Boat team racing event (which did not race because of bad weather), and

our boats had a fair amount of success during Cowes Week 2008.

Since then the boats have generally dispersed to other Solent fleets to complete their seasons but with a will to make big things happen next year. I know five new Cowes owners who have got involved since Cowes Week and bought boats. The XOD class is getting towards a shortage of good quality boats for sale so if you are thinking of getting involved then don't delay.



There are now ten boats committed to doing much of their XOD racing from Cowes in 2009. As a team we decided that we wanted the best of both worlds, to be able to race in Yarmouth and Cowes and so we have bought another boat and she will be available for people to try next year.

Buying a boat

Boats are available second hand from the XOD website. There is much discussion in the Class about what builder and what year you should have and the hulls, despite being one design, do vary. Recently the rules have been tightened and newer boats vary far less than the older ones. *Quest* is not one of the mythical long boats nor is it from a renowned quick builder, but I think the Woodnut boats have won as many Captain's Cups as anything. One quote from a well known and

very good XOD sailor is, "There is no such thing as a slow X Boat only slow X Boat sailors". Almost all the makers have had success over the years and my limited experience to date would back up this statement. The only issues are that the boat needs to be down to weight and fair and that epoxy boats will need much less annual maintenance.

XOD sailing 2009. The way forward:

We believe that we will have enough boats next year to get good racing for most of the season and we intend to target both weekend sailing and Tuesday evenings and have a full programme. However, by reforming the Cowes Division, we do not wish to detract from other local divisions, particularly those closest to us - Hamble, Lymington and Yarmouth. It is easiest for us to race with the Hamble division and we hope to join them to do the Red Funnel Keelboat Championship weekends. We are also talking to Yarmouth and hope to discuss with Lymington about their late season programmes and hope that, if we can agree to race with them in August after Cowes Week, we can persuade them to race with us for July pre Cowes Week. Both fleets are only a couple of hours sail away with a following tide. There is an open XOD Championship planned to be run by the Island Sailing Club in late June and we hope to attract some visiting boats.



The future looks bright for the X One Design which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2011 when we aim to get 100 boats on the line for Cowes Week. It may be many more than that so the time to get involved is now.

There are some boats available in Yarmouth but not advertised on the class website so anyone interested please get in touch with me, Neil Payne on thepaynes@onwight.net or 01983 298834. I will have happy to take you for a sail or organise a boat for you to try.