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Winner is decided

For the last six weeks our fantastic competition has been gathering pace as entries have poured in from across the country. Finally a winner has been decided – as voted for by you on our website. So let's take a look at the finalists, and a few other entries which caught our eye...

The hunt has been on for a tired dinghy in need of a complete makeover. In April we launched our competition, encouraging all our readers to put any suitable dinghies forward. The prize, worth thousands to the lucky winner, is the chance to get the dinghy 'pimped' by a great line-up of experts. From the hundreds of entries received, the panel voted on a shortlist which was then put forward for the public to decide with a live vote on our website. The result was very close, but the winner, literally by a whisker, was the Fireball of 22-year-old Kirsten Claiden-Yardley.

The winner

Kirsten's Fireball, sail number 12216, scraped in just ahead of Clive Edmonds' 32-year-old Parker 505. The 30-year-old Fireball took the prize by just 12 votes, polling 172 votes to the 505's 160.

Kirsten, 22, nicknamed 'Kinks', describes herself as a 'small, sunny, stubborn, blonde, waterbaby'.

Just to give you a clearer picture of our winner, in a film she would be played by Sarah Michelle Geller! Based at Oxford SC, Kirsten started sailing in a Mirror aged 10. She then moved into Toppers which she sailed until she was 16 when she moved onto helming a 420 for two years. At 16 she qualified as an instructor and worked at Minorca Sailing Holidays before university. She has been sailing her Fireball for just four months crewed by Andrew Jarvis, who she describes as her 'skinny long-term boyfriend and general handyman who does the heavy lifting.'

Kirsten's most memorable sailing moment is: 'Losing my crew in the surf off the beach at Lowestoft during the 420 nationals and sailing at high speed up the beach!'

Kirsten describes the boat in its current state, explaining: 'It leaks where it was patched and has shabby paintwork and epoxy smears. The rust-stained sails date from the 1980s and the jib is mended with Sellotape. The rudder doesn't fit and is too short. We want to finish a race looking good and without something breaking!'

In its current condition she would only be club racing the boat, but following her win, expect to see the boat out and about a bit more over the summer.

A mass of entries

There were so many great entries it was a shame that only one boat could win.

The age of our entrants ranged from 13 to 75, from the West Country to Scotland with clubs and classes spread around the country. There was everything from Lasers to 49ers, Merlin Rockets, Contenders, National 12s, International 14s and many more. There was a Firefly who thought it should win as it was called 'Featherlight', the owner pointed out that there was an obvious connection between 'pimping' and condoms, making it the perfect winner; and there were three more Uffa Fox Fireflies, all worthy candidates for the prize.

There were a number of Cherub hopefuls: 'My boat has such a great character and it's really well known. She was once awesome, but unfortunately now she has become a little tired. But with your help we can restore her to her former glory. Being a development boat makes it ideal to be 'pimped' because you can do so much more with her than with a one-design. We've all seen what the amateurs can do to Cherubs, now let's see what the pro's can do!' challenged

Runners-up

Clive Edmond's 505

Clive's 32-year-old Parker 505, sail number 5541, 'Passion', is based at Littleton SC where he is crewed by 'anyone up for some excitement/entertainment'.

Clive, 35, nicknamed Dr Evil Sea, describes himself as, 'Fun, happy, rampant, passionate and unique'. If we were to employ a film star to play him it would be Adrian Edmondson!

He describes his most memorable sailing moment as: 'Me and four adults in my Optimist gate-crashing an Enterprise with eight people on and two holes in my boat!'

Regarding his 505, Clive says, 'It was left at our club to die, and I am making it work, she's lovely and still goes like a train.'

Russell Brayshaw's Phantom

Russell's Phantom, sail number 946, is a wooden self-drainer designed by Paul Wright and Brian Taylor. It is about 10 years old and his home club is Hollowell.

Russell, 47, nicknamed 'Big Foot', describes himself as, 'Big, noisy, funny, honest, competitive.' Who should play him in a film about his life? 'George Clooney (I wish!)', says Russell.

He describes his most memorable sailing moment as: 'Salcombe YC regatta 2005 – bit late for the start and in a fluster, got the rudder caught on a mooring rope, I hung upside down under the water with my daughter holding my ankles for what seemed ages trying to disconnect us. We were one minute late for the start but got a freak gust (common at Salcombe) that took us into the top six.'

Russell says: 'It's basically very sound – the hull is epoxied and in excellent condition. Things have moved on in terms of sails (Dacron-Kevlar), spars (alloy-carbon) and rig control. I can't reach the control lines.'

Garry Packer's Lark

Garry's 18-year-old Parker Mk2 Lark, sail number 2252, is currently called 'Blu Tack' and based at Bristol Corinthian YC. He describes his crew as: 'Thin, energetic and distracted by too much mountain biking.'

Garry, 47, has been sailing since the age of 11. He describes himself as 'just slightly past his prime'.

He describes his most memorable sailing moment as, 'Sailing across to the Isle of Wight for an ice cream in the last race of the Bosun nationals (1981?) from Lee and giving the race officer a nervous breakdown.'

Garry says: 'Sarah Richards has proved that an oldish Lark can still win the nationals, There's not a lot wrong with it but its a bit past its prime and I just don't have the time to do the work as I spend a lot of my time teaching sailing at Bristol Corinthian YC.'



2nd



3rd



4th



Above (l-r) Mike 'Fat Boy's Lilac Merlin; Daryl Wilkinson's National 12; Hamish Myles 24-year-old Merlin; Stephen Hand's 20-year-old Tornado.

Right Jeremy Taylor's Phantom was just beaten to the shortlist by Russell Brayshaw's entry.



Cherub sailor Stuart 'Stuberry' Tinner.

Andy Harris put forward his Flying Dutchman with the plea, 'If you've ever seen the trail of destruction left by those unfortunate bodgers on 'DIY SOS' you'll have some idea of what my FD is like. I have taken the world's most complicated dinghy to pieces and I can't remember how to put it back together...'

Mike Pickering's 14 was one of a number of International 14s entries we received, when asked why his boat should be pimped, his reply was: 'I'm a student... (enough said I think) I can only afford to make it just about seaworthy. With some nice kit this baby could fly off the line and get me some serious silverware.' Equally, Chris Pickles' 49er needs some help, 'Everytime we sail it something breaks. We have travelled to three opens this year and had to retire from two. We really want to do the 49er nationals in August, but the boat is uncompetitive and needs a lot of TLC to the hull, rigging and set-up to be able to do this!'

We also loved the plea from a lilac Merlin, sailed by two grown men who were taking a lot of ribbing for the colour of their boat! And we really wanted to save Niall Ferguson's National 12, which seemed to be celebrating its 30th birthday in a slightly dodgy way as Niall explained: 'I can't take photo of boat, as it currently has a Laser 1 sitting on top of it (breeding?)'

Right Stuart Tinner's Cherub.

Below (clockwise from right) Andy Harris' FD; Gareth Walkley's Contender; Graham Darvill's Scorpion; Stuart Hadfield's 18ft Skiff.



What next for the winner?

Now we have a winner, we are racing ahead with getting the boat ready as soon as possible for a full summer of sailing. We will be following the boat's progress in a series of features in the magazine so you can see what happens each step of the way.

First stop for Kirsten's Fireball is Pete Vincent's West Country Boat Repairs, where the hull will get a thorough overhaul. From there, the boat will go to fittings specialists Harken in Lymington. At the company's headquarters the boat will get a complete set of new fittings, while our rope partner Marlow will kit the boat out with spangly new control lines.

Next, it's time to put on a few miles as mast specialists Selden in Gosport and sailmakers Pinnell and Bax, based in the Midlands, put a new rig and sails together. While all this is going on, Grapefruit Graphics will be working on an image for the boat and its crew, who will also be kitted in new sailing gear by Gill.

Last but by no means least, we will follow the boat onto the racecourse as Kirsten takes her sailing, and if you don't get the chance to see the boat in action over the summer, you should be able to come and see it on display on our stand at the 2008 RYA Dinghy Sailing Show. ■

