

Kenya Laser Association

AGM 2006

Chairman's Report

General

The activities of the KLA membership has again centred around club training and racing. Geographically it would be impossible to do otherwise in Kenya, and this does in part explain the apparent lack of interest in the Kenya Laser Association. It is, in reality, an association of convenience, and will remain so until the number of sailors with international aspirations reaches a critical mass. In the meantime, it will continue to provide those of us fond of expensive, painful holidays the opportunity to compete abroad and bring back our experiences for the benefit of others. The clubs were our introduction to Laser sailing, and they remain the foundation of our ability to stay in the sport. Sailing is truly an amateur sport here; jobs, schools and families come higher than sailing, unfortunately.

Naivasha remains the heart of Laser sailing in Kenya, although not all hope is lost for Mombasa. Once a year Kisumu gets excited about sailing, but we then hear nothing from them except news of the drinking and curry evenings.

Members from Uganda are part of a large and active fleet that races weekly, trains newcomers of all ages and travels as much as possible. We are trying to encourage more to travel wider and experience new sailing conditions.

Regional roads have gone from bad to worse, visa fees are expensive, plane fares extortionate, work schedules inflexible and school holidays inconvenient, but still a hardy group of KLA members put all that aside and travel long distances just for the thrill of competing against the best in the region and those brave visitors from overseas that we can persuade to join us. If you have not experienced sailing away from your home club, please join us too.

What is surely important is that those who think enough of the sport to participate in it, however infrequently, also feel strongly enough to support its growth, maintenance and infrastructure.

Regional Competitions

The three National Laser Championships continued to provide well-organised and very competitive sailing. The 2005 Tanzanian event was sailed earlier in the year than usual, resulting in lower winds. Due to the demands of several masochists, the 2006 event has been moved back to its usual early September slot and we expect high winds and big waves.

Compared to the big storm of 2004, the 2005 Uganda Open was relatively sedate, but with arguably the strongest East African fleet assembled in years.

The Kenyan Championships at Kilifi remains a test of organisational skill, logistical challenges and a true test of the best Laser sailors.

Thanks go to all the organisers, officials and competitors who together made these events during the last year so enjoyable.

The other events on the regional calendar, at Naivasha, Entebbe and Kisumu, all have their own particular charms, but unfortunately Kisumu and Entebbe have not had large fleets in recent years. Kisumu in particular has had very small Laser fleets, although the Fireballs have proved the location is as popular as ever. The 2005 event was in doubt until the last minute due to the political scene, but the club pulled off an enjoyable event although the usual Saturday storm didn't make an appearance. The Entebbe Open fleet was almost entirely from VNSC, and the lack of real interest in Laser sailing there unfortunately continues. Naivasha, on the other hand, remains one of the most enjoyable, if frustrating, events on the calendar, with totally unpredictable sailing conditions but wonderful hospitality.

Summary of Results

Naivasha Laser Open 2005

- 1 Joachim Bebbington
- 2 Simon Woods
- 3 Don White

Tanzania Laser Open 2005

- 1 Al Bush
- 2 Simon Woods
- 3 Gordon Bell

Entebbe Laser Open 2005

- 1 Reint Bakema

unfortunately other results from Entebbe not available

Kenya Laser Open 2005

- 1 Al Bush
- 2 Alistair Barnes
- 3 Chris Childs

Kisumu (Lasers) 2005

- 1 Sarah Searle
- 2 Anja
- 3 Rachael

Uganda Laser Open 2006

- 1 Al Bush
- 2 Don White
- 3 Gordon Bell

These national events again proved several points:

- We need to work hard on our fitness and skills to unseat Al Bush from his throne in all three countries. His consistency of results at Kaazi, Kilifi and Dar are remarkable, and a just reward for years of dedication to fitness and technical improvement.
- Many younger sailors, and Chris Childs performance at Kilifi last year stands out in particular, are showing good results in senior company. This must be very gratifying for the trainers and mentors of these teenagers, and bodes well for the future of Laser sailing in Kenya and the region.
- The Radial and 4.7 rigs, pioneered in Uganda and gaining popularity in Kenya, have proved many times that it is possible for lighter weight sailors to enjoy fast and controllable Laser sailing in even the most extreme conditions. Down-sizing the rig to suit the sailor is not a wimpy way out, it makes sense and it works. It also makes teaching much easier as the smaller rigs capsize less often, and if the boat does go over there is less sail area under the water for the struggling beginner to bring up. We all had to go through the pain and bruising to both bodies and egos learning capsizing, but adults in particular tend to enjoy sailing and stick with it if their early sessions are spent sailing rather than swimming and weight-lifting.

The East Africa Traveller's Trophy will be presented later in the meeting. However, as this has been the 2nd year of running the scoring of the Traveller's Trophy under the new method worked out by Gray, we now have some statistics with which to impress you.

Last year only 4 people qualified to compete (ie sailed 3 races or more)

This year it was 8.

Last year 81 different sailors competed in one or more of the series events, this year 86.

The finer points about the calculations may be explained by Al later when we come to the presentation. It is very unfortunate that the Entebbe results were not made available to us, something we will improve on next time.

International Competitions

Reint Bakema and Sarah Searle both travelled to Brazil for the 2005 Masters Worlds. Reint stayed upright most of the time and learned hard and fast in the large and strong Masters fleet. Sarah, in the Apprentices fleet, came to grief in the first race and only participated in one other. The standard of the top sailors is as high as when they were younger and competing at senior level, but they do appreciate a good meal and drink in company afterwards, something apparently lacking in the more serious senior event. The 2007 Laser Worlds will be in Portugal, something worth bearing in mind maybe when considering the gym membership and leave schedules for next year?

The experience gained, and contacts made, while competing internationally do filter down to those other sailors interested. All sports need a pyramid, with the novices supporting the top competitors, who are in turn inspired by the successful ones. Success isn't only winning, sometimes one can feel like a champion just for surviving a run or difficult gybe.

Business

Uganda is still struggling to form a National Sailing Federation, of which a Laser Association will be a major player. I understand Tanzania is also forming their own association. In the meantime, I would like to continue to support or represent KLA in whatever capacity, from being the dud of a Worlds to liaising with the Technical Delegate on humming rudders. It has not been entirely successful being Chair while living in another country, but worse things happen at sea. Whatever is decided about the next committee, I would like to build a database of members, and send out regular newsletters. This may mean a split of the Secretary and Treasurer roles, previously taken by one person. This is for this meeting to decide later on.

Al has taken over the accounts from Gray, and I thank them both for their good work. Thanks to some sound decisions, we are in a good state for this and future years. We must also thank Simon Woods for his successful efforts in gaining considerable sponsorship for the Kilifi Championships.

Mike Charles is our measurer. To my knowledge he has not banned any boats under official measurement, but that's not to say we would condone deliberate violation of the Laser Class rules. We in Africa have more reason than most to thank the International Laser Class Association, for all its flaws, for the strict one design policy. There is no other way that we could turn up at a major international championship and know that the only difference in what we are given to sail and what we sailed at the club last week is a few years in wear and tear.

Those of you at Kaazi in February will remember my very unsuccessful attempts to pay tribute to Graham Bush. As we have all been aware this weekend, there is "something missing" without Carol and Gray. The Uganda Laser Open was the last major East African event before they left Kenya, and I took the liberty of buying and having engraved a crystal plaque which was presented at the prize-giving. The wording was in appreciation of Gray's contribution to the sport of sailing in East Africa. It was for everything he, and Carol, had given us on and off the water over so many years. I know the clubs of Kaazi and Naivasha presented their own tributes, but what I wanted was an acknowledgement of the big picture, and our appreciation of it. Gray, I know, fully understood the sentiments expressed, and was grateful.

Sarah Searle, May 2006