

TRINIDAD'S UNIQUE SOLUTIONS

Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a series of articles celebrating sailing's role in youth development for Caribbean children.

Trinidad & Tobago is finding unique solutions for youth development through junior sailing.

"The MR 15s do not exist anywhere else," explains Mark Loe. "They are similar to the RS400. They were designed for the Caribbean. It was a project we tried about ten years ago, to have a Caribbean two-man dinghy."

Mark — who is the owner of Ullman Sails Trinidad, President of the Trinidad & Tobago Sailing Association (TTSA), and the CSA Sailing Development Committee's Caribbean Dinghy Championship Subcommittee Chair — helps us understand Trinidad & Tobago's recent sailing development.

As in most Caribbean nations, the effects of the economic recession that struck the world in the 2008-12 timeframe came to roost late in Trinidad. Their dinghy program took a hit. TTSA is pleased with the MR 15 though, Mark says: "I'm currently trying to get the builder to give me a quotation for the boats, to pass on to other youth sailing programs for their information."

*Check out MR 15 footage at https://youtu.be/NF1_TnreSQw and <https://youtu.be/yxmgbtbLK-JA>. We are currently just getting our dinghy program started again after a few bad years.

'To have a Caribbean two-man dinghy... we had Phil Morrison design a boat for Caribbean conditions with trapeze and asymmetric spinnaker'

"Equipment-wise, we have about 80 Optimists that the government bought after we hosted the 2005 Optimist. We also have eight 420s and eight Lasers that belong to the schools and 20 privately owned Lasers. TTSA has eight SR 21 keelboats that we are presently refitting to start our adult training and racing program."

"A few years ago, we had Phil Morrison (of RS sailboats) design a boat for Caribbean conditions with trapeze and asymmetric spinnaker. Called MR 15, we currently have six and are pushing to grow this fleet. These boats are built locally. The builder is preparing pricing to send to other island nations to see if they have interest."

Regarding Trinidad's unique approach to advancing youth sailing through use of MR 15s, Elizabeth Jordan, founder and director of Antigua's National Sailing Academy, says, "We would be interested to hear more about the MR 15s and the pricing."

Mark continues: "TTSA is the national governing body for sailing in T&T and is located at Chaguaramas. We've always had dinghy racing and Learn to Sail summer camps since as far back as the '70s. In the '90s we expanded to include a sailing school where we offered lessons during weekday afternoons in addition to the week-

end classes. We also employed a full-time sailing instructor and introduced the Optimist dinghy.

"We've always had teams racing in mostly regional regattas. We reached a peak in 2005 when we hosted Optimist as well as had a sailor place second in the Opti Worlds. We, like everyone else, are struggling with falling participation and interest but are actively trying to revive racing by not concentrating only on youth but expanding to young adult sail-training and racing. We currently have an Olympian in Laser, Andrew Lewis, and an upcoming Laser Radial sailor, Kelly Arrindell, as well as a few more young adults attending university abroad.

"We expanded and now have sailing schools in two other locations on the island. These are run by interested parties and parents, and the instructors' training and salaries are paid by the Ministry of Sports. These schools offer mostly free sailing to the communities, with some assistance from corporate entities in their areas. We have plans for two more schools, one of which will be in Tobago. Financing is the eternal problem and with our economy recently, government funding has been cut drastically. We are now stepping up our pursuit of corporate sponsorship."

Trinidad has demonstrated regional connection and support by inviting and hosting Grenadian sailors and coaches to the clinics they've held in recent years. They also actively send their youth sailors to regional regattas in places such as Schoelcher, Martinique. In 2016, Trinidad's team of youth and adult sailors won CSA's Caribbean Dinghy Championship — beating the likes of Barbados, the BVI, St. Maarten and Puerto Rico.

Mark tells of plans for the year ahead, "We are looking forward to hosting the Caribbean Dinghy Championships in October 2017. We will be generating the Notice of Race this month (available at <http://caribbean-sailing.com/sailing-development/caribbean-dinghy-championships>). We'll send a team to Martinique's Schoelcher Regatta, being held February 24th through 28th. We have a Laser Radial sailor at the World Sailing Youth Regatta and Kelly Arrindell has been invited to sail in the OCR in Miami. We had a gap in holding our National Dinghy Championships but we're reviving them. Coming up March 11th and 12th and April 8th and 9th, the championships will be bigger and better than ever!"

To learn more about the TTSA and its solid sailing history visit www.ttsailing.org



Ellen Birrell and her husband, Jim Hutchins, are tireless advocates for youth sailing. Ellen asks, 'What better method for Caribbean youths to understand the sea and the weather and the opportunities within the marine industry than junior sailing?'

Ellen Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard S/V Boldly Go to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she supports grass roots and competitive junior sailing, and serves as chair of sailing development for the Caribbean Sailing Association (<http://caribbean-sailing.com/sailing-development/the-future-of-caribbean-sailing>).

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