

You don't have to be a millionaire to sail yachts

FUAD ESACK

If anyone should ever ask Lentegeur sailing enthusiasts Tessa Wentzel and crewmate Charlie Teuteberg of Durbanville, what to do with the drunken sailor, they'd probably say: "throw him overboard and get on with it".

Or, if he were a fellow crew member, they'd make him a better sailor, win all their races and let the competition "eat wake".

That pretty much sums up the attitude of these feisty seafaring women (yes, Charlie's a girl, just in case you're wondering), who have embarked on an ambitious development project to introduce young people from disadvantaged communities to competitive sailing.

Motivated by their passion for sailing and teaching disadvantaged children basic sailing skills, they intend setting up a sailing school at the Royal Cape Yacht Club.

Yacht owners Paul Maré and Lindsay Birch availed their vessel Majimoto 11, for training purposes, while the Good Hope Sailing Academy offered to provide sailing notes.

Tessa, 19, a former learner at Aloe High, made sailing history earlier this year when she became the youngest female skipper in South Africa ("The young woman from Lentegeur and the sea", Plainsman, January 24)

She considers the lack of a proper support structure as the main reason for development sailors not breaking through the ranks. "These individuals, more often than not, are young people of colour, who, unfortunately, fall by the wayside due to a lack of equipment and funding," she said.



■ South Africa's youngest skipper, Tessa Wentzel from Lentegeur and a crewmate have started a development project to introduce young people from poor communities to sailing. Seen here on board their training vessel, Majimoto 11, are: Tessa Wentzel and Yaseen Roman. Back: Marco Tobin, Charlie Teuteberg, Lee Tobin, Ridwaan Solomon, Nigel Mhlabeni, and the yacht's owners, Paul Maré and Lindsay Birch.

The budding sailors currently trained on board Majimoto 11, come from all over the Cape Flats and have their sights set on South Africa's premier yachting event, The Cape to Rio Race, in 2003.

Lentegeur's Nigel Mhlabeni, 17, a Grade 12 learner at Aloe High who was introduced to sailing when Tessa delivered a talk at her former school, said: "Sailing's great fun and you get wet too."

Riedewaan Solomon, 28, of Heathfield called it "playing chess on water". He added that there are few sports that challenge people on

so many levels, both physically and mentally.

Fellow crewmember Yaseen Roman, 21, from Woodlands and a final year mechanical engineering student at Cape Technikon, got into sailing while working part-time at the RCYC, while the Tobin brothers Lee, 19 and Marco, 16 from Grassy Park, went from dingy sailing at Zeekoevlei to sailing around Table Bay.

Although yachting is often regarded as an elitist activity, the crew is determined to break down misconceptions about the sport.

Of course it helps if your dad's a millionaire, but, according to them, that's not what it takes to be a competent sailor.

"What the average sailor needs," said Charlie, "is to master everything from handling a vessel to understanding weather patterns and the international sailing rules of the road.

"Competitive sailing is a sport that requires intensive skill and focus. It is also a strong team sport that develops initiative, foresight, self-confidence and inter-personal development," she said.

She added that their dream was to see more development sailors competing in this internationally acclaimed race.

Added Tessa: "We intend to realise this dream through sheer dedication, determination and hopefully finding great sponsors.

"Our mission is to leave a mark on the sporting world, to change the sailing community and the way South Africa sees yachting."

Anyone who is interested in getting involved can contact Tessa or Charlie on 083 5356 799 or 083 278 7171 respectively.