

Dart Family Statement. 28/03/2009

To all customers and friends in the Dart family. As far as I am concerned the Dart family encompasses Stampede, Dart 20 owners, Dart 18 owners, Sprint owners, Spark owners plus wives, girlfriends and all 'hangers on'.

As some of you know I started a firm called Panthercraft with a close friend on mine, Kim Stephens, in 1969 to build Tornado cats in GRP; it hadn't been done before. We built a few, I won the Tornado Worlds in 1971 and because I had the winning boat we went on to produce some 300+ Tornados. I won a couple of European's and Nationals and we kept on selling in competition with at least 6 other builders. The Tornado was chosen for the Olympics and Kim and I realised that unless we wanted to join the 'arms race' for gold medals then we had to design our own boat or go back to our original jobs. We teamed up with Terry Pearce and asked Rod March to do the lines drawings of a Production One Design cat along the lines of the Laser Dinghy concept. The rest is history.

I write the preamble to make the point that I have been around the block a few times and have first hand experience of Classes and their rules and their development. I was instrumental in re-writing the Tornado rules in the 60s to try to control what is called a 'Development Class'. I saw the demise of the Tornado at club level (we had 8 in the dinghy park at Restronguet) and the demise of the Shearwater at that time simple because owners wanted 'go faster' sails and gear and to sail the same equipment as the 'winner' of the latest regatta.

Panthercraft was sold to Laser in 1989 and continued to thrive. More recently the Production One Design concept and the method of keeping that concept alive has not been policed.

So to now. Bryher Mouldings Ltd, my company, owns all the rights to the design, building and marketing of the Dart products; you might say that they are mine to do with as I please. However life is not like that and I want to see that existing members, customers and friends continue to benefit from the concept as originally drafted. Dart occupies a niche market as the most cost effective competitive Production One Design cat save for the Hobie 16. It appeals to husband and wife, father and son, mother and daughter teams and if junior is old enough there are whole families sailing several boats. In the early days the boat also appealed to the unmarried youngsters because Windsurfing was in its infancy and skiff dinghies were not around except on Sydney Harbour.

This is no longer true and the Dart is never going to appeal to the younger generation as it once did; there are far too many other fast boats about. In the beginning of Dart if you wanted to go fast with the occasional hairy moment you bought a catamaran today the choice is vast. Dart has an unique niche now and will carry on appealing to all those that want value for money and simplicity from their sailing. Whatever price you pay for your sails, boat etc it will retain its value over a long period of time. The strength of the Dart Class has to be in strong leadership from the builders in close consultation with the Class Association to make it possible for the class to continue and Bryher to function. The pricing policy on new boats and 'restricted parts' has wandered off course and indeed some of the product being sold for the Dart is sold at little over cost. If this is allowed to continue then there will be no future in carrying stock or any inclination to invest in new tools and production. It is a fact of commercial life that businesses have to make a profit to survive and I have been asked to preserve the Dealer network in Europe if at all possible. This means that regardless of where the boat/parts are manufactured there has to be a margin for the manufacturer, the distributor and the dealer. As those of you in this line of work will know, the retail price of a manufactured article is roughly twice that of the price at the factory gate. Indeed the mark up by the shop that sold your trainers is somewhere between 120 and 150%.

I would like everyone to understand my personal position in all this. Earning a living from Bryher is

not a major priority for me now as I own an extremely successful residential mobile home park with my brother based on sound business practise. I want to ensure Bryher Mouldings

stays afloat but my main purpose in getting involved again is to see our contribution to cat sailing "The Dart Family" (Kim, Terry and mine) continue, albeit not at the level it was in the past. The concept behind the boat is not that different than it was 30 years ago and to move from our niche market would be a disaster.

I have had many meetings with the class associations and many customers plus the 'feedback' from the chat page on the Dart class website and I would like to summarise and answer some of the challenges as follows.

Manufacturing

- New boats.
 - I have to sort out the quality control problems in South Africa and see if I can't get a guaranteed source of product from there. There is no other alternative at the moment. If I succeed then a lot of our recent problems go away.
 - I have not yet reached the point where I can price a new boat and this will depend on building a new mould etc in SA. Someone has posted somewhere that a new boat can be made for £5,000. This is very unlikely since a simple 'back of the envelope' calculation would suggest that it has to leave the factory gates at about £2,000 and that is patently impossible.
 - All the tools to make new hulls are in SA. There are no moulds in UK, no decking jig, no facility to produce hulls anywhere except in SA. All tools were shipped from Rob White to SA; I was there to see the container packed.
 - To set up another production facility at this time doesn't make sense. It would need a huge investment just to tool up and to service a market of what I consider is about 35 new boats per year of the Dart family. Amortise your investment over a sensible period and you add to the price of a new boat before you start the build.
- Sails
 - The sail thing has to be looked at in light of what happens in other fleets. Whoever wins the Nationals will have XYZ sails on them. Hey presto, XYZ sails price goes through the roof. Cheque books out everyone. This isn't might be, this is what happens in every fleet where alternative sails are allowed. Add to that the difficulties of getting class measurers, and that some people measure less stringently than others, and the problems multiply. This is exactly what the Dart Fleet has fought hard to avoid. It is our intention to continue the close quality control on sails because this is where the arms race will begin.
- Parts.
 - There is a huge stocking problem. In the past and when Laser's buying power was behind Dart a stock of say 250 halyard locking rings was not really an issue. Now that I have taken over all the stock I have enough Main halyard locking rings to last for years and years. That is money that could be best spent elsewhere but we have to have them. Main beams; we have to buy 250 just to get the extruder to make them. These are just examples.
- Licensee
 - Bryher Mouldings doesn't have any premises or the manpower, just me, so it has to Licence someone to keep the whole thing rolling. I am not prepared to work with someone I don't know very well and I want to be able to discuss problems and quality on a daily basis, face to face. Windsport already exists and Brian Phipps has worked with myself via Panthercraft, on Tornados, Dart, both in production and sales from the earliest days, his history and knowledge of Dart goes back further than most, I know him extremely well. He has the setup already (and don't let anyone say that based in Falmouth is a drawback; it is not an issue. He is exceedingly well connected in the Cat world nationally and internationally and is a great teacher of cat sailing. It is a 'no brainer' in deciding to work with him to get Dart servicing off the ground and running as it used to be. Brian is working closely with SA and with me on all aspects of the current problems. Leave personalities out of this altogether as long as Brian and I get

along and we both deliver the goods anything that anyone perceives happened in the past is irrelevant.

- Brian has bought into the Licence that Laser gave up and can service personally the UK customers and is working to service the European and world wide Dart sailors via the existing European agents in a sustainable way. There is no other possibility of anyone else 'making a living' in the UK market in spite of what has been said on the chat page. That just adds another level of margin to the price of everything. We simply end up with a retail price that a customer 'thinks' is a 'rip off'. All parts can now be sent 24 hour delivery to anywhere in the country.
- Viability
 - The whole future of the Dart class is going to rely on the support that Bryher and Windsport give to your Associations and the support all Dart sailors are willing to give in return. Every penny you spend with us is going to go to supporting the infrastructure that I am setting up. I am going to make sure Windsport makes sensible margins and a sensible profit. We are both committed to investing in the class and in tools and dies if that becomes necessary but that has to come from proceeds that we engender from the sales of spares in the first instance and new boats in the long term. It was always intended that wire, ropes, shackles etc would be provided by the local chandlery etc. I have no problem with competition from others but I do ask that there is an end to 'copies' of restricted parts. If you want to see the class continue its production one design success, Dart owners have to support those that are going to ensure that the one design status is maintained, stock all the high value, minimum product run items that sit in stock for long periods but when you want one they are there. By all means go elsewhere for a 'copy' rudder blade but every time you do you make it more difficult for us to justify carrying spare sails, beams and masts so that you can have those from stock at some time in the future when an breakage occurs. This is not a complaint, simply a statement of what makes for continued survival of a class to sustain it's Production One Design status.
- Clean sheet
 - I have stated elsewhere the problems that have occurred and I have apologised for those shortcomings where I can be held responsible. This is a clean sheet now and I am looking forward. I thank all those that have done their best to keep the spares flowing when others didn't but I have made a commitment to making the whole thing work properly from now on and to stock all the spares. I have undertaken with your Associations to deliver a package, properly controlled for quality, and for Windsport to actively support the class with product and personal appearances at Open meetings and Teach Ins. We will give the support that has been missing in the past but please give us your support and a chance to make it work.
- Class Support
 - What made the Dart so popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s when it was already 10-15 years old is what we need more of now, "The dealer and association working closely to continue the "Darts success" with a common goal and a commitment to the class by people who know the boat. This is what we need to achieve but to do that we need well thought out and costed strategies that provide for all dart sailors and not just those in a specific country.
 - Windsport have already been in ongoing discussion with UKIDA as to how best support the UK fleet using the two way strategies above. Their proposals include a number of class support initiatives including support at class events, class teach-in and related boat shows.

Ian Fraser for Bryher Mouldings Ltd.

Statement agreed with: Brian Phipps for Windsport Ltd.