



A First Class way to learn

First Class Sailing is one of the CA's training partners and runs regular courses at CA House. Principal Charlie Tulloch explains how the school has extended from City-based classroom training to Transatlantic racing and luxury Arctic sailing

In 2000, Saul Masson started First Class Sailing. His business was based around going into corporate offices and running evening navigation classes for anyone interested in sailing. The idea took off, and when Saul needed additional instructors he thought of Charlie Tulloch, who'd done a delivery from Thailand to Malta with him. In 2004 Saul sadly died and Charlie took over the business.

Twenty years later, First Class Sailing is running theory and practical courses throughout the year, with many of the theory courses based at CA House in Limehouse. The business still specialises in going into offices in and around the City to run evening navigation classes. A substantial crew of part-time instructors cover almost the entire RYA cruising syllabus, from Competent Crew to Yachtmaster Ocean, plus one-day courses. And in the past few years the business has branched out into adventure sailing, offering an opportunity for clients to sail the ARC or the return journey, or to explore Arctic waters with a small group of like-minded adventurers.

Charlie learned to sail when he was around eight years old, in a Drascombe Dabber (*Yabber Dabber Doo*) with his dad on the River Dart in Devon. In his 20s he studied with UKSA, did a season with Sunsail and made yacht deliveries to the Caribbean before skippering a privately owned boat from uk to

Panama around Central America and back. Charlie went on to study merchant shipping operations at what was then Southampton Institute (now Solent University), which included a year at sea on container ships, so he has a pretty extensive grounding in both the theory and practical side of all things maritime.

In the early years of FCS, head office was at Walthamstow – handy for London, not so good for practical sailing. "I worked from home for a year or so," says Charlie, "but in the end it proved easier to be on the south coast, initially Warsash and for the past 12 years or so in Shamrock Quay, Southampton."

There's a preference for mature instructors who love sailing but still work in other walks of life

FCS owns a couple of modern Beneteaus, replaced every five years or so, which are used for the RYA Competent Crew, Day Skipper and Yachtmaster practical courses, and shorter Channel hops and other mile-builders – the school's bread and butter. There's also a Westerly Fulmar, now 30 years old but robust and durable, and ideal for family sailing. Charlie owns First Away yacht charters which offers a range of vessels popular for bareboat charter by those who have taken practical courses with FCS.

After many years of steady business, the last two to three years have seen a big leap in the number of trips on offer – up 30% in 2018 and again in 2019. For longer and more adventurous trips, including heavy weather sailing courses, the Fastnet, the ARC and Biscay crossings, FCS uses steel Challenger 72ft yachts, which take 12 crew. There's a huge demand for places on these, and also for more upmarket cruising, with ensuite cabins and plenty of creature comforts. For these trips FCS charters *Santosa*, a 55ft Bruce Roberts design which has

Courses at CA House

FCS runs courses at CA House with 15% to 20% CA member discounts. Go to www.theca.org.uk/public/courses/ca_house and log in to see member prices. Courses may also be available at other locations in London or Southampton.

Here are some forthcoming courses:

RYA Sea Survival May 16 or July 25.

Offshore Personal Survival May 17.

RYA First Aid May 2, June 6, July 18.

RYA Diesel Engine Maintenance
April 4, May 16, June 13, more dates in 2020.

RYA VHF Radio April 25 with half-day assessment on April 26, June 6/7, June 27/28, and more dates in 2020.

RYA Day Skipper theory intensive
two weekends and a Saturday, starting on September 12.

To find out more or book, go to www.firstclasssailing.com or phone 0203 006 3717.



two luxury double cabins and is sailed by a skipper and cook – although clients are welcome to do as much or little sailing as they like. This summer (2020) *Santosa* will be heading from Falmouth, via the Caledonian Canal and Inverness to Bergen, then up the coast of Norway to the Lofoten Islands and Spitzbergen, before returning via Scotland to Falmouth. Almost every leg is already sold out.

The theory and day courses are where FCS started and many of those are run at CA House. VHF, diesel engine maintenance and first aid see a steady stream of clients passing through the FCS classrooms. Sea survival is especially popular for those going on the Fastnet.

One course which shows the changing face of sail training in these days of AIS transponders is the RYA Radar course. "Radar is a very valuable tool but the course is now dated," says Charlie. "We have one instructor who has all the kit on board and is able to run courses for one to three people, but we don't push them very hard. However, Yachtmaster exams are now asking radar questions. It's

something the RYA are working on."

There's still a slow but steady demand for the Yachtmaster Ocean theory course, where students learn the basics of sextant navigation. "We're lucky to have a very good instructor, who can also do a practical weekend on the water in the Solent where you get to use the sextant," says Charlie. Instructors are key to the running of FCS, and there's a preference for mature people who are not just great at teaching sailing skills but also still work in other areas, from running a recording studio to being a business coach.

As FCS has got busier it gets harder for Charlie himself to get out on the water, although arranging exotic trips for clients can inevitably make him pretty restless. In summer 2019 and again this year he will be doing a trip to Norway. But with a wife and twins aged 5¾, he doesn't want to spend too long away from home at a stretch. He also finds time for some family sailing (*pictured below*). It all helps him keep in touch with the needs of FCS's clients.

Camilla Herrmann 



Win a Transatlantic sailing trip worth £2250 with FCS

The CA's big draw prize for 2020 is a **35-night sail from Antigua to Portsmouth**, departing February 17, 2021, for one person.

From Antigua, the Challenge yacht will head north to get away from the easterly trade winds and into the more favourable westerlies, before turning east; it may make a brief stop in the Azores. The yacht is scheduled to reach Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth on March 24.

Charlie told us, "You will likely be pushed on this trip but the sense of satisfaction when you get to the UK will be huge!"

The value is **£2,250**, and the prize includes insurance (those aged 65 to 75 may need to pay an additional premium), safety gear, all food/drinks on board plus a training weekend in the Solent beforehand. The winner must be accepted by a medical advisor and will need to cover their own flight costs and any food/drink while ashore. FCS has also offered 10% off for a second person booking.

The draw opened on March 1 and is exclusive to CA members, with the winning entry to be drawn at the Southampton Boat Show in September. It is open to any CA member aged 21 to 75 years old.

For details of the prize and how to enter, [turn to page 10](#).