

Safia's sailing ambitions

Omani teenager placed 4th in the country's 1st National Sailing Championship



Hobie 16 teams compete in the National Championship finals

By Ali Ahmed Riyami

SEVENTEEN-year-old schoolgirl, Safia bint Salim al Habsi, is an Omani teenager with sailing ambitions in her mind. She has not let her young age or her gender interfere with her aspiration of becoming one of the country's best female competitive sailors.

It was a pretty perfect start for the promising sailor to notch up the fourth position, alongside teammate and helmsman, David Clark - Catamaran Sailing Captain and Training Instructor at the Ras Al

Hamra Boat Club -in the Sultanate's first ever Audi sponsored 'Oman Hobie 16 National Championships. This is a testimony to the fact that she means business.

Safia has shown a lot of mettle in entering, qualifying and coming fourth in the first Hobie 16 National Championship. Eighteen competitors competed in the qualifiers and a total of fourteen teams took part in, what turned out to be, strongly contested finals, held at the Ras Al Hamra Boat Club on September 16 and 17.



Racers prepare for the start of the competition



Safia bint Salim al Habsi holding fourth place trophy

Competing against seasoned championship sailors, some of whom have even raced in the Hobie 16 World Championship, she proved her worth and can be proud of her team's fourth place spot. In fact, having done so well in her first official contest and having shown a level of determination and enthusiasm beyond her years, much can be expected from her in future sailing competitions.

In an earlier interview with the Observer, Safia spoke about her aspirations in the world of sailing and how she initially became involved in a sport that has, as yet, not attracted many Omani competitors. She said that she started sailing a year ago and, since then, has sailed and raced in a number of boats. Besides the Hobie 16, she has sailed in 'lasers' and 'toppers', which she found to be great fun.

Safia developed an interest in sailing whilst researching for a school project, on 'Sailing in Oman', for her school's newsletter.

Eventually, she contacted the Boat Club and was invited to visit the club's facilities. On a revisit, during a 'regatta race' she was invited to join the 'Green Machine Team' -the Hobie 16 sailing team, becoming the first Omani female competitive sailor at the Ras Al Hamra Boat Club.

Sailing for Safia is not only a lot of fun, but also an opportunity to supplement some of her school learning. She pointed out that certain theoretical elements taught in mathematics and physics at school, are also covered practically in sailing.

Her interest in sailing has also led her to appreciate the marine environment, which she said she found very fascinating, encouraging her to take up snorkelling and other



Safia bint Salim al Habsi and team-mate David Clark show off their trophies as Audi sponsor representatives Ibrahim al Zadjali, Brand Manager, and John Arnold, GM, Wattayah Motors, look on.

water sports.

Her sporting ambition is to further her skill in sailing and, in this regard, she said that she hopes to obtain sponsorship from government or private sponsors. She said that she feels lucky to have the opportunity to sail and is grateful to His Majesty the Sultan's Government. Further, she said she would love to represent Oman in future sailing competitions and hopes to still find time to continue sailing when she continues her further studies.

Safia noted that Oman's beautiful seas offer the country's youth a wide variety of activities and water-sports that they could take up during their spare time. Oman's marine life is full of different

species, including whales and dolphins. She added that she hoped that everyone would do their utmost to take care and protect this wonderful natural treasure.

Youngsters need to have greater awareness about the marine environment, she said, adding that, schools should help promote this awareness and inform their students about the dangers of pollution; so that preservation of this beautiful environment can take place, allowing future generations a chance to appreciate it.

Currently, Safia is in her final year of secondary studies at Umama bint Abi-l'Aas School in Al Khodh. She said that she hopes to continue her studies, here in the Sultanate, and become a marine biologist.



Safia is all smiles as she receives her consolation prize from Ibrahim al Zadjali. John Arnold is also seen.