

Zippa (Sadler 32) RTI 7th June 2025

Will Burns and Tony Whitelaw

Will's story

Not being a racer myself and being more of a cruiser I needed to be encouraged to enter the RTI race on Zippa our Sadler 32. This 'encouragement' came in the form of Amanda Mochrie from Solent Girl Racing and Deliveries as they sailed with myself and Zippa in the Summer of 2022 during the Sailing Vision Trust week in the Solent. Her suggestion being that that we should enter as a combined team with one of the crew being Visually Impaired (VI).



She and her partner Roger were keen to see Zippa racing with a VI sailor after spending the week cruising the Solent in the Blind fleet for their 1st time and loved this experience.



So we entered the RTI in 2023 when, to our surprise, we came 3rd out of 8 entries for the International Rotarians trophy for the fastest boat around the Island with a disabled sailor on board.

Exciting !

We planned to have another crack at it in 2024 but I wasn't able to get the boat to the Solent in time due to various reasons, which was OK as the wind was too strong that year and all 5 entries for that cup pulled out due to the conditions.

This year I was thrilled that Tony Whitelaw my visually impaired sailing friend had agreed to join Zippa for the race and allow us to compete again for the Rotarians Trophy. I also welcomed Amanda and Roger back to complete my crew. They are

Winter 2025

very experienced ocean racers and familiar with regular Solent racing on all kinds of yachts, so my hope was that we would be even more competitive this year.

Tony is an experienced sailor and a committee member for the Sailing Vision Trust, having participated in many Sailing Vision weeks sailing over the years. He was also before his sight deteriorated to the extent that it is now, a member of Great British Blind sailing team; having competed at international level and won medals. I have known him for a few years and sailed with him a couple of times before, most recently in October 2023 on a Jeanneau SO 410 against another 10 of these yachts in an annual charity fundraising race called RUCKIES PIRATES Solent Challenge. That year we raised money for Sailing Vision Trust, and in the past for the RNLI.

So onto the 2025 RTI,

In the days leading up to the race the forecast again looked like 40 knots plus of wind. It wasn't looking safe to race again for much of the week, until the Friday before the race when the forecast mellowed and myself and Tony boarded Zippa then headed over to Cowes to meet Amanda & Roger to prep for the race. This was after some conferring and murmurs overheard in the Hamble of sailors saying "It looks like it might be alright now" and the likes.

Once in Cowes we spent the afternoon plotting waypoints to suit the weather forecast. Now being more focused on a shorter course and the late Friday night forecast of West to Southwest 4-6 occasionally 7 later with Rain and showers, possibly thundery later. We set off for the start line Saturday morning, after some more weather deliberations, agreeing a plan to use a Full Main sail and play the headsail to suit, dumping the main in the gusts.

After a good start off the line in our class (ISC 8B) we made our best course to wind down the western Solent tacking to keep us in the strong ebbing tide in about 16 - 18 knots of SW wind.



As we approached Hurst and the Needles the wind built as it does down there and we had to be careful to play the main, so as not to round up in the gusts as we had 20 - 25 knots plus now.

Rounding the needles the wind eased back to around 18-20 knots and we tried to aim for our next waypoint at St Catherine's which was hard with the following swell of about 1.5 - 2 meters.

Amanda who was navigating was often requesting another 1 or 2 degrees to port or starboard on this leg. But it was hard to maintain precision and accuracy in this gusty swell.

Once around St Catherine's point we gybed and the other yachts were quite bunched up around us aiming for Bembridge ledge ECM. So we had to put a couple of gibes in to keep our wind and out of the way of the other boats.



Now on the finishing leg from Bembridge to Cowes. We had the tide on the nose and the wind still SW, so it was a fairly good line to the finish with very little tacking needed. But we tucked into the shallow water to lesser the negative tidal effect.



Close to Osborne Bay some really heavy rain came in along with around 30 + knots of wind and when the squalls passed the sky changed dramatically ahead of us, we saw some distant lightning over the New Forest and then the wind lulled to almost nothing. We soon saw the yachts ahead of us all scatter in different directions we thought "what's happening?" Then, with no warning the wind swung 90 degrees to the NW and built up to around a

Winter 2025

steady 16 knots (see course track). So it was now tactical tacking towards the finish line!



We had for most of the latter part of the day had a neck and neck race with Speedwell, another Sadler but a Sadler 29 with some fancy looking sails. We had a great battle towards the line and they pipped us to the finish although our ISCRC rating put us slightly ahead of them on corrected time !

Once moored back in coves we watched the preliminary results come in and to our joy and amazement we were placed 3rd in class, 17th in Division and 148th Overall in the ISCRCs. Deep joy.

When the final results were published we are still 3rd in class but 19th and 154th respectively out of 352 in ISCRC

On the Sunday morning I received a message and a call to say we had also won the Rotarains trophy. I don't believe we had much competition (If any) this year for that trophy as the ISC web site has not published any details on the trophy listings yet. TBC

Unfortunately Tony and I weren't able to make the prize giving, as I needed to get Tony back to the Hamble to meet his lift home. So, Amanda and Roger collected the trophy and are currently looking after it now, although it has been engraved with " ZIPPA 2025

21:20

5G

60

ISC Rating System

ISC Overall

ISC 4

ISC 5

ISC 6

ISC 7

ISC 8

ISC 4A

ISC 4B

ISC 4C

ISC 5A

ISC 5B

ISC 5C

ISC 6A

ISC 6B

ISC 6C

ISC 7A

ISC 7B

ISC 7C

ISC 8A

ISC 8B

ISC 8C

Total results for ISC 8B: 20

1

FIRST ESCAPE

8642

Corrected

08:57:10

Finished

2

KIOWA

K3442

Corrected

09:09:13

Finished

3

ZIPPA

GBR5822Y

Corrected

09:14:18

Finished

4

BUFARDO

2649L

Corrected

09:14:49

Finished

5

MAGICIENNE

GBR4604L

Corrected

09:30:16

Finished

6

TARKA

5669L

Corrected

09:46:53

Finished

7

SPOOFER

GBR4106T

Corrected

09:48:14

Finished

racing.islandsc.org.uk

Winter 2025

“I will pick it up and it will take pride of place on the mantelpiece before we return it next summer so we can defend it again in 2026!”



I was conscious as our race progressed that I felt Tony wasn't as active as I or he would have liked in the helming of the boat, but we had fairly challenging conditions with close quarter sailing. However, Tony played an important role with sail handling; controlling the Main sheet track to suit as we tacked and gybed, along with releasing loading and winching the headsail sheets and winches to adjust sails. But, at the end of the day, he played an important role, was a full member of the crew and was closely associated with our success on the day, with his disability minimally impacting on his performance.

Sailing with little or no vision is much easier sailing upwind as you can feel the wind in your face and the weight in the helm. But on that point of sail while racing we needed to respond quickly and precisely to avoid collision etc from the criss-crossing of the other yachts. With more experience of sailing together, this wouldn't have been a problem but we simply hadn't worked out our communication strategy enough and unfortunately this was one of my failings as skipper. But hopefully in the run up to RTI 2026, we will be able to sort this out and better use Tony's extensive racing skills.

A couple of weeks later I was sailing in Cornwall on this year's Sailing Vision Trust event, which I have taken part in for the past 9 years, and we were using an app called Audionav that lets VI sailors steer to sound. It's very simple and accurate, but only for Android phones (Hence, I haven't experienced it properly before). Written by a blind sailor (Completely blind since birth) that I know and is a genius computer programmer by trade.

Winter 2025

I have sailed with him before for a couple of weeks and I know how accurate the device can be in his hands, However, its use has always been through his headphones so I wasn't aware how it worked in practice until this year when a skipper with an android phone set it up on a Bluetooth speaker for us all to hear while cruising around Cornwall in this year's Sailing Vision Trust week.

I then realised we could use this for the next race which would allow a VI person to steer accurately to within 1 degree safely on the downwind legs, rather than relying on my helpful, or not helpful, description of the world around us. So that's the plan for 2026 and I also hope that the writer of the app will also join us as crew since I know his desire for precision is very good as he is the European Blind shooting champion and also 2nd in the world. (yes that's shooting with a gun !!). He also competes against sighted shooters now and often beats them using his sonic targeting system! I have experienced his accuracy on the helm in the past and it's impressive. I think will give us more opportunity to get all involved on the helm with better accuracy and keep our trophy.



I'll now hand over to Tony to describe his experience of the race and more about the Sailing vision Trust.

Will Burns (Skipper of Zippa)

Tony's story

As a visually impaired sailor, when an opportunity to go sailing with a skipper on his own boat, it's rare for me to decline. So when Will Burns asked if I'd like to join him for the Round The Island race on Zippa, it was a definite 'yes'. I've known Will for a number of years through other skippers and the Sailing Vision Trust but hadn't been aboard his Sadler 32, Zippa. I've sailed off and on, when time and opportunity allows for many years, starting on windsurfers then dinghies, keelboats and subsequently yachts, including some racing. I now have very little useful sight, and sailing offers a fantastic environment to allow full participation in conjunction with crew mates. Once I've explored the boat, understanding where everything is, how the various moving parts function and fit into the overall operation of the boat it becomes an easy and natural environment in which to function. There is a particular pleasure in feeling when a yacht is 'in the groove' when helming or sail trimming when you have insufficient sight to see instruments or the windex.



As I'd never been aboard Zippa before when I joined Will on her in the Hamble I spent some time getting to know the boat, exploring how and where the sheets, halyards and other controls operate, then getting the feel of her layout. Familiarisation of a boat is obviously important for any crew member, and for me it's particularly important to get to know the boat in my own way, for example as different colours are often used to identify specific functions, as I can't use the colours I take time to memorise which clutches carry which controls. We then transited across to Cowes and I was struck by how stable and



Winter 2025

direct Zippa felt. Given the forecast for the next day's race, this was a great reassurance as we expected some variable weather conditions and swells.



The day of the race we were joined by Amanda and Roger, sailors with wide experience and knowledge of the area and the challenges of the Round The Island race. After much conversation about reefing options and the likely condition a plan was put in place. As I didn't have a lot of experience on Zippa and the Round The Island specifically, it was very instructive to hear the considerations of timing, currents and the likely weather en-route. From the start of the race we settled into roles on board. Tactical planning and route selection, together with the need to be dynamic to respond to weather and close quarter sailing were the order of the day and I kept busy in the cockpit during the many manoeuvres. For a VI in dynamic activities like this situational awareness is important and communication throughout the boat is key in order to be fully involved in the action, this was very much part of our day on the RTI.

As mentioned earlier, when an opportunity to indulge in my passion for sailing and being on board with a great crew is always welcome, and there are a number of organisations and charities which help provide access to sailing for VI sailors. But one of the real enablers for such events and activities is skippers and owners of yachts who volunteer and bring their skills and boats to events, together with skilled volunteers as crew mates alongside VI sailors.

One of these charities is the Sailing Vision Trust (SVT) which has been providing such opportunities for many years, and celebrates its 50th year in 2026. I have sailed with SVT for a number of years and was recently asked to join the board as a Trustee. SVT primarily organises an annual event entitled Sailing Vision Week (SVW). This event alternates between Cornwall and the Solent. The 2026 event will take place in the Solent between 27 June and 4 July. SVW usually comprises a fleet of around 20 yachts, divided into a number of smaller flotillas cruising the area, staying overnight in marinas, on moorings or anchored. The crews, aside from the skipper, comprise a mix of sighted and VI crew. The watchwords for SVT at this event are safety and empowerment. We seek to provide an environment where both sighted and VI crew mates develop mutual understanding and support alongside sailing skills and experience. The SVT community has become far more than simply an annual event. Wider sailing friendships develop, and other sailing opportunities emerge. Some of the VI sailors have gone onto racing, representing Great Britain in world VI championships.



Another activity for SVT is to encourage and, if possible, support the development of technology to enable VI sailors to access navigation data and other information. Some stand-alone audio compasses and apps have been developed independently, and some audio output systems have been fitted to specific boat installations, and we are

hopeful that, given instrument developments which include wifi broadcast of data, that a more generic system may be possible.

One of the challenges that SVT has is the continuing need to find willing skippers and boat owners, like Will, to volunteer their boats to take part in Sailing Vision Week, without such volunteers SVT would find it challenging to run the event. To this end SVT welcomes interest from anyone in the sailing community, and if you are interested in finding out more the website is www.sailingvision.org, and to contact SVT direct the email address is mail@sailingvision.org



Tony Whitelaw