

# RULE CHANGES

UK MCA Technical Officer **Martin Egan** discusses technical developments...



**A**s you may have noticed (!), there have been quite a few changes to the class rules over the last few years. Rule changes are needed for time to time if an active dinghy class is to keep abreast of the rest of the sailing world. Even ultra-strict manufacturer 'one-designs' like the Laser change their class rules from time to time. In the past the Mirror has also changed – for example allowing alloy tube masts with wooden end plugs instead of solid wooden masts when supply of suitable timber became difficult, or allowing the daggerboard to be sheathed with GRP.

## RECENT CHANGES

The recent changes are some of the most significant that the Class has undergone in its history. These have been aimed at widening the appeal of the Class by introducing a true low maintenance option (*i.e.* no wooden parts), and modernising it with respect to the rig, rigging and GRP construction.

## BERMUDA RIG & ALLOY BOOM

Without doubt the biggest change was to allow a Bermuda rig and alloy boom in addition to the traditional gunter rig. The Class has agonised over

this change for years – some members may remember a postal ballot of the UK membership in the mid-1990s when the majority in favour was not big enough for the change to go forward. One of the biggest concerns was over the performance. Having allowed the change, and with the dust now settling, the performance of the two rigs appears to be very similar. Although a lot of racers have adopted the Bermuda rig, the best sailors still win irrespective of the rig. For example Hector Cisneros won the Northerns in July using a gunter rig. The rules allow you to mix and match, so you can use an alloy boom with a gunter rig and DIY enthusiasts can recycle old alloy gunter masts into booms.

## CENTRE-MAIN

The Topper Class recently changed their rules to allow a centre-main. This meant the Mirror was the only RYA approved junior class with an end mainsheet. All modern dinghies use a centre-main and RYA teaching methods are increasingly focusing on centre-mainsheets. The end mainsheet was also proving a problem for those looking to change to Mirrors from other small dinghies such as the Optimist or Pico.

Forcing potential newcomers to learn a new way to tack was not the way to make friends. As with the Topper class, this change has not affected performance and is fairly cheap to fit to old boats. At the same time the kicking strap rule was changed to allow a 'strut' kicking strap above the boom. This gives more space in the cockpit and is aimed at adults teaching youngsters to helm by crewing for them.

## GRP CHANGES & MK3 INTERIOR

GRP Mirrors have been around since 1986 when Bell started producing them, but they were very heavy compared to wooden boats. It was the Australian boatbuilder Jonnie Collova of Vasco Boats who pioneered the first GRP foam-sandwich Mirror. These boats proved to be a match for the best wooden boats. Dave Gebhard at Trident UK followed up with a UK built foam sandwich boat which has proved fast and popular. However the rules dictated that these boats had to be essentially a copy of a wooden boat – even down to details such as shroud blocks. This meant these boats were not using the advantages of GRP and required a large number of moulded parts to be produced, cleaned up and then fitted together to make a boat. A review of the GRP rules was undertaken with input from Trident-UK, Winder boats, Vasco Boats and other GRP licence holders around the world. The IMCA asked Phil Morrison to restyle the interior for GRP construction while keeping the boat looking like a Mirror. The result is the new MK3 design, which is available to any GRP Mirror builder worldwide. The stowage lockers and the hole in the skeg were removed to simplify construction. The number of moulded parts needed has dropped dramatically – the Winder boat is made from just 3 mouldings; hull, deck and thwart / case top. The result has been well received by those who have tried one.

## FUTURE CHANGES

I expect we will continue to see some fairly minor changes over the next few years. A proposal to update spinnaker construction is currently being considered by the IMCA and there will be a review of wooden boat construction to try to make kits easier to put together and produce a better boat that lasts longer. ■