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SPECTACULAR  
SPORT OF  
**SAILING**

HOW TO  
CHOOSE A  
COUNSELOR

IF FIRE STRIKES — STAY ALIVE

# Daredevil Spirit

*"The world is seventy percent ocean," says Lee Burratti as he scans Newport Harbor. "I think it should be open to everyone." Lee*



*effortlessly guides his small sailboat around larger vessels anchored in the harbor. Then he smiles broadly "... that boat right*

*there," he says pointing toward a 50 foot schooner, "I think that is one of the nicest boats in the harbor. I'd like to own that boat someday ... or one like it." Lee pauses to laugh, "Well, I'm working my way there."*

by Tammy Lechner

**T**he 39-year-old native of Dana Point, Calif., who uses a wheelchair due to a fall six years ago from the mast of a sailboat, credits sailing with getting him "back into the mainstream" of life.

"The fact that you can compete with your able-bodied friends again," says Lee Burratti, "that's what makes this a spectacular sport for a disabled person.

"When you're out there in the boat, you're on the same level as everyone else," he continues, "and after the racing is over, there still is no division that keeps you from associating further with the able-bodied crowd."

Duncan Milne and Jan Sherman, sitting in their wheelchairs, nod in agreement.

"There's something about sailing," says Duncan, "that gives you back a sense of identity, as it was without the disability. You slip out of the chair and into the boat and you leave your everyday situation behind. You really do sail away."

Jan adds, "For me it's like a ride at Disneyland where you can be enjoying an activity without the chair. Sailing is the only sport I know of where you really can participate fully without the chair."

The trio was together in Newport Beach for a practice session prior to their departure for Helsinki, Finland, where they represented the United States in an international regatta held last August.

The race, in its fourth year, was originally designed for disabled participants. Last year disabled and



"I have no finger movement or trunk balance," says Keith Clark (above), "and I need to be hoisted in with a crane and lift strap." The crane is a hoist used to lift boats in and out of the water and the strap is a catamaran body harness.

(Left page) Jan Sherman gets out of her wheelchair, as Mike Watson holds it, to scoot across the dock.

able-bodied sailors competed against each other.

With their sails set under the name of The American Wheelchair Sailing Association — an organization they are working hard at building — Lee, Duncan, and Jan acquired \$13,000 through local donations for travel expenses and then put their eight months worth of training to the test in Helsinki.

Out of a field of 62 sailors competing in a series of six races over a three-day span Lee placed highest out of the AWSA group with a 41st place finish, followed by Duncan in the 42nd spot and Jan in 52nd.

"Next time I'd like to see our group afford to go ahead of time for final practice sessions and also be able to ship our own boats over," Lee adds. "Not having our own boats there was a disadvantage."

All entrants had to sail a 12-meter minidefender — a boat design which has opened up sailing as a viable sport for the disabled. Originally designed for able-bodied sailors to use on bays and inland waters, the boat is a one-fifth scale replica of a 12-meter yacht, usually used in the America's Cup regatta.

It offers some innovative technology. It is virtually untippable due to a 300-lb. keel and air chambers filled with foam. It comes with a self-tacking, self-furling jib and hand steering. All controls are within easy reach on a front panel including a joystick for the rudder. The usual need to move around from side to side is virtually eliminated. The mariner needs the use of his arms but not his legs to sail.

While the disabled sailing tech-

nique is a bit more difficult for quadriplegics, it is still possible for them by wrapping the ropes around their hands.

"It really depends on your strength," says Keith Clark, a 31-year old member of AWSA who has sailed since he was 7-years-old. While bodysurfing five years ago, he broke his neck and is a C-5 quadriplegic.

Once inside the minidefender Keith uses his teeth to hold the line and applies muscle power from his neck. When in a competitive situation, he says he needs additional body support inside the boat to help him with his balance problem.

"Despite the apparent obstacles," says Keith with a grin, "water tends to be a great equalizer."

"It's easy to sit and say, 'Gee, I wish I had use of more of my body but frankly it's good to have this much,'" says Keith. "Someday, though, we hope to have an electric version of the boat with servo motors, either to use out of necessity or as an override, to make it remote controlled. I'd also like to see toggle switches on there for people who can't tow a line."

Keith explains that AWSA is working in consultation with the boat's designer/manufacturer team and the organization has acquired five minidefenders from the builders. Brand new, the vessel costs \$4,000, a price that includes sails and trailer. A used minidefender can be had for about \$1,000, if one can be found.

"We'd love to work an aspect of our organization into a rehabilitation program," says Duncan, "and help

kids born with disabilities shed the 'I'm different' idea.

"I believe there are two very clear benefits to this program," Duncan continues, "the obvious one is learning to sail and perhaps the more important one is learning an independence and maturity that will carry over to other aspects of living."

Otis Morrison, who had a stroke, was encouraged to participate in AWSA by his physical therapist. Otis, who owned his own sailboat for 12 years, says, "The program makes it possible for a paralyzed person to experience the ocean and, in my case, return to sailing to some degree."

After one outing Otis says he felt comfortable with the hand controls and quickly adjusted to having the rudder in front of him rather than in back.

While the AWSA hopes to expand sailing for rehabilitative purposes, racing coach Leonard Connelly says that such an instructional program is a difficult one to choreograph.

"There is no stereotypical level of disability," he explains. "There may be two paraplegics in wheelchairs but their ability levels may be miles apart. We're finding that different adaptations may work better for some people than others."

**T**he AWSA was formed two years ago. It is a non-profit association which provides training for sailing to disabled persons. It has a membership of about 35 people and another 60-plus who say they'd like to participate. For information write AWSA, 512 30th St., Newport Beach, CA 92663.

"We also need to take the time to ascertain where people are with sailing itself before we can cut them loose and feel good about them being on their own. We're really overloading the boats by putting two people in them for instructional purposes but it's necessary to feel people out and decipher their ability or lack of ability."

AWSA organizers have a long list of plans for their organization which would eventually extend to a far greater number of people.

"I hope to see a day when there are a dozen facilities like this one," says Lee, "and regattas can be held around the country on a regular circuit. Then we can send our best two racers to the world championships each year ... perhaps the United States could even take a turn at hosting the classic."

Achieving the necessary funding for such plans is the main challenge for the AWSA and so far the group has relied heavily on donations from The Foundation for Sea & Marine Education — a relatively new foundation which is struggling itself to stay afloat.

Foundation president Kenneth Hickenbottom says his organization's finances are "hanging on by shoestrings" after financing the Helsinki regatta for the AWSA.

If the foundation is successful in its fundraising efforts, Kenneth hopes to provide financing for the design and building of an 80 foot long catamaran for disabled persons.

"Sea access just hasn't happened for the disabled," says Kenneth, "and we want to make it happen in Newport Beach and then share it with the world."