

Me and the Sea - Jackie Ward, Founder, Clifden Boat Club

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Written by Staff Reporter

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The success of the Hallmark boat in sailing's West Coast Super League over the last few years is as much down to the efforts of the dedicated crew as it is to the competitive attitude of its owner, Jackie Ward.

Jackie's love of the sea, and of sailing in particular, goes back to his father. "My Dad had a boat, one of the small Galway Hookers. I would have sailed in that for years as a kid and things just went from there," he explains.



After some years in the UK, Jackie returned to his native Clifden and, along with Peter Vine and Adrian O'Connell, set up Clifden Boat Club as it is today. "There wasn't much sailing going on in Clifden at the time, just fishing mainly. I had bought a small yacht and Peter and Adrian were into it as well so we decided to start up the club."

Despite only setting up in the early 1970s, Jackie says the history of the boat club in Clifden goes back generations. "There was a club in existence for years and we have a big cup dating back to 1937.

"Last year then, a woman found another cup when she was rooting through her attic, that her grandfather had won in 1907. We got that polished up and we're trying to get a replica made for the club now. We also had a centenary celebration in the club last year and tied in our regatta to that."

After a number of years without a club, Jackie thought it was time to establish one again. "There was a tragedy in the Bay in the 30s or 40s, where two local lads died, and after that the sailing in the town just kind of stopped.

"We started up the club then and built the new premises about 18 years ago. On paper we'd have 185 members from kids all the way up, but most of them wouldn't be consistently active."

Jackie Ward is certainly a consistently active member. Having served as the Club Treasurer for a number of years, he is now a General Committee member as well as being a vital member of Team Hallmark, along with sons Damian and Barry, Thomas Davis, Mike Coquil and Mathieu Husenot.

Indeed Jackie admits his two sons and two daughters, Susie and Gemma, were always going to get into sailing. His wife Bernie though, might have reason to feel aggrieved by her husband's sport. "We rarely really go abroad on holidays and when we do I'm always wishing I was at home. I'd

much prefer to stay at home and mess around in the boat," Jackie admits.

Although he has already spent decades on the water, Jackie's love of racing has never waned. "I'm as bad as the young lads with the racing," he says. "I race twice a week and otherwise I'd be out on the water as much as possible."

Through his days racing around the West Coast, Jackie has gained a number of good friends from various clubs around Ireland, and maintains that there is very healthy competition between them. He would also encourage anyone to get involved in sailing around the country.

"I love everything about sailing and I would think everyone should get into it. Contrast to belief, it actually costs very little to participate in," he argues. "It's a very healthy pastime, its great to get out in the fresh air and the social side of the sport is great."

Jackie though, does believe that there are a number of areas in which sailing and the profile of sailing can be improved in this country. "There's very little coverage of sailing in Ireland and people have to understand that with a lack of coverage, sailing doesn't stand a chance."

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