

Fireball thoughts on Development and encouraging new boat sales.

Introduction

I asked if I could put a presentation on behalf of the 2 builders (Winder and Weathermark) to the open forum during the Europeans at Portoroz. Here is a summary of what I spoke about along with some other thoughts from those who were at the Forum.

Dave Winder and I have for some time been speaking and are concerned with the lack of new boats being built. With teams not replacing 5 – 6-year-old boats it means there is a very short supply of good championship quality used boats for new teams wanting to get into the class and be competitive at the front of the fleet. It is unusual for new people to a class to buy a new boat.

Background

Boats stay competitive for many, many years and there has been no real update since 1995 so for many owners there is no reason to buy a new boat when it will be much the same as the one they have. We all know of boats still winning and being competitive for 20 years! However, leaving it so long before replacing makes the boat old and it depreciates in value thus making the price difference of a new boat quite substantial.

Therefore, while the class is strong in participation the class should look at some changes to give a reason to replace a boat.

There are a number of possibilities for improvements, modification and changes without changing the speed or performance of the boat. Some simple and some – in peoples mind radical.

At the meeting I asked everyone to keep an open mind and not throw their hands up in horror at ideas. I was pleasantly surprised by the positive and receptive response. As a class we have to think forward and be positive.

Some examples of classes that have got it wrong and right.

UK based I'm afraid. The Enterprise class was huge in the UK but suffered from new boats such as the RS200 and other MODs (Manufacturer One-designs). They knew they had to do something but spent years debating it. Finally, once turnouts and sales had become very small, they got a new deck mould. It was one piece and self-draining and got over all the issues the boat had. However, it was left too late and they missed the boat having lost their fleet. Also, because of the time delay the cost difference between the current owners boats and the upgrade was too much. They had left it too late to do anything.

I fear if action is not taken the Fireball class could be at this point in the not too distant future.

Two examples of success are the Wayfarer class and the GP14 class. In the case of the Wayfarer, the builder bulldozed the rules to make the boat better with a double floor and less buoyancy plus a number of other changes to make sailing the boat more pleasant. They have sold near on 2000 boats since the changes were made 6 years ago. In the GP14 class the association allowed the rules to be relaxed to change the way the floor was made. A double floor with self-draining cockpit and decreased buoyancy has improved the boat and the class is thriving.

Decreasing the buoyancy helps prevent the boat inverting and makes it easier to climb on the centre board in the event of a capsize.

Ideas shown at Europeans.

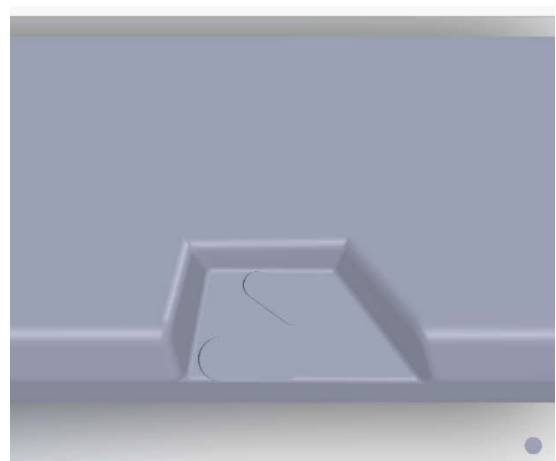
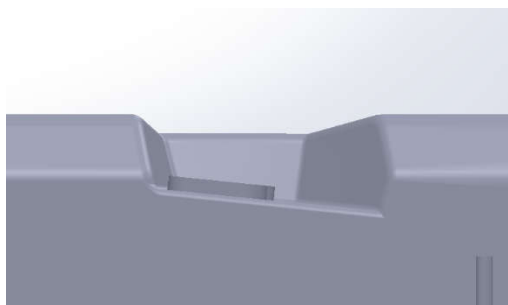
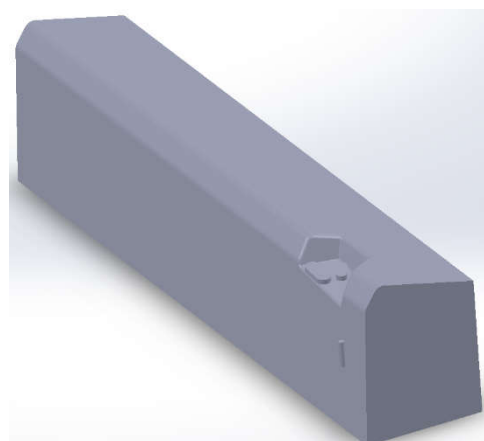
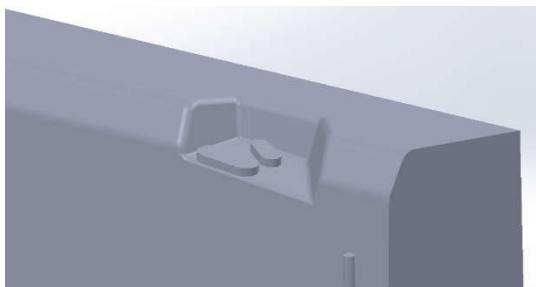
A few years ago Chris Thorne from the UK came up with some simple modifications that would make the cockpit cleaner and more open for both the crew and helm. Below are his pictures along with his explanation.

Proposal to permit changes to the location of jib cleat and block positions in conjunction with side tank shape

It is proposed to introduce into the moulding of the side tank a recess that would house the jib sheet cleat and block. During development discussions the shape and size of this recess has been reviewed to ensure that it does not create any advantage or disadvantage in sheeting control. The length fore and aft is larger than first envisaged and this is due to the requirement to allow sheets to run when adjustable inboard/outboard jib bars are fully extended to their furthest outboard position.

The base height for the fittings is the same as the plinth currently provides and the depth of the recess (inboard to outboard) is sufficient to accommodate the standard fittings thus maintaining as much of the side deck as possible. The angling of the base is used to reduce sheet wear against the deck and discharge water to the cockpit floor and out of the hull.

Dave Winder has confirmed that this element can be added to the moulding procedure simplifying construction of the boat and in turn marginally reducing the cost of the process. Furthermore, whilst only being a small element it would increase the available clear movement or action space in the cockpit, remove a trip & bump hazard and allowing larger crews to move freely and in more comfort. The additional benefit is that in light winds the crews are able to move around in a less confined space, making the boat more comfortable but also more accessible to sailors of all shapes and sizes.



The disadvantages of this proposal limit the user to a 'tacking forward' approach and there are some in the fleet who prefer to tack facing backwards. A rule proposal could permit the moulding to be placed further aft if preferred though the shape and the moulding would need to change in size to accommodate different sheeting angles. It is assumed that a large proportion 'say 90%' of the worldwide fleet tack forwards and therefore this technique is promoted with this setup. If permitted a 2nd moulding for rear facing tacking could be developed if required and rules amended accordingly.

1. Side tank deck formation & shape

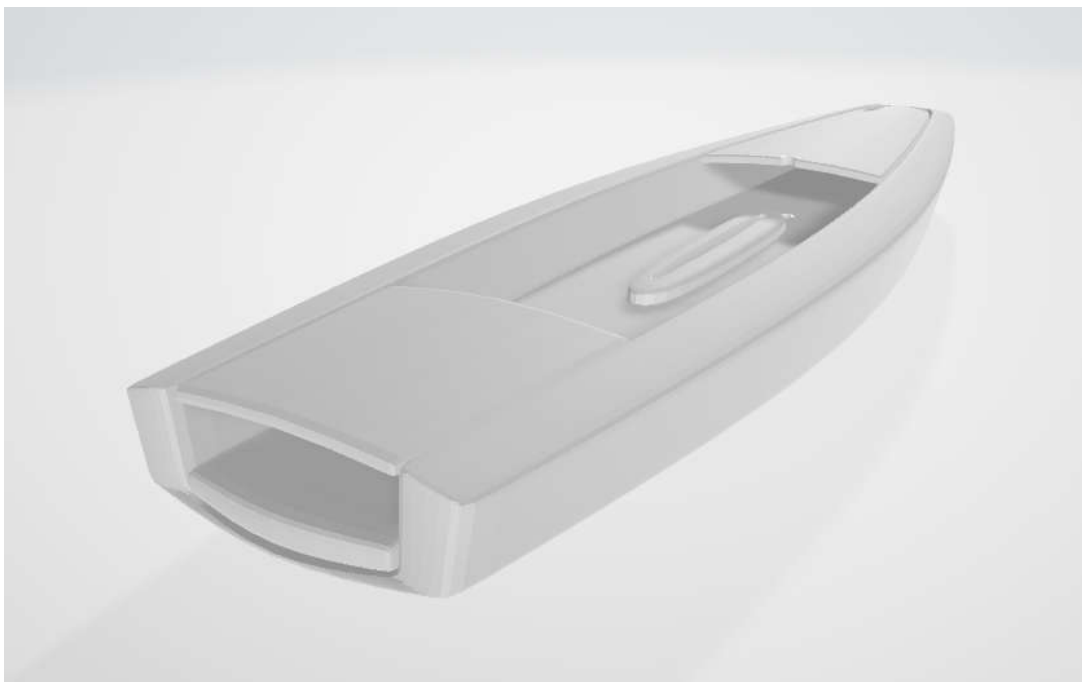
The current side tank internally is a relatively steep and sharp corner. In manufacturing terms, it requires separation of the deck from the structure during moulding and then an additional process to complete the construction. This proposal seeks to reshape the inboard corner of the side tank creating a less acute angle and again one which can be included in the current mould processes. The softening of this angle works twofold in increasing the accessibility to new crews. In numeric terms it increases the distance between the boom and the side deck therefore allowing large crews to move around the boat, but it also visually makes the cockpit appear larger therefore the perception is that the cockpit area is larger

My and Dave Winders idea.

I have always thought the self-bailers were both dangerous and outdated. All new designed boats are now self-draining. So, I set about thinking of a self-draining Fireball. The screen shot of the 3D image has been done as a sketch and is not accurate or to scale!

It would have a double floor with a one piece deck/floor moulding that goes straight onto the hull. The foredeck and stern deck are 'lids'. The floor height would be no more than the mast step which is good for short crews but would mean tall crews having to bend a little more. The open area under the foredeck means a spinnaker shute could be used again without the risk of a tube filling up with water. By reducing the buoyancy the boat will float lower in its side for getting on the centre board and also help prevent the boat turning upside down.

Obviously, there will be much to be engineered to ensure strength and stiffness along with working out where all the controls run.





Ideas from teams at the Forum.

At the meeting which was very positive and actually got people quite excited a number of all sorts ideas came from the floor.

1. Increase corrector allowance.
2. Allow carbon. Lighter boats with correctors that over time the weight can be reduced.
3. Lower height of the side deck on the inboard side to level off side deck to stop sliding off the side.
4. Extended removable gunwale for lighter shorter crews.

If anyone has other ideas we would welcome them. We can then have a discussion on which way and how far to go to ensure the future of the class.

The thinking is to simplify the mouldings and the building process to also to reduce cost and improve the ergonomics of the layout for both helm and crew.

Try to simplify the whole spinnaker system to encourage sailors that are used to asymmetric and a range of crew size and strength.

And of course modernise the look of the boat.

Dave and I would like to go forward with the double floor option but will need the classes support and desire.

Does the class want to look forward or always find reasons not to take on a change? We need the class members and MNAs to get on board and join in the thought process to move the Fireball forward and attract those sailors that don't all want to go kite boarding after their 29er.

Please come back to us with your thoughts and more ideas, If we as builders are to develop boats and ideas we need to know the class members and owners are with us.

Dave and Dave