2013 Commodore’s Report

In 2012 the Fireball class celebrated its 50th anniversary. While the celebrations have ended, the challenge of keeping our class relevant and modern in today’s world remains. To that end, we have written and approved a strategic plan outlining our goals and action plan for Fireball International. If you have not yet read the plan, please do so. It is available on the FI website and your feedback is welcome.

Our new website, developed under the direction of Ben Schulz, has proven to be a major success. In addition to an updated look and feel, the content is impressive. The website is our primary marketing and branding tool and does an excellent job of showcasing the class, the boat, and activities all over the world. Traffic on the site has been very good.

The Fireball International facebook group has grown to over 500 members, serving to facilitate communication between Fireball sailors everywhere. Facebook can be used to promote events, share technical information and other ideas, and keep in touch. Please spread the word and encourage Fireballers everywhere to join.

Fireball International has approved a new constitution. Beyond some necessary housekeeping, we have redefined our approach to membership. Our new definition recognizes that the Fireball is a two man boat and that crews are full and valued members of our association. We need everyone’s input to make the class as successful as possible.

We have instituted a three year horizon for World Championships. Schedules announced well in advance permit better organization and marketing of the events, and allow for better vacation planning. This year we are gathering in Slovenia; in March of 2014 we will be going to Thailand and the World Championships in 2015 will be in Wales. Choosing venues and dates that will please everyone is truly challenging. Our status as an international class demands geographic rotation and provides an exciting opportunity for travel. We are interesting in promoting fleet development internationally and encouraging as many sailors as possible to experience racing in a World Championship event.

The Fireball class is facing many challenges. Participation has been fairly constant, but we are not witnessing significant growth. The class is healthier in Europe than elsewhere in the world, but even within Europe activity is uneven. There are far too many countries where fleets have disappeared or risk disappearing. Our fleet needs more young sailors, as the average age of the fleet has been steadily rising. High travel and shipping costs, difficult economic times, and limited resources have added constraints to all.

It is gratifying to witness active interest in our class by professional builders, sail makers and other members of the industry. FI is interested in working closely with the industry to develop new markets and promote increased sales.

Fleet development is ultimately local. By sharing enthusiasm for the boat, inviting others to sail, and organizing and encouraging activity, the class can and will grow. Active NCAs can promote growth by providing the right mix of local and national events, and ensuring media coverage. Fireball International can help by raising the profile of the class, sharing best practices for fleet development, and by implementing desirable technological improvements. Everyone has a role to play.

The challenges are real, but there are opportunities to grow and develop. We will continue to focus on fleet development.

I would like to thank the FI executive for their commitment to the Fireball class. We are very fortunate to have a dedicated and talented team around the world working hard for our class.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Jospe Commodore Fireball International