

Thoughts from the UK on Future Fireball Events

Background

International:

- Dinghy sailing is in decline. Fewer people are participating.
- Fireball sailing has been recognisably in long term decline for very many years.
- The number of Fireball sailing nations has reduced considerably.
- The number of new Fireballs has reduced dramatically over the years.
- Professional Fireball builders do not consider it viable to invest in a class with low unit sales.
- Fireball's international image has suffered due to recent poorly attended major championships.

UK:

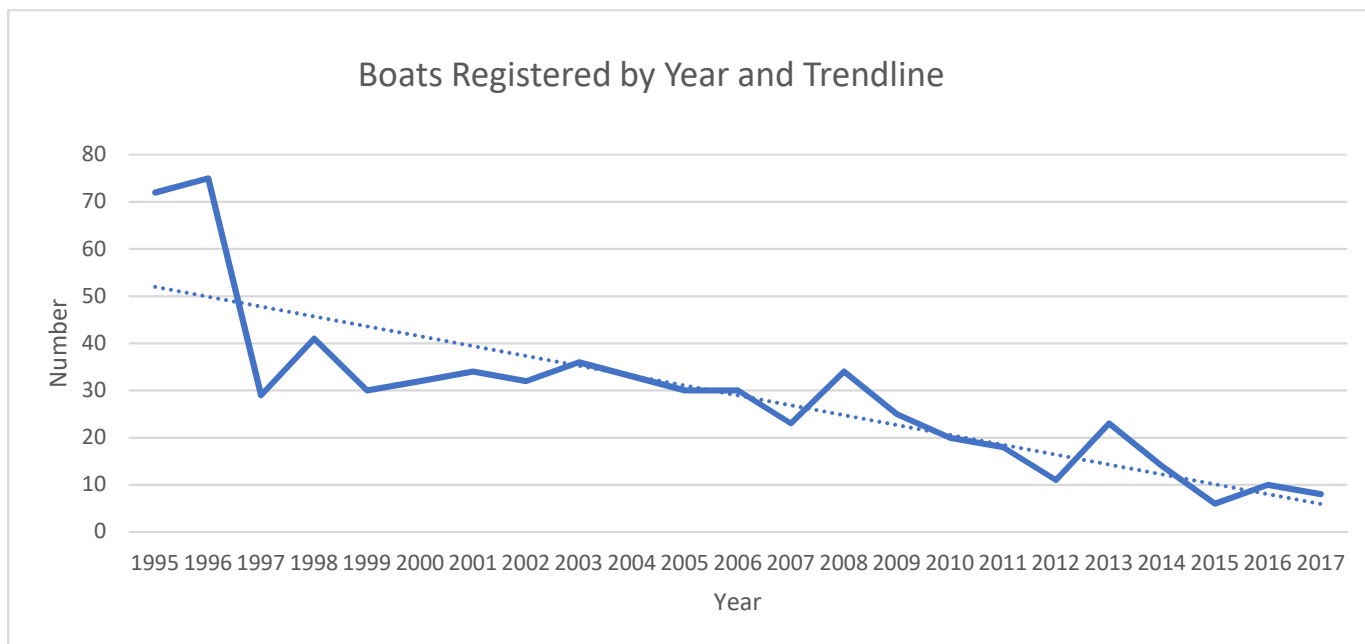
- Only a handful of clubs in the UK now support the Fireball class.
- There is great competition from other dinghy classes all of which fight for a share of the decreasing dinghy sailing population.

SWOT Analysis

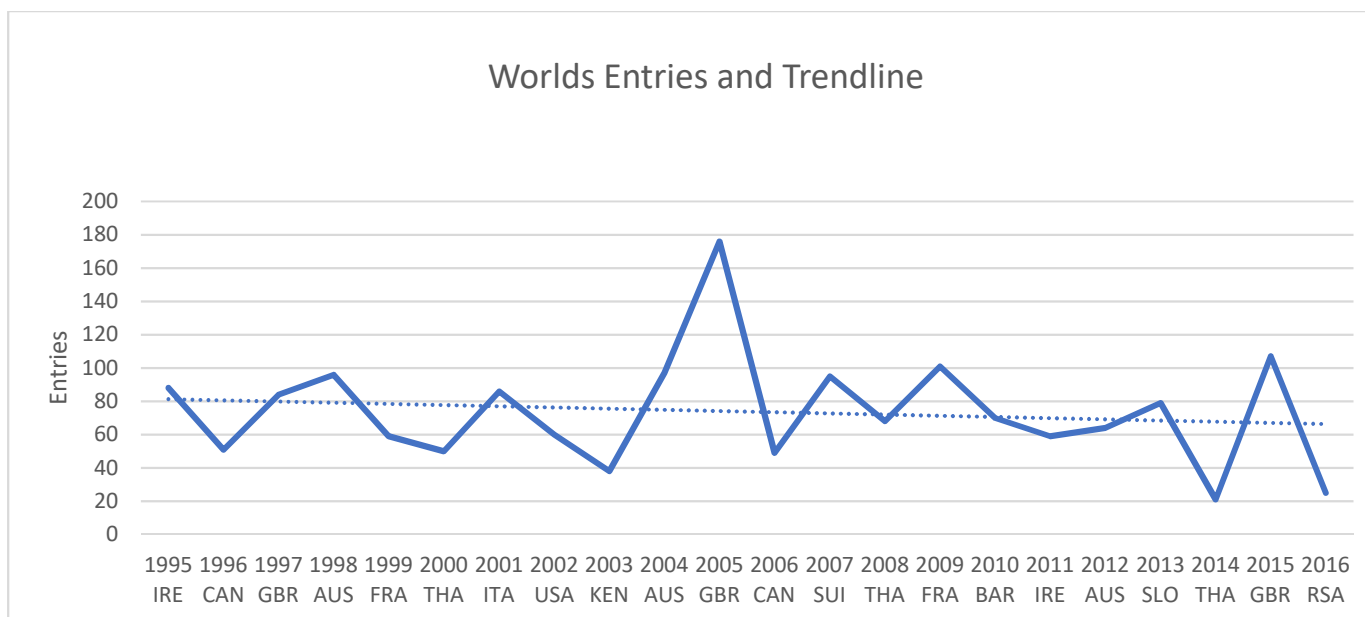
Strengths	Weaknesses
Several large in-country fleets	Usually a reliance on host NCA to underpin championship entry numbers
Class attracts top quality sailors	Many sailors do not have the money or the free time to regularly race their boats at overseas regattas
Fireball continues to enjoy a high profile in the UK, Europe and Australia (North America?)	Negative trendline for championship attendances and new builds
Fireball remains competitively priced	High reliance on the UK for boat, spar and sail manufacturers
The class has wide appeal attracting sailors from all backgrounds; it is cheaper to sail than many other classes.	Some NCAs are too small to properly support their members
Good second-hand market; multiple entry points	International promotion of Fireball lags behind some of the newer classes
Modern boats remain competitive for many years and retain their value well	Lack of major class sponsor
The Fireball is an excellent boat for both club sailing and international regattas	
Opportunities	Threats
A small number of core NCAs provide a platform for growth	Asymmetric classes: promote themselves as easier to sail and more fun.
Attractive championship locations are available to the class	World Sailing likely to demand stricter championship governance (appropriately qualified officials) leading to higher costs
Modest changes to rules may generate disproportionately beneficial effects	World Sailing believed to be looking to reduce the number of international classes
	Boat builders cannot justify changes to moulds due to low unit sales

Discussion

1. The general situation



- The graph shows a long-term decline in Fireball.
- At its height, the Fireball class had almost 400 local fleets spread across the world from Papua New Guinea to Nigeria to Sweden. Now there are only a modest number of local fleets in a handful of countries.
- Annual new boat registrations have been reducing steadily since the 1970s and are now in single figures. This means that it is not worthwhile for builders to invest in the class.
- The class inhabits a hard fought-over segment of the dinghy sailing marketplace. Arguably Fireball is the most popular double-handed, single-trapeze symmetric spinnaker dinghy outside of Olympic and Olympic-training classes (i.e. 420 and 470) but the principal competition comes from asymmetric classes that often have the benefit of large manufacturers' promotional budgets (e.g. RS Sailboats' RS200, RS400 and RS800).
- There is a reliance on UK manufacturers for boats, spars and sails

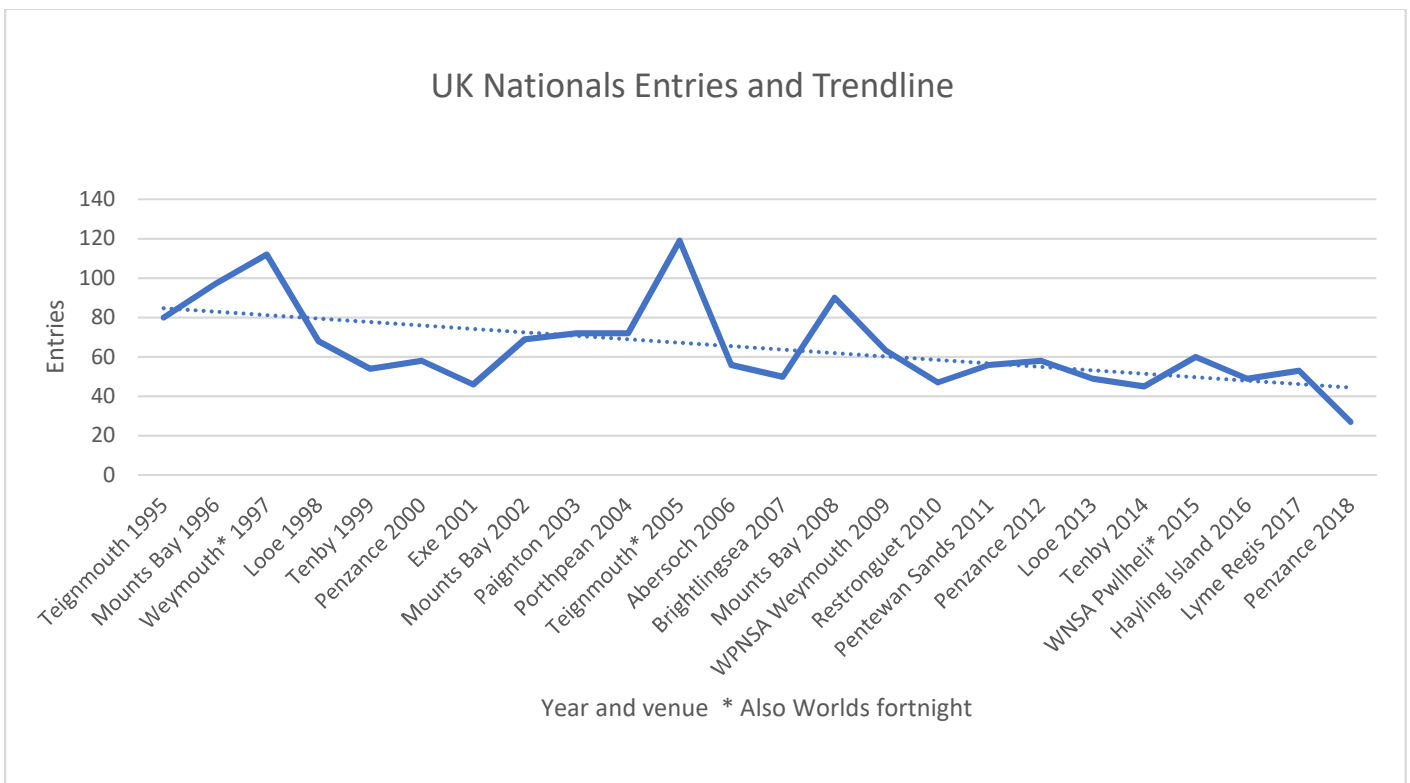


- Attendance of the World Championship is in decline.

- Two particularly poorly supported events were held in the last two years which will have been noted by World Sailing.
- There is a clear correlation between a well-attended championship and strong competitor numbers from the host NCA (see attached chart).

2. The UK situation

- The UK is still the largest NCA and its sailors and suppliers have helped maintain the success of the class.
- Fireball still enjoys a high profile in the UK sailing community regularly winning prestigious events against very well sailed boats from other classes. This is despite a diminishing club presence – there are now only five or so significant local fleets.
- We are concerned that if the Fireball stops being a class sailed at club level, it will instead become one sailed only on the open meeting circuit, like the 505, Hornet and Osprey.
- The number of open meetings held have fallen to just five in 2018 plus the National Championship and the Inland Championship.



- Attendance of the Nationals is presently running in the 40-60 range but the trend is one of continuing decline.
- The 2018 national championship was the worst-attended of all time. To an extent this was caused by a number of competitors who could only attend one event in the year and elected to sail at the Carnac Worlds rather than the Penzance nationals. However, UKFA is mindful that the 'Carnac effect' may just be the headline reason for a low turnout.

3. The way forward

3.1. We would like to see Fireball International:

- be proactive in promoting the class
- help develop individual NCAs through a long-term class development strategy
- look for ways to increase participation

3.2. Championship venues

- When considering venues, Fireball International needs to recognise that not all 'glamorous' venues attract higher competitor numbers: Barbados (2010) with just 3 local boats worked out well; Thailand (2014; 1 local boat) and South Africa (2016; 9 local boats) didn't.
- Fireball International needs to be realistic about how much support an event will get and be prepared to provide support to the host nation if there is not a strong fleet there. The graph of worlds entries shows that where there are a high number of boats from the host nation there has been a well-attended event.

3.3. Championship scheduling

- Major championship scheduling needs to be planned several years ahead. There needs to be greater liaison between FI and NCAs to avoid clashes and reduced attendance because of competing events.

UKFA

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