

# THESE GIRLS CAN!

## Emerging female role models in windsurfing

**INTERVIEWS, WORDS AND PHOTOS:**  
SIMON WINKLEY

**LAST SEPTEMBER I RAN A RYA START WINDSURFING INSTRUCTOR COURSE FOR OCEAN ELEMENTS IN VASSILIKI WITH A 7:1 FEMALE:MALE RATIO (SUCH COURSES USUALLY HAVE WAY MORE GUYS THAN GIRLS). As a member of the RYA Sport Development Team I am aware of the importance of increasing female participation in sport so I was keen to document this course as a means, perhaps, of inspiring other women to take up windsurfing or to become an instructor.**

The groundbreaking 'This Girl Can' campaign by Sport England addresses research that reveals a huge difference in the number of men and women playing sport in England. And it's not because females don't want to get active.

Millions of women and girls are reluctant to exercise because of fear of judgement – of their appearance, ability or how they chose to spend time on themselves – which is a situation well-worth addressing as far as I am concerned. In my years of

coaching I have witnessed the great benefits not only to fitness but confidence, happiness and self-esteem that windsurfing can bring to real women.

Each of the candidates kindly agreed to be interviewed to give snapshots of their windsurfing journey to date, insights into working alongside other females on the course and their thoughts about the balance of women in windsurfing. They also share one killer track that fires them up to get out on the water...



**Jessica Park**  
(Huddersfield)

Age 19, riding for two years.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*

Fear mixed with pure bliss (but it's awesome!)

♪ Offenbach - Be Mine  
"Let's start the show" ♪

**I have been windsurfing on and off with my family - in Vass and at home - since I was little but only really got into the sport in the last couple of years. I was a Kids Club Leader this season with OE in Horto and hopefully now I will be able to teach RYA courses in Greece and at home.**

Windsurfing seems quite a male dominated sport yet in recent years females have started to nail the harder freestyle tricks. They have become just as good as the men and, in places like Vass, I have noticed that more and more of the instructors are women. I am in awe of all women who are amazing in this sport.

The course was really enjoyable having so many females on it. It was such a level playing field and we all wanted each other to do well which created a lovely atmosphere. My moderation day nerves, on reflection, were mostly excitement for what I might be able to achieve in the future.



**Sophie Cartridge**  
(Poole)

Age 21, riding for one year.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*

Frustration vs the best feeling in the world...

♪ The Drums - Let's Go Surfing  
"Oh Mama, I wanna go surfing" ♪

**Growing up in Poole Harbour I have always had a love for watersports and last summer, thanks to my Dad teaching me, I spent three weeks going from first time windsurfing to planing before starting my new job with OE in Vass. The course proved that there is just so much to learn.**

Memorizing things is definitely not my strong point yet I passed the course so I am really happy. Throughout the winter I hope to improve my personal level of windsurfing and I would like to use my qualification to work in Poole.

Currently the number of male windsurfers to female windsurfers is disproportionate yet recently there has been a big increase in the number of female windsurfers.





## Georgia Reid (Essex)

Age 23, riding for six years.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*  
 "Ahhhh Maaa Gaawwdd... this is so fast I LOVE IT!"

🎵 Chumbawamba - Tubthumping  
 "I get knocked down, but I get up again" 🎵

**Having dinghy sailed all my life competitively I found windsurfing difficult at first. Once I got over the beginner stage though I started to love it and have been hooked ever since! The course was good fun and full of laughing and joking around.**

We all got on very well and were always happy to help each other in the sessions. I have always been on courses with a good mix of males to females but it was nice just having a girly week with giggles all round!

When I windsurf at home or have been away on windsurfing trips the majority of the people I meet are male. I do feel, however, that women are really starting to go for it – there is a massive following for @windsurfgirls on Insta! Give it time and us girls will be running the windsurfing scene! Every girl that I see out on the water pushing for big moves or just blasting around having a great time makes me think, "I want to be like her!"

## Alicia Wergen (Chichester)

Age 19, riding for four months.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*  
 Mostly (at speed) I am absolutely petrified!

🎵 Dex River - Sugar  
 "She don't compromise" 🎵

**When I first arrived in Vass and saw the sheer amount of people who were blasting about I knew that I needed to go as fast as them and I respect any girl who gets up on a board and gives it a go. Whilst the women in Vass are just as keen as the men, there seems to be more of a gender imbalance within the higher levels of the sport.**

The course was so enjoyable and I have learnt an incredible amount not just about windsurfing but about teaching techniques. I am looking forward to returning to Vass next year that much more now. Having more females on the course created a very mutually supportive environment on and off the water. It is very exciting that more females are getting into the sport. I always say go for it, get wet and enjoy taking on the challenge of trying something new... windsurfing is not easy but it's incredibly cool!



## Rebecca 'Jeanie' Barnsley (Nottingham)

Age 21, riding for four years.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*  
 A feeling of being cool and full of adrenaline... .

🎵 Rihanna - Shut Up and Drive "I'm a fine-tuned supersonic speed machine" 🎵

**Me and my sisters got into windsurfing through my parents who are both keen windsurfers. I took an apprentice instructor position this year to learn on the job and to receive training for the future.**

Like many sports, I feel the men come first however, I do think women are much more represented than in other sports. The PWA website – whilst tending to show male rankings first, for example – has a very strong and fairly equal representation of women.

My female role models are two out of the three RYA Advanced-Plus Instructors on our team: Rhiannon and Eilidh. They are great windsurfers and have helped me so much with my windsurfing... oh, and my mum, as she's always keen to jump in a cold lake back home and to have a flask of tea ready for me when we are done!

Before the course I was pretty apprehensive but as soon as we got to know each other we were all put at ease. The course was in-depth and informative and I now feel confident to teach a group on my own. More women instructors are likely to get more women involved in the sport and will understand specific concerns like how to deal with harnesses sliding upwards!



## Zoe Partridge (Shrewsbury)

Age 21, riding for nine years.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*

Yippeeeeeeee!

♪ Friendly Fires - Hawaiian Air

"I gave it all" ♪

**I only got into windsurfing properly in the last three years where working seasons gave me regular access to water and kit. I hope to do another season because teaching windsurfing in the sun is much more appealing than in the UK!**

At the level I know, the women/men balance is pretty equal, which is great but, as with other sports, I don't think it's the case at the top. The windsurfer I admire is my sister as, despite us being quite competitive, she has the skills that I aspire to.

During the course, any apprehension I had about needing to be a high-level windsurfer soon disappeared. Already being a RYA Dinghy Senior Instructor helped as there is plenty of overlap.

Having so many females on the course was lovely as my previous instructor courses have been full of middle-aged men! Not that there's anything wrong with that but it was nice to have other girls to learn with and to laugh along with. Everyone was very supportive of each other.

## Alice Read (Oxford)

Age 19, riding for 16 years!

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*

All the problems go and I lose track of time!

♪ Bryce Fox- Horns

"The fire she breathes" ♪

**My family all windsurf and my first time on a board was aged three. When I was ten, I joined my local RYA Team 15 programme, Oxford Zoomers and became Inland National Champion in 2011, 2012 and 2013 before reaching the RS:X Transitional Squad.**

I was so nervous entering my first World Championships at age 13 that my family promised me a puppy if I came top ten. On the final day I secured tenth place, got the puppy and she comes with me everywhere I go windsurfing in the UK!

I was anxious before the course as I had not done much teaching. I soon grew in confidence though as the girls related to one another very positively. The course was engaging and time on the water was maximised which was great. It feels empowering that so many new female instructors are coming through and I can't wait for Vass 2018. I feel that the sport is represented really well by women – we are right in there. I look up to Lena Erdil and Sarah-Quita Offringa. Sarah is awesome at freestyle, freeride, slalom, waves... she does it all and always seems to be smiling!



## Bram Von Zon (Oosterhout, Netherlands)

Age: 21, riding for five years.

*What's in your head when windsurfing?*

Nothing. Just the freedom of flying. . .

♪ Aslove - Feel Good

"Watch me as I gravitate" ♪

**Since I participated in a high school try windsurfing session I was hooked on this sport! To be honest, when I walked into the room on the first day of the instructor course, I was pretty surprised to be the only guy.**

The girls made the course so much fun though and I learned so many new things. I was actually already qualified with VDWS (Association of German Watersports Schools) but I needed the RYA instructor qualification as it is more globally recognised.

My first windsurf instructor Katrin was amazing and I know that these seven girls will do as good a job as her at training new and progressing windsurfers and will inspire other women to get involved.



Congratulations to the eight newly-qualified instructors and thanks to Adam Chubbock of Flying Fish for moderating the course. Use these links to learn about #thisgirlcan and to see how you can start your own windsurfing journey:

<https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/women/this-girl-can/>

<http://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/> <http://bit.ly/2BfNGDW>

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