Traditional Style Boats – Results of a Survey on boat buying and show going

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1 Introduction

The Prospectory ran an online survey on behalf of the Wooden Boat Builders Trade Association (WBTA). These are the results and our conclusions from them.

We tried to survey people who own or have an interest in traditional-style boats[1]. We wanted to find out about:-

1. **Their boat buying behaviour**.
    - *How often do people buy traditional style boats?*
    - *What proportion of these purchases are new builds?*
    - *What proportion are traditional wood (carvel or clinker), modern wood (ply/epoxy) or GRP?*
    - *What sizes of boats do people buy and how much do they spend?*
    - *How do they find out about the boats they buy and what is the role of boat shows in the purchases?*
2. **Their boat show behaviour**.
    - *How often do boat owners go to boat shows and which ones?*
    - *How is show going affected by geography?*
    - *What do people most want to see at a dedicated show for traditional-style boats?*

The survey ran during November 2008. To attract people who own or are interested in traditional-style boats, we advertised the survey in Water Craft magazine, on the www.classicboat.co.uk website and in the ybw.com newsletter. We would like to thank Watercraft and IPC for their help in promoting the survey.

We also contacted 40 traditional boat websites, online forums and traditional boat associations to ask for their help. We are very grateful to the many organisations who took time and energy to help us either by informing their members or posting a link to the survey on their website.

A prize draw for 10 'Classic Sail 2009' calendars was offered as an incentive to complete the survey.

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[1] For the purpose of this survey, the term 'traditional-style boats' was loosely defined "as the kind of boats appearing in either Water Craft or Classic Boat magazines".

2 Who did the survey?

187 people completed the survey. Nearly all were UK residents.

This sample is relatively small so the results must be treated with caution. However, random samples from our data set show high consistency across responses suggesting a relatively uniform population. Our recruitment methods (specialist magazines and websites) inevitably create a bias towards the enthusiastic end of the boat owning (and show going) market.

96% of the subjects were male and Figure 1 shows the age profile.

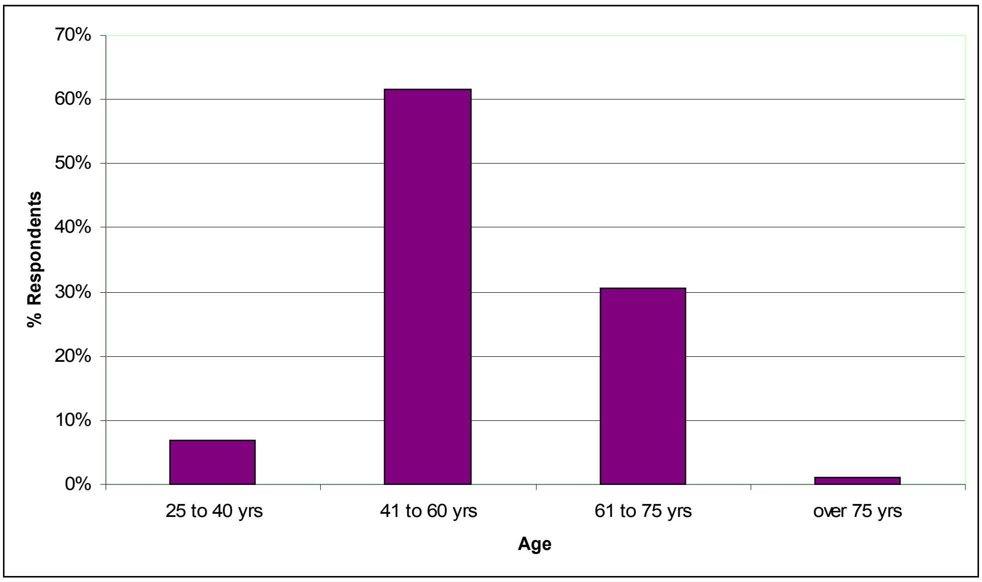

Figure 1 Age profile of respondents

90% of the respondents were aged over 40 years and 31% over 60 years. This suggests that the under 40's may be less likely to own traditional-style boats or may not be sufficiently interested in them to have encountered the survey or completed it. We don't know if the same mature age profile holds for all boat ownership.

Figure 2 shows where the respondents[2] live.

[2] Based on the 147 respondents who provided their postcodes.

Figure 2: Where the respondents live

We compared the geographical distribution of our survey sample with that of the Watersports and Leisure Participation Survey (2007). This estimates the proportionate distribution of the sailing boat owning households across 6 ITV regions. Figure 3 shows how our distribution compares to theirs.

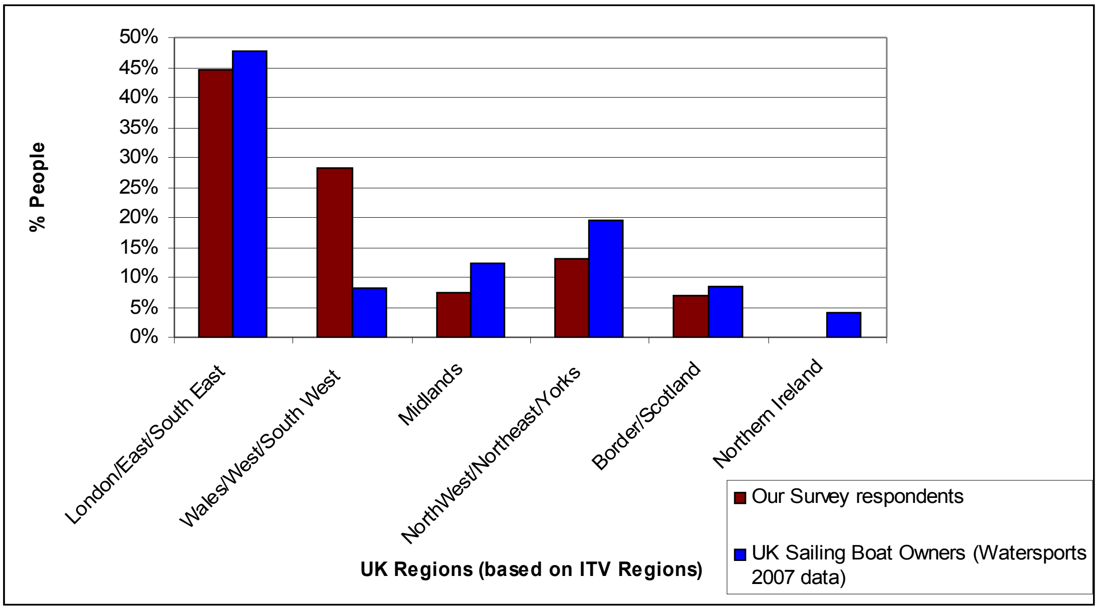

Figure 3 : Geographical distribution – compared to all sailing boat owning households

There are a couple of discrepancies. Our survey had proportionately far more traditional boat interested owners in Wales/West/South West region and somewhat less in the Midlands and North. We don't know why this might be.

3 How often do people buy boats?

12 of the respondents (6%) had never owned a boat in their lives although 8 of these said they were thinking of buying one, 6 had recently been to a boat show and 4 subscribed to boating magazines.

Figure 4 shows when the remaining respondents bought their first boat.

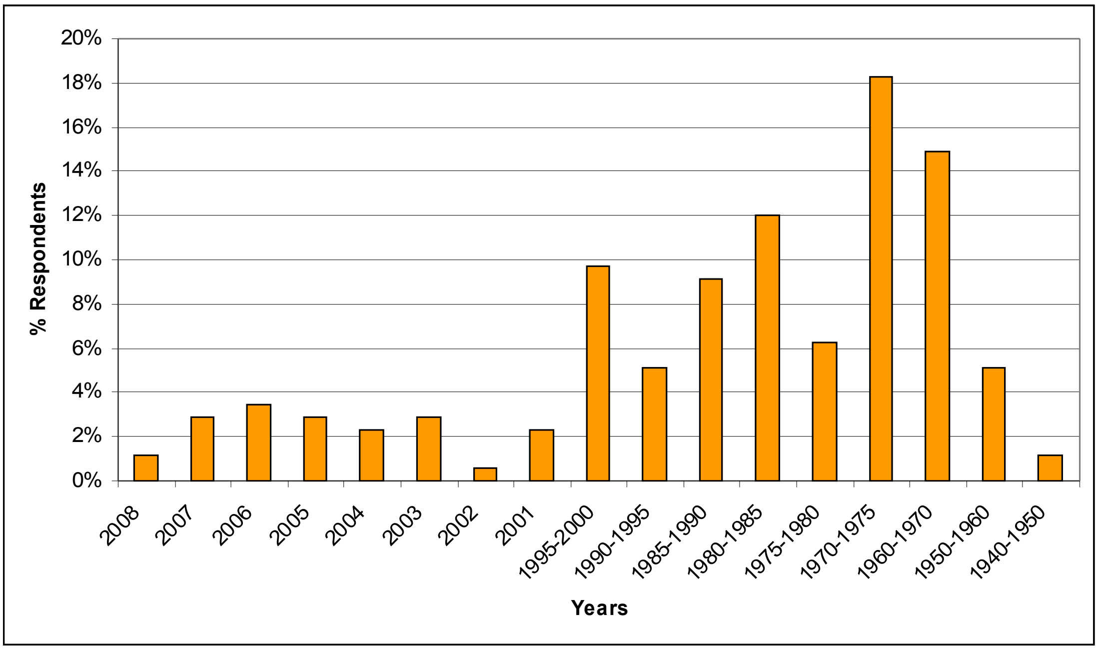

Figure 4 : When people bought their <u>first</u> boat

Given the age profile of our respondents, this suggests that most people buy their <u>first</u> boat in early adulthood. For the 61 plus age group, the most common purchasing period was 1960-1975, for the 41-60 age group, it was 1970-1985 and, for the 25-40 group, it was 1985-2000. There were relatively few 'recent converts' in our sample – only 10% of those who have purchased a boat since 2000 were first time buyers. In other words, our sample suggests a population of life-long enthusiasts.

Figure 5 shows when people bought their most recent boat.

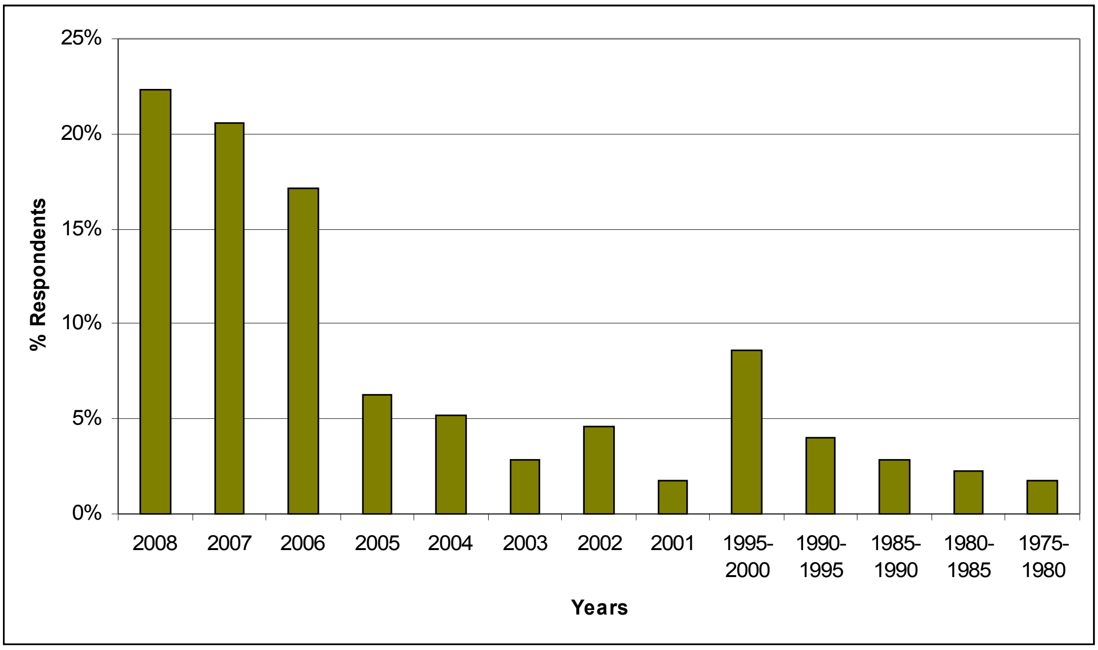

Figure 5 : When people bought their last boat

60% of our sample had bought a boat in the past 3 years and 81% had done so since 2000. So, what can we deduce from these figures about how often they buy boats?

We asked subjects how many boats they had owned since they bought their first one. Responses ranged between 1 and more than 20: the mean was 6 and the median[3] was 4. Only 11% had only ever owned 1 boat.

This allows us to calculate how frequently in their lifetimes people purchase a boat. Figure 6 shows the results.

[3] The median is the ½ way point – half the values lie above it and half below. In this report, we will state the 'median' rather than the mean (average) either when the data are in categories or the distribution is not symmetrical. (Where the distribution of data points is symmetrical (a 'normal curve'), the mean and median are the same.)

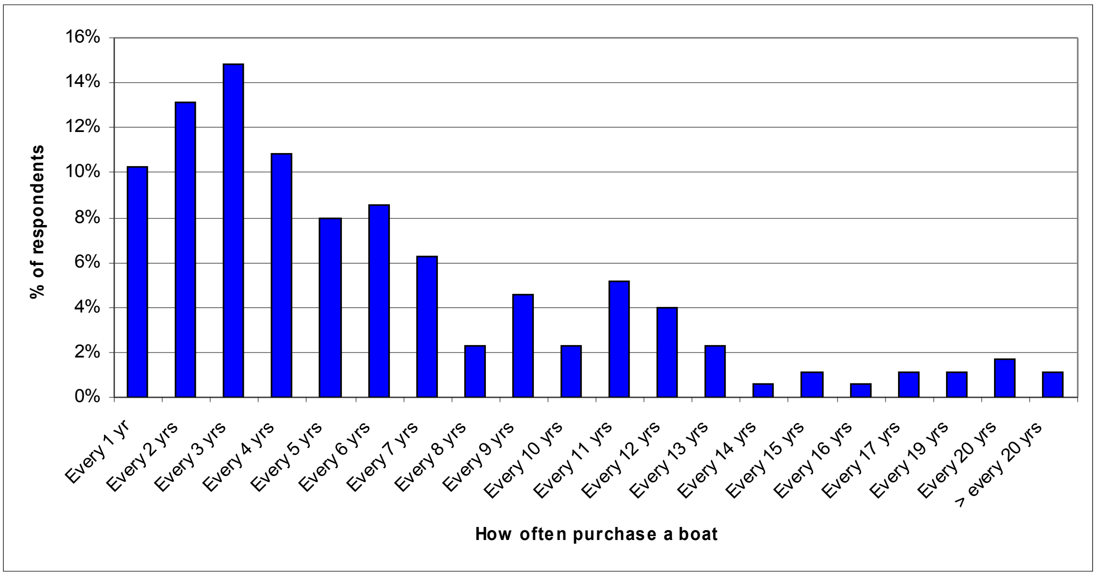

Figure 6 : How frequently people purchase a boat

The good news, from a boat builder's perspective, is that people purchase boats frequently. On average, they do so every 3 years but the median is every 5 years. The not so good news is that very few of these are brand new boats.

Comments which people added to the survey give a feel for the way this buying behaviour can often result in a small fleet!

- *"I have a 37ft teak on oak gaff cutter ... which I bought in 1984. She is my "lifetime serious boat" and she was my fourth boat. In 2000 I bought an RNLI clinker boarding boat and fitted her with sails and an engine. In 2003 I bought my son a Firefly dinghy and this year I bought another Firefly as a "going concern" and an Albacore in need of restoration - all three dinghies are hot moulded wood built by Fairey Marine in the 1960's"*

- *"this boat is a new traditional style Tender to our Tamarisk 24 gaff cutter. We have 3 sea worthy boats at the moment + 2 Canadian canoes"*

- *"I have 10 boats at moment ... some for sailing some for sculling, some for pottering, some for motoring…"*

Later on in the survey we asked people whether they were currently thinking about getting another boat. 45% of them said they were and startlingly, 49% of those who had bought in 2008 were already thinking about buying another boat!

- *"every time I do it.....I say not again.... and every time, it only takes a while before I am looking again."*

- *"the last boat I bought was a Spirit 46. I sailed her in the Mediterranean classics in the summer which I enjoyed. I am now selling her and will probably buy a real classic boat (i.e. built before 1930). Of more relevance to you may be my recent purchase of a sea raider from swallow boats"*

4 What boats do they buy?

The survey asked people about the last boat they'd purchased[4]. Figure 7 shows the percentage of new versus 2nd hand or kit boats.

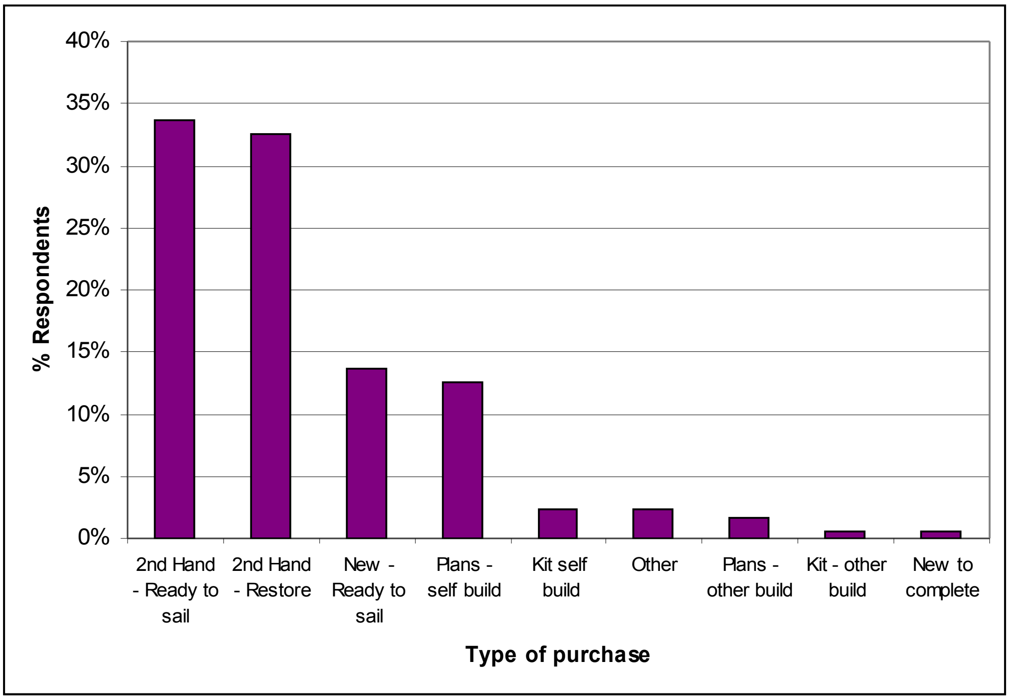

Figure 7 : Types of purchase

The striking fact here is that only 14% of the last boats purchased were new, completed boats. In fact, there were as many plans sold as new boats. The vast majority of purchases (65%) were 2nd hand with half of those needing some restoration or repair.

When asked whether the last boat purchased was 'traditional style', 61% said 'yes', 32% said 'no' and 8% said they didn't know (*"I've put "don't know" as it depends on your starting point. What does a Firefly count as? To me, as a racing dinghy sailor, she is traditional. In more general terms, compared to a clinker working boat, she is modern!"*) .

Figure 8 shows the difference between the purchasing patterns for traditional style and modern style boats. It is important to remember that our survey sample was deliberately biased towards people with an interest in traditional boats, but many of them actually buy modern style boats.

[4] We deliberately focussed the majority of survey questions on the last boat they purchased (rather than boats they have owned in general). This is because survey responses are considerably more accurate when they are concrete and specific. For example, people might like to think that they tend to buy wooden rather than GRP boats but their last purchase is an actual case.

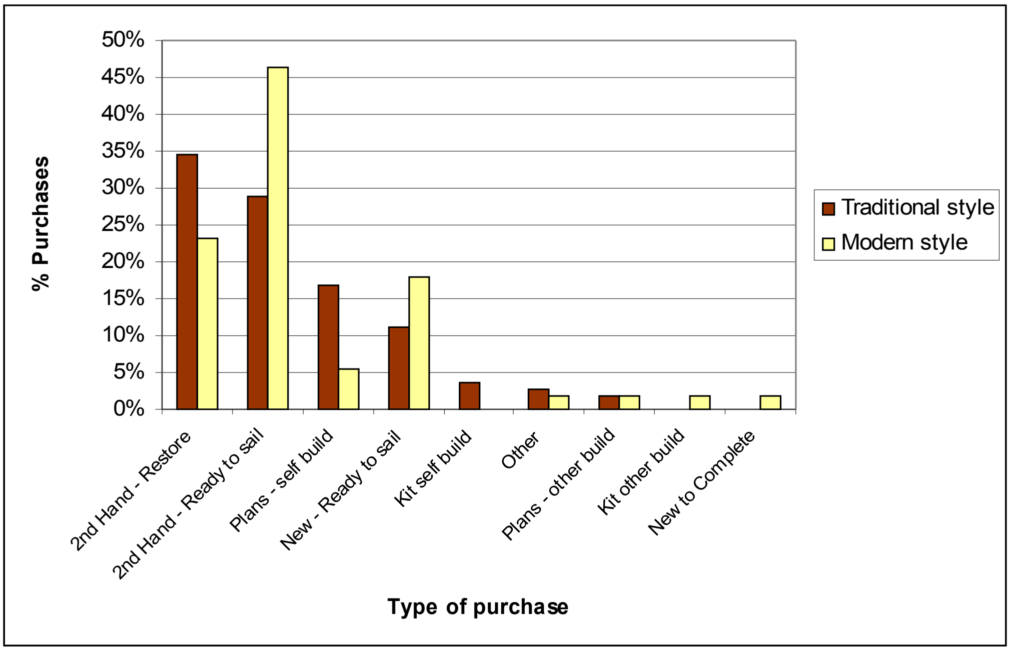

Figure 8 : Comparison of 'traditional style' and 'modern' boat purchases

Modern boat buyers are most likely to buy 2nd hand boats which are ready to sail whereas traditional boat buyers are more likely to acquire purchases which need restoration. The important difference to note however is that **only 11% of traditional style boats purchased are <u>new</u> (ready to sail) boats.**

Figure 9 shows the type of boat purchased.

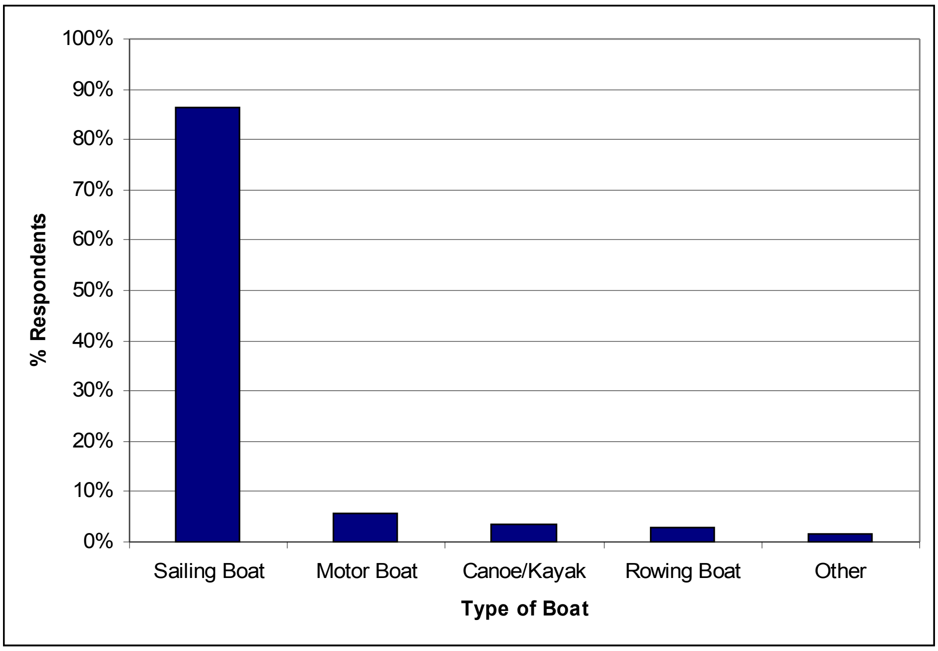

Figure 9 : Type of boat last purchased

86% of the boats last purchased by our sample were sailing boats.

Figure 10 shows the size of the boats purchased.

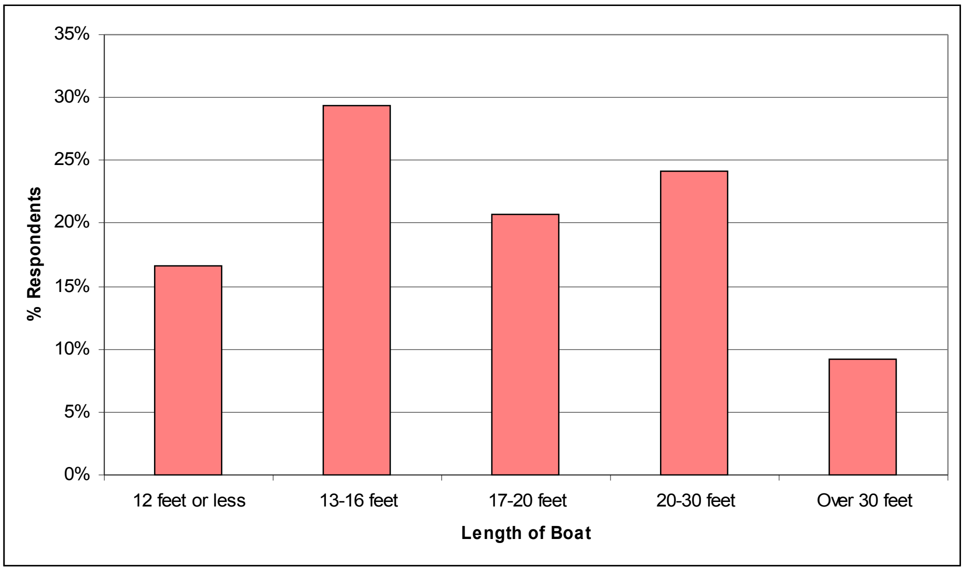

Figure 10: Size of boats last purchased

Our sample tended to buy boats in the 13-30 foot range. However, 71% of the new boats they purchased were in the 13-20 feet range.

Figure 11 shows the main construction material/method of the boats purchased

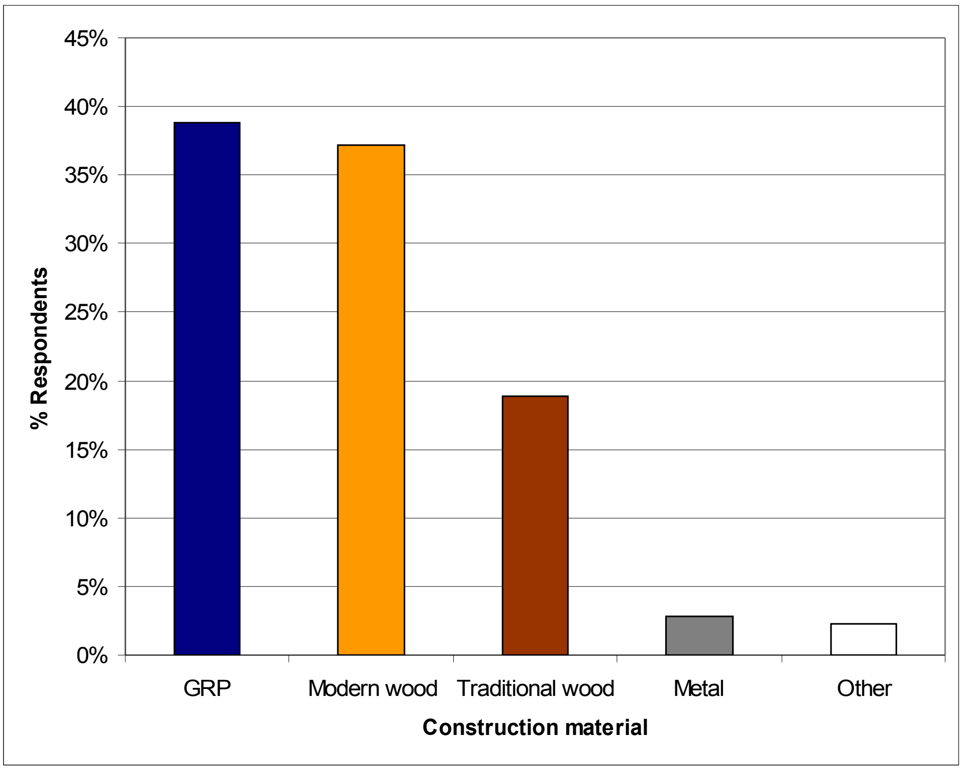

Figure 11 : Construction materials/methods of boats purchased

The percentages of GRP and modern wood (epoxy/ply) are roughly equal. Traditional wood (clinker/carvel) accounts for only 19% of sales.

Figure 12 shows how the construction material varies across new and 2nd hand boats.

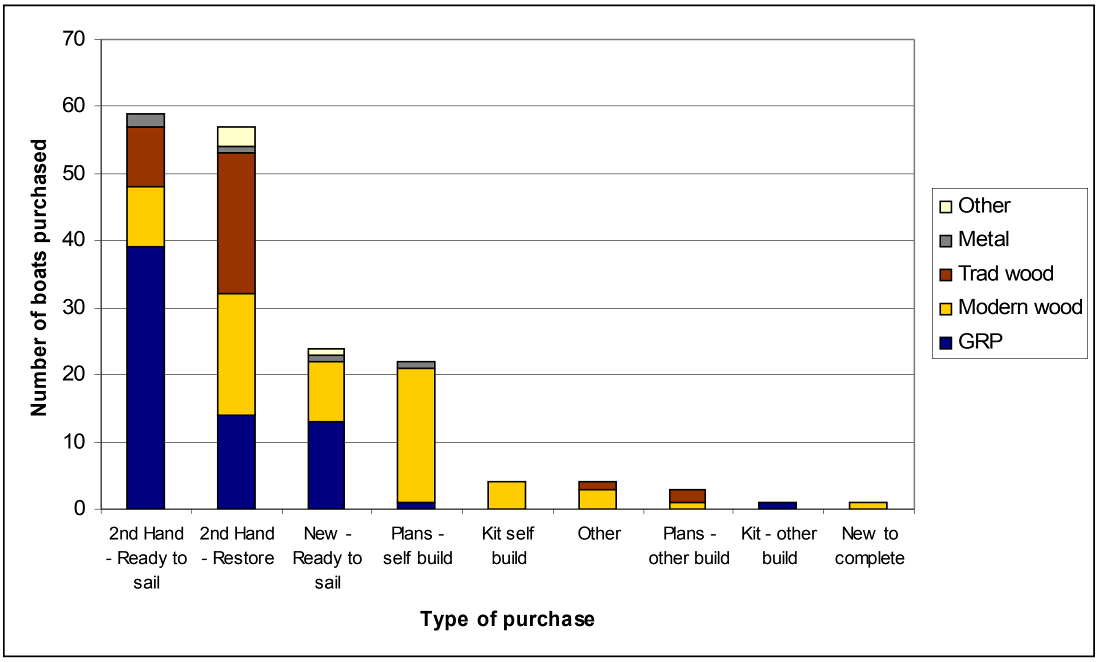

Figure 12: Variation of construction material – New versus 2nd hand boats

GRP dominates the 2nd hand, ready to sail market (66%) but not the restoration market which is focused (not surprisingly) on wooden boats. GRP accounts for 54% of the new boats sold and modern wood for 38%.

- *"Having become tired with the restrictions of 'marina based' sailing. I wanted a more traditional style of boat that still offered the safety and ease of maintenance of new designs and materials. I also wanted it capable of being towed to places to explore. Eventually opted for the 'Bayraider' from Swallow Boats. Been very pleased it and has filled all my expectations"*

- *"I bought a GRP Falmouth bass boat, a gunter rigged ketch. Its traditional lines are very pleasing and it sails well. The hull is GRP everything else is wood. I would have preferred a one of the earlier ones which are all wood construction. I feel there is a market for reconstructing the wooden hulled type as I have had so many enquiries about the boat since I' ve had it.*

Significantly, none of the new sales recorded were traditional wooden (i.e. clinker/carvel) boats.

In summary, our survey covered 45 different combinations of boats people could have bought. Table 1 shows the most common combinations purchased.

Type of Boat	% Purchases
2nd hand, ready, 17-20 feet, GRP	11%
2nd hand, ready, 20-30 feet, GRP	8%
2nd hand, ready, 13-16 feet, GRP	7%
2nd hand, restore, 20-30 feet, mod wood	5%
2nd hand, restore, 20-30 feet, trad wood	5%
2nd hand, restore, > 30 feet, trad wood	5%
New, 17-20 feet, mod wood	5%
New, 13-16 feet, GRP	5%

Table 1 : Most common combinations of last boats purchased

At the other end of the scale, some combinations were not purchased at all. This may reflect their low appeal to this population or, simply their availability.

	Purchases
New, all lengths, trad wood	0
New, <13 feet, modern wood	0
New, > 30 feet, modern wood	0
2nd hand, restore, > 30 feet, GRP	0

Table 2 : Combinations not purchased

5 What is the appeal of a new boat to those who buy them?

50% of the people who had bought a new boat said that it was a brand new design or a customised one. Some of their comments made about the buying experience suggest that these are major motivators for buying new.

- *"This was a brand new GP14, heavily bespoke, to incorporate features that I have liked in GPs I have known well over 45 years plus some new ideas of my own."*
- *"I was involved with the detail design of a new boat and did not get to sail this particular craft before purchase; I tried its slightly bigger sister."*
- *"I bought a Saltern's Tela, and it felt like a personalised boat. It was built for me and I still love it"*

A couple of people talked of enjoying the build process and the relationship with the builder.

- *"Having my new boat built by a local builder allowed me to see every stage of the build. This provided me with an intimate understanding of it's construction. I found the process hugely interesting. I have also found that delays on the anticipated delivery dates are extremely frustrating, which for me was an unexpected risk in going the new build route. However I have enjoyed a good relationship with the builder and am well satisfied with the end product."*
- *"I had a racing/cruising catamaran built in Cape Cod by a friend of Nigel Irens, I assisted with the build which turned out a great success, I learned an great amount in a very short time and made lifelong friends along the way, would do the same again".*

Since relatively few respondents had bought new the last time they bought, we don't have much reliable quantitative data about new boat purchase behaviour.

6 How much do they spend?

Figure 13 shows the amount our sample spent on the last boat they purchased.

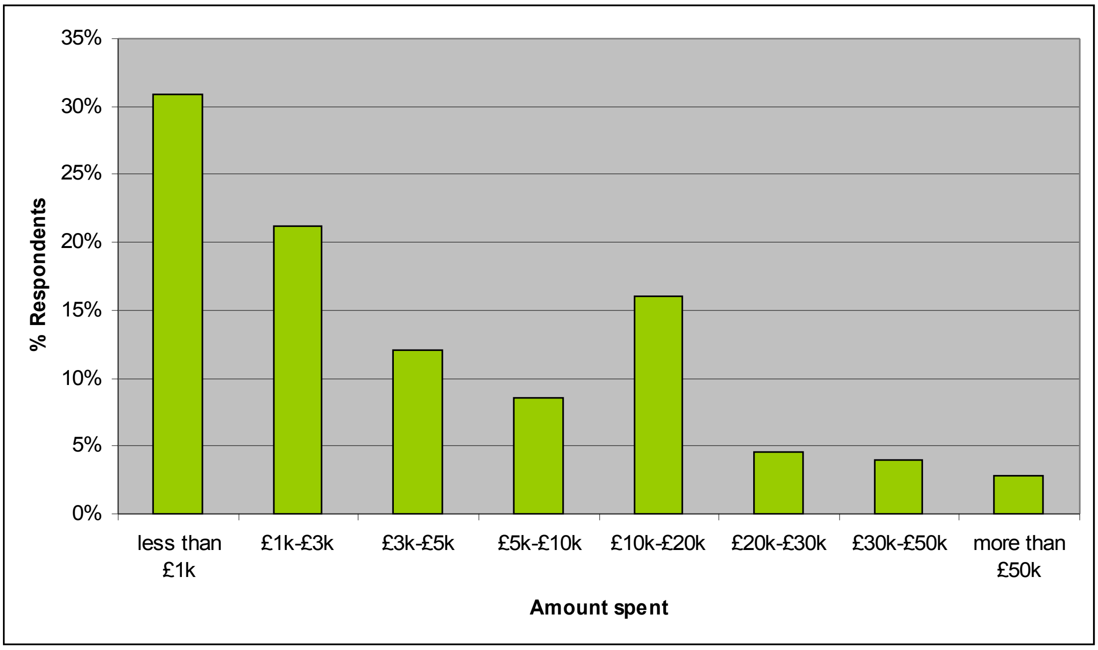

Figure 13 : Amount spent on last boat purchased

The amounts are surprisingly little. 31% spent less than £1k and 52% less than £3k. As figure 14 shows, this is primarily due to the predominance of 2nd hand purchases.

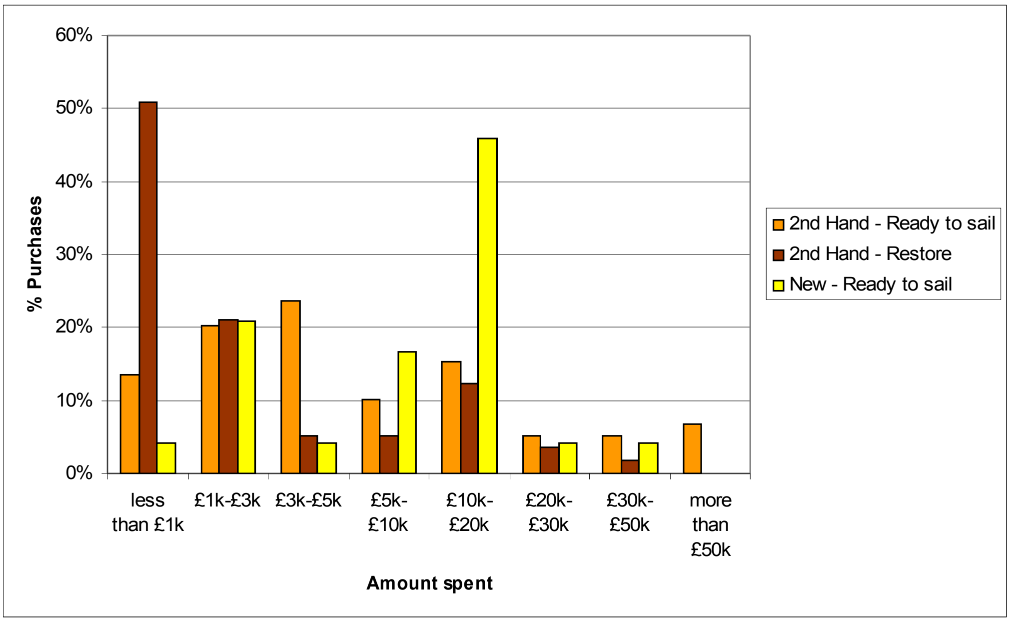

Figure 14: How purchase prices vary depending on new versus second hand boats

The fact that half the restoration boats purchased cost less than £1k suggests that these were 'cheap boats' rather than valuable restoration projects. Comment confirms this was often the case. Ironically, they may spend considerably more on the boat in the long run.

- *"It was a question of my heart ruling my head. I was made a very attractive offer by the seller who was emigrating. I took it because it involved minimal outlay for a boat I liked. It was unwise as the boat required much more renovation than I had the time to give it. The outcome was not too serious as the initial outlay was so modest."*

- *"I had been looking for a Drascombe Lugger that I could afford..... I located a Drascombe Lugger via The West Briton news paper. Restoration is in progress!!!".*

- *"Wanted a cheap way into sailing for my son (11 years. Did not want to spend too much in case he did not take to sailing and enjoyed doing a bit of restoration. Now looking for a self build boat."*

In contrast, 71% of the *new* boats purchased cost more than £5k. The most common new purchase was a 13-20 foot modern wood or GRP boat in the £10k-£20k range.

Only 24% of buyers tried the boat before they bought it, although this went up to 50% in the case of new boats.

- *"It would have been nice to have taken the boat out so that our first sail wouldn't have been as much of a hair raising experience."*

Finally, we asked people whether the boat they last purchased was larger or smaller than their previous one. We included one option 'not a replacement', little realising that that would turn out to be the commonest case!

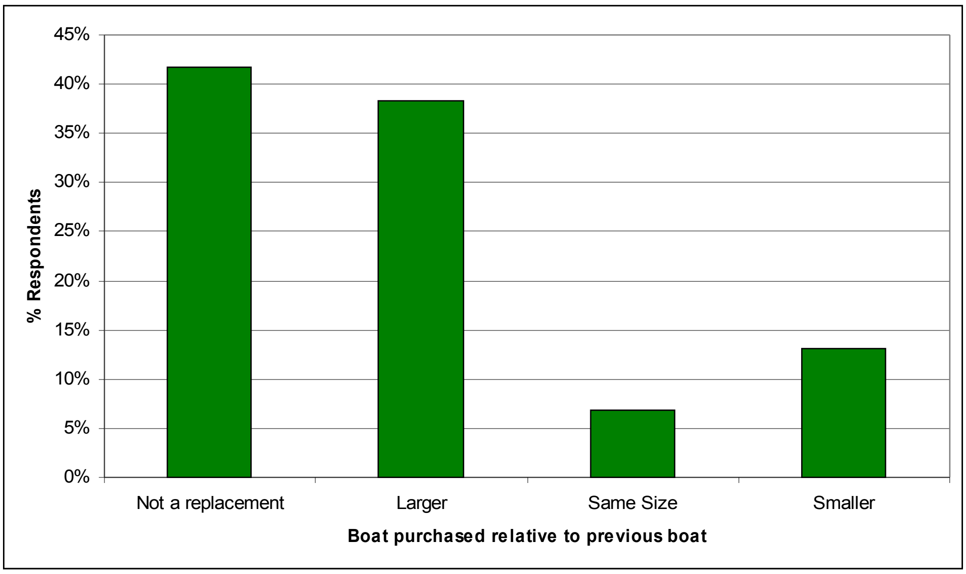

Figure 15 : Boats purchased relative to previous purchases

In 42% of cases, people were not purchasing to replace a previous boat. It seems they were simply expanding their fleet!

- *"Keeping the GP14s, but when finance permits looking also to buy another offshore cruising yacht.   Almost certainly a gaff cutter trailer-sailer"*

- *"Perfectly satisfied (last boat) and will keep it and love it, whatever other boats I might buy in the future."*

Where people were looking to replace, it was much more likely to be a larger boat. Interestingly, new boats and restoration boats (projects?) were most likely to be additions rather than replacements. Second hand (ready to sail) boats were the most likely to be larger than the previous boat.

7 How do people find out about the boats they buy?

We asked people how they found out about the last boat they purchased. Figure 16 compares the results for new and second hand boats as these were very different.

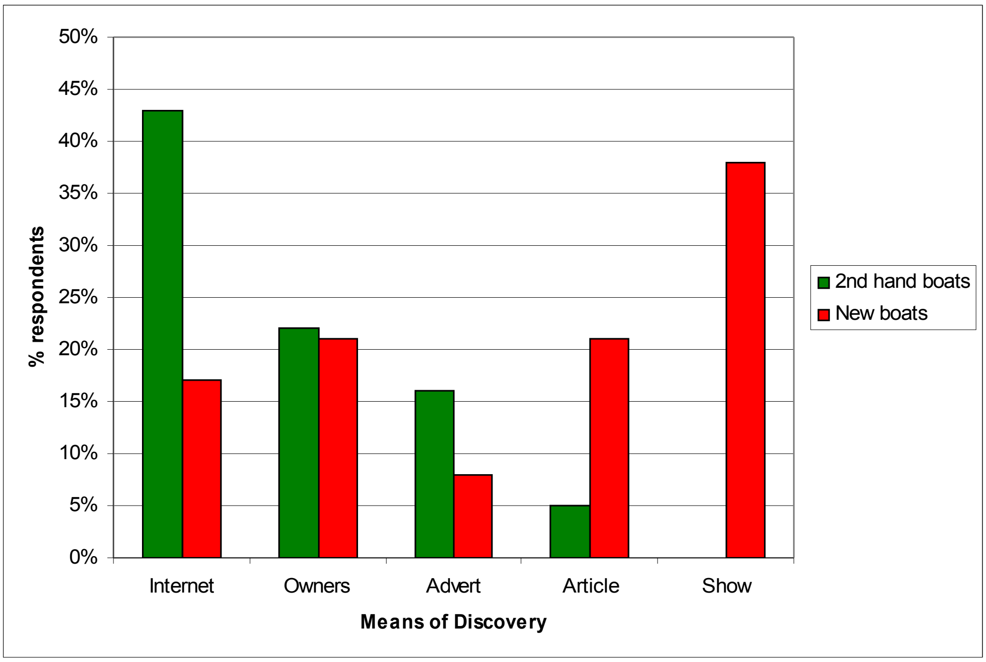

Figure 16 : How people found out about the last boat they purchased

For 2nd hand boats (the vast majority of purchases), the Internet is now the commonest way for people to find out about the boat they eventually buy.

- *"The Internet is a fantastic facility for boat searches! I especially like Boatshed.com with its many pics (even though they are a bit small) of each boat. BoatsandOutboards.co.uk has a bigger choice, but few photos and less info on each boat"*
- *"Online was excellent - ability to see photographs (extensive through Eastern Yachts with 40+ photos). Made pre-selection easy."*
- *"Bought on eBay - unseen and with 5 mins to end of auction, but a known type of boat which I wanted to own, an American design rare in Europe."*

In contrast, those who had bought a new boat had only found out about it on the Internet in 17% of cases. New boats are most likely to be encountered at a show (38% of cases). Magazine articles were also much more significant sources of information for new boat purchasers. And the show most commonly mentioned was Beale Park.

Of those who had bought a 2nd hand traditional wooden boat, none said they had found out about the boat at a show, but there are relatively few shows that feature second hand boats.

8 What boats are they thinking of buying next?

45% of respondents said they were currently thinking about buying another boat[5]. Half of them were people who had bought a boat in the past 3 years. It looks as if acquiring a 'new' boat stimulates, rather than satisfies, the appetite for another one!

We asked respondents what features were most/least important about their next (imagined) boat. Figure 17 shows the results in order of importance.

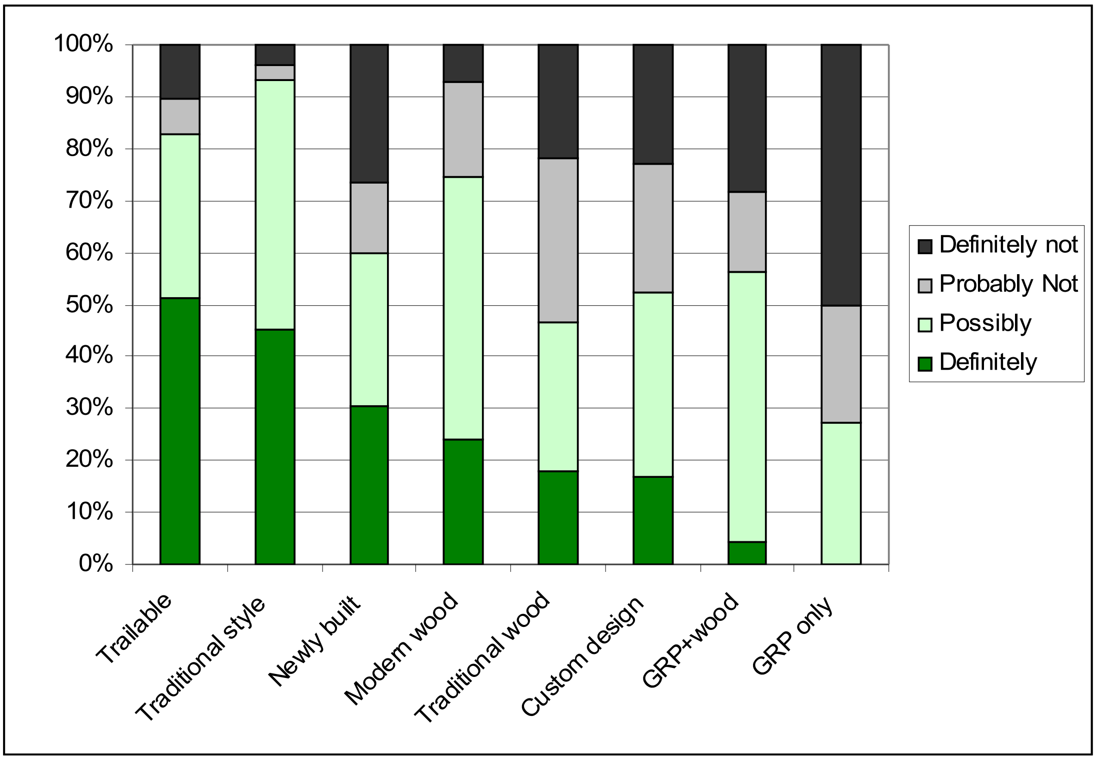

Figure 17 : Projected characteristics of next boat purchase

'Trailable' was the most important characteristic followed by 'traditional style'.

There are notable disparities between this chart (people's expressed intentions) and the characteristics of the boats they *actually* bought last time. This may simply reflect the gap between people's aspirations and practical reality. For example, 31% of people say that they are 'definitely' thinking of buying a <u>new</u> boat but only 14% of them did so last time around. Only 4% say they are 'definitely' thinking of buying a GRP boat (with wooden trimmings) and no-one plans to buy a pure GRP boat. Last time around, 39% bought GRP boats! In terms of construction materials, it may be that people are fairly open to making such decisions depending on the available boats and prices at the time they buy.

- *"Much as I love traditional wooden boats, I have had my times of maintaining vintage wooden yachts when I was younger. This one will be low maintenance, probably GRP, but might consider wood/epoxy. Good seakeeping and comfortable*

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[5] This percentage was the same whether the last boat was new or 2nd hand. It was higher in the case of kits and plans. This could be because they want a new project having completed the previous one, or it could be an "operant condition" of boat owners.

accommodation, with gaff cutter rig, now more important to me than material of construction."

However, there are two exceptions to this general tendency for the boats people aspire to own being more traditional than the ones they actually buy. For some reason, the projections for 'definite' modern wood boats are actually lower than last purchases and the projections of 'definite' traditional wooden boats are about the same as actual sales.

Figure 18 shows how people expect to find out about their next boat.

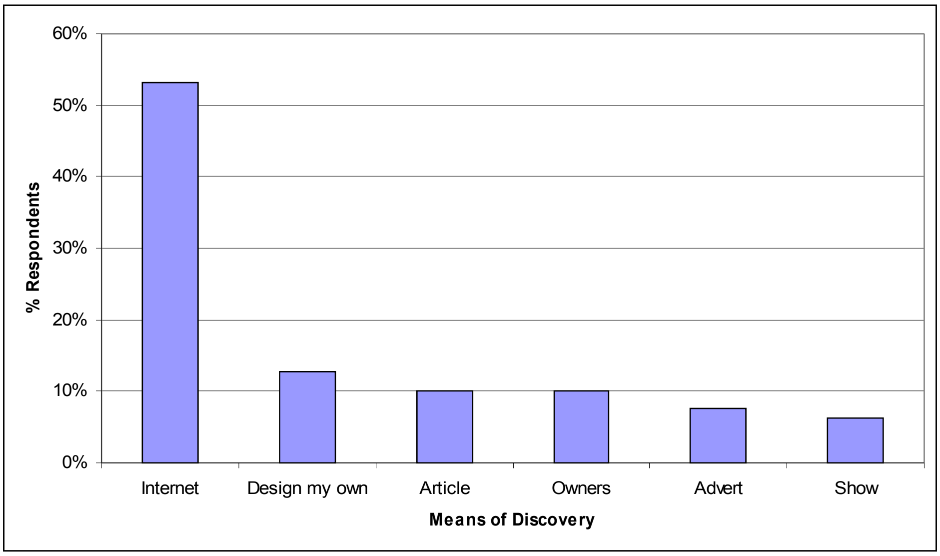

Figure 18 : How people expect to find their next boat

The Internet again is the dominant method. This chart suggests that people do not think of boat shows as the obvious place to visit to find their next boat. Even those who were definitely thinking of buying a new boat only cited shows in 13% of cases.

9 Which boat shows do people go to and how frequently?

In the survey, we listed 5 UK boat shows: London Excel, London Earls Court, Southampton, North or South Wales and Beale Park and asked respondents to tick which of these shows they had visited in the past 3 years: 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Whilst recognising that some of these shows had not been held in all 3 years, it still allowed us to calculate the show attendance patterns in our small sample.

60% of our sample had attended one or more of the 5 UK shows in the past 3 years. We shall call this group 'show goers'. 40% of our sample had not been to any UK shows in the past 3 years. We shall call these the 'no-shows' ☺.[6]

First of all, Figure 19 shows the proportion of our survey sample who attended each of the shows at least once in the past 3 years.

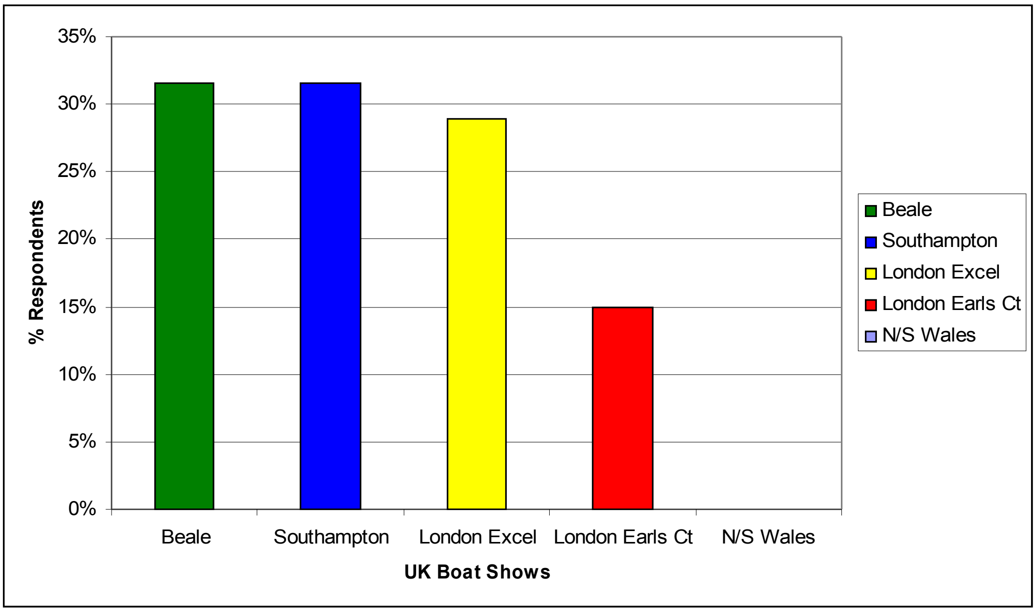

Figure 19 : Boat shows attended in the last 3 years[7]

Beale and Southampton both attracted 32% of our respondents and London Excel 29%. None of them went to either of the new Wales shows.

In the case of Beale, 8% of our sample had been to all 3 of the last 3 shows, 10% has been to 2 and 14% to only one of the last 3[8]. The trend in show attendance at all 4 shows is slightly downward, less markedly so at Southampton and Excel.

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[6] Rough calculations (based on the Watersports Survey 2007 figures and the published visitor figures at UK shows) suggest that our survey population are far more likely to be show-goers than the average boat owning household.

[7] Percentages add up to more than 100% because some people attended more than 1 of the shows.

[8] Beale exhibitors talk about "seeing the same faces every year". These data suggest that Beale might have a significant segment who actually attends only once every 2 or 3 years. The pattern at Southampton is similar although slightly less frequent.

We were interested to see the combinations of shows this population attended in the past 3 years. Figure 20 shows the result. The size of each bubble in this Venn diagram reflects the proportion of our survey sample who attended that show. The numbers are the actual number of individuals in any combination.

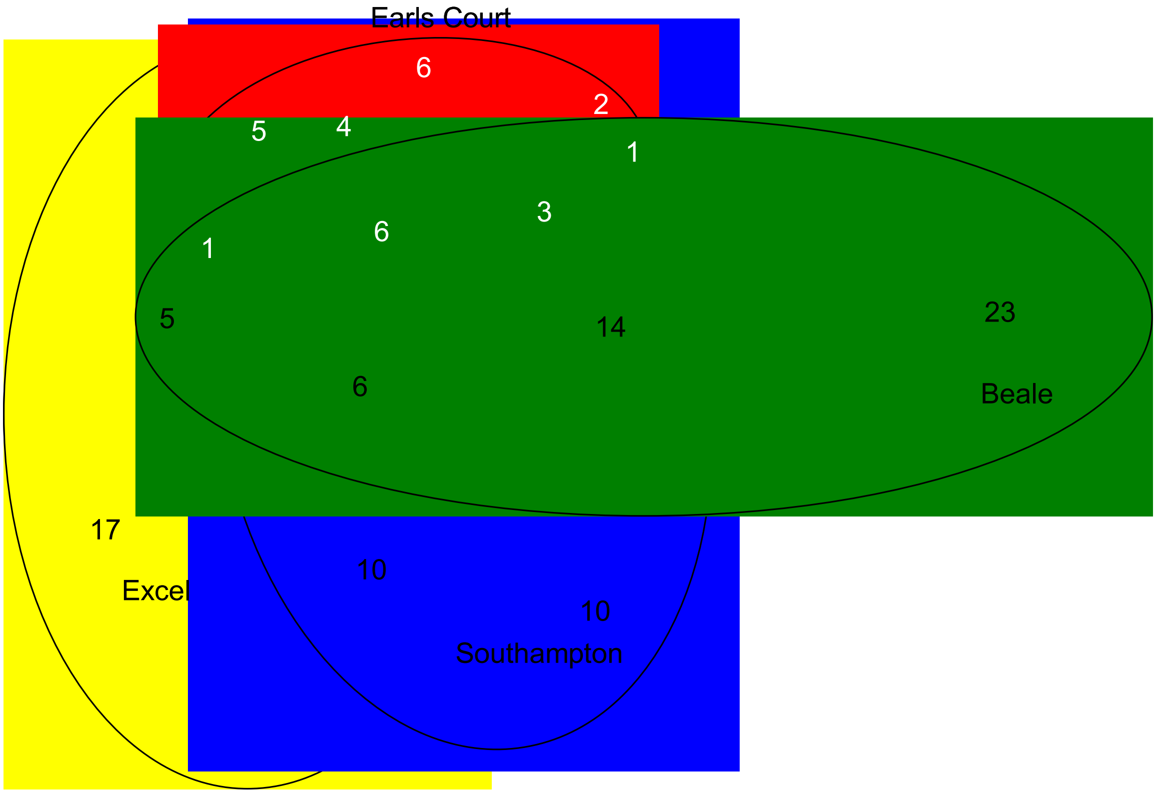

Figure 20 : Combinations of boat shows attended

Only 3% had been to all 4 shows. But the majority of show-goers had been to more than one. Beale, followed by Excel had the highest "unique" populations with 39% of Beale-goers not attending any other show whereas only 17% of Southampton-goers only attended Southampton and only 7% attendees at Earls Court only went to that show. The most common pair-wise combination was Beale and Southampton.

Obviously, we do not know how accurately these combinations reflect the total show going population but that might be useful information for any boat seller planning which combination of shows to target.

10 How does geography affect show attendance?

Figure 21 shows the geographic location of the show-goers (green dots) and the no-shows (red dots).

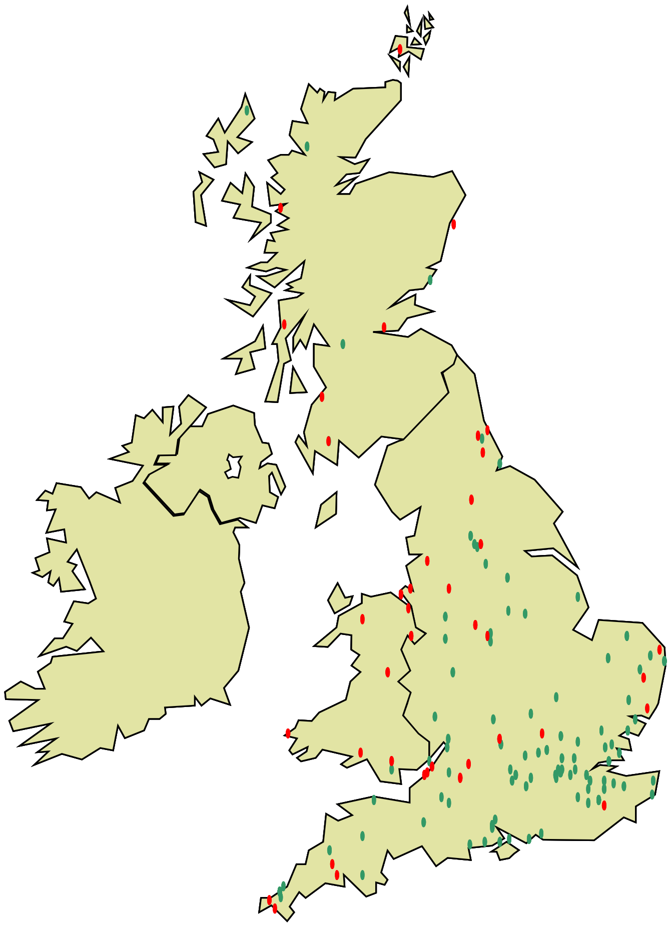

Figure 21: Geographic distribution of show-goers and no-shows

Proportionately, those respondents who live in the South are much more likely to go to one of the 4 shows than those living further North or West. Indeed 89% of our respondents who lived in London and the South East went to a show whereas this drops to 63% of those who live in Wales or the South West. This is hardly surprising given that all 4 boat shows are in the South. If you live in London or Brighton, no show is more than 60 miles away from you. Whereas if you live, say, in Norwich or Plymouth, all the shows are at least 100 miles away and if you happen to live North of the border, all shows are at least 300 miles away from you.[9]

- *"it would be good to have a boat show in the centre of the country, not as seems the norm in "the South"!*
- *"How about a boat show like the Beale Park show in Cornwall?"*

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[9] Alternatively, maybe Southerners prefer looking at boats whilst hardy Northerners and Westerners prefer simply sailing them? ☺

Figure 22 shows the distribution of show-goers for each of the 4 shows.

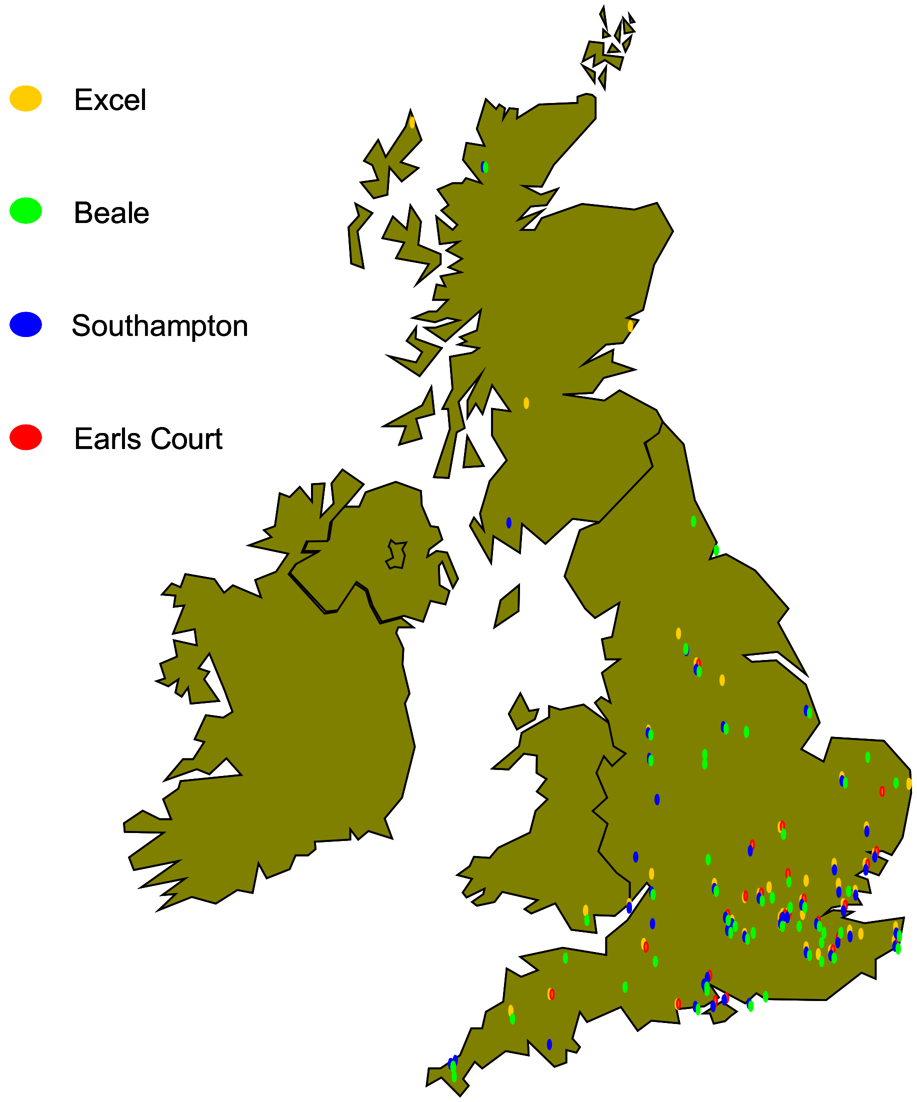

Figure 22 : Geographic distribution of show-goers for 4 UK shows

Beale and Southampton appear to have a slightly wider catchment area.

We also found a far greater geographical disparity between show-goers and no-shows for the 2 London shows than for Beale and Southampton. Figure 23 shows the median distance (in miles) from each show for the show-goers who did and did not choose to attend each of the shows[10].

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[10] i.e. this does not include people who did not go to ANY show.

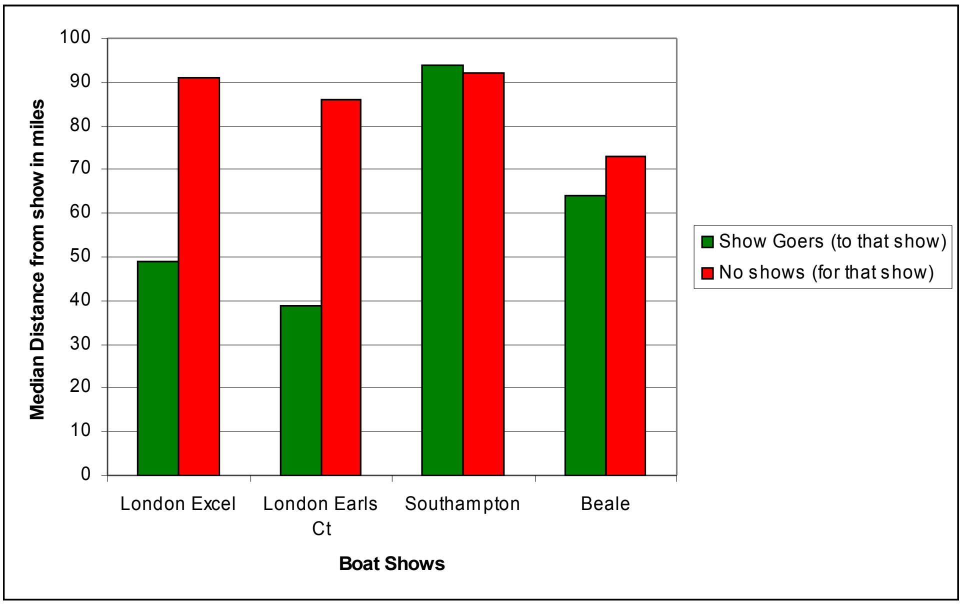

Figure 23 : Effect of distance on show attendance

So, the median distances which show-goers travel to Southampton (94 miles) and Beale (64 miles) are far higher than the median distance travelled to the London shows (~ 44 miles). Some of this would be because of the density of population close to the show locations but it also suggests (as does Figure 22) that more people are prepared to travel further to Beale and (particularly) Southampton.

On the other hand, Southampton's own survey[11] of show visitors shows 70% of them as coming from the South and South West. For example, only 3% came from the Eastern counties and 3% from North West England. But these data sample their entire visitor population which consisted of 52% non-boat owners who were probably more likely to have lived locally. Our sample was biased towards enthusiasts whom one might expect to travel further to a boat show.

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[11] We are grateful to the BMF for sharing a copy of this with us.

11 What is the relationship between show going and boat buying?

One motivation for this research was a better understanding of the relationship between boat shows and boat sales in the traditional-style boat sector.

The fact that only 11% of purchases of traditional style boats in any year might be new boats (Figure 8) is obviously a discouraging starting point. However, more encouraging is the fact that 38% of those new boat buyers say they found out about the boats at a show and that show was most likely to be Beale (Figure 16).

We can look at this relationship in 2 ways – are the people looking for a boat more likely to go to shows? And to what extent are people who buy new boats influenced by seeing them or finding out about them at shows?

In the case of the first question, the answer unfortunately seems to be 'no'. Only 13% of those who are currently thinking of buying a brand new boat say they expect to find it at a show (Figure 18). Also, if we take the subset of people who bought boats in 2006, 2007 and 2008, they were no more or less likely to go to shows than anyone else. However, the picture is different for the recent purchasers of new boats, 79% of whom were recent show-goers.

In the case of the second question, we asked all respondents whether they had ever (in their lifetimes) bought a boat at a show or first encountered one at a show or, at least, been influenced by talking to a vendor at a show. Figure 24 shows the results and how they differ depending on whether people are (recent) show-goers and whether their last purchase was a new boat.

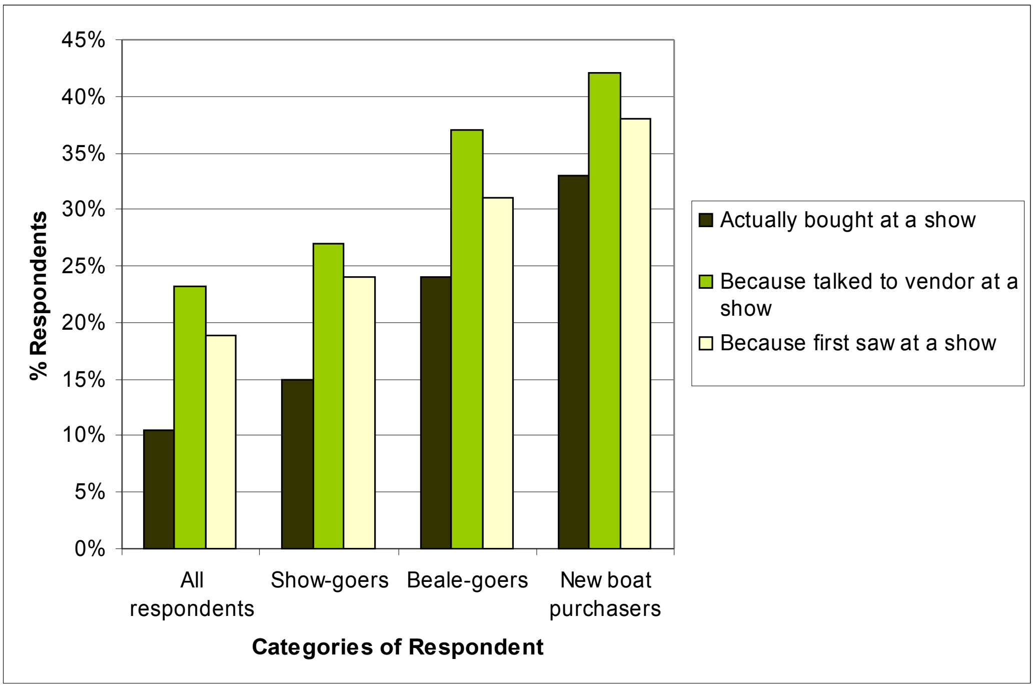

Figure 24 : Influence of show on boat buying across different segments

The responses to this question were consistent with findings elsewhere in this survey. Across the entire population, only 10% of people said they had ever bought any of their boats at a show[12]. Given the predominance of 2nd hand boat buying in our sample, this is not surprising.

- *"I don't buy new boats....or normally plastic boats, so I wouldn't want to go to a show"*

However, if we take the show-goers (whether or not they went to shows with the intention of buying a boat), they are (not surprisingly) more likely to do so (15%). In the case of Beale show-goers (the only UK show geared to this traditional-style market), this percentage rises to 24%.

If we take the (small) segment of new boat buyers, the percentage bought a boat at a show is much higher (33%) and 42% of them were influenced by talking to the vendor at the show.

- *"Talked to Andrew Wolstenholme at Beale about Coot design who put me on to Alex Jordan."*

- *"I've just ordered the first Bay Cruiser from Swallow Boats. Sailed in a BayRaider at Beale Park and then visited the workshop before I took the plunge"*

So, shows play a very significant role for the subset of boat owners who both go to them <u>and</u> buy new boats. What we don't know is whether shows effectively convert any non-intentional buyers into buyers or 2nd-hand buyers into new boat buyers.

[12] This percentage is consistent with the Southampton show survey. They asked show visitors whether they had bought or intended to buy a boat at the show that day. 9% said they intended to buy a new boat.

12 What would people like to see at a boat show dedicated to traditional-style boats?

The WBTA want to see higher show attendance of people interested in traditional style boats. The survey tried to establish what would make a dedicated traditional boat show more or less attractive to this population.

We listed 17 possible features and asked subjects to rate each one in terms of its importance to them. Figure 25 shows the responses in order of desirability.

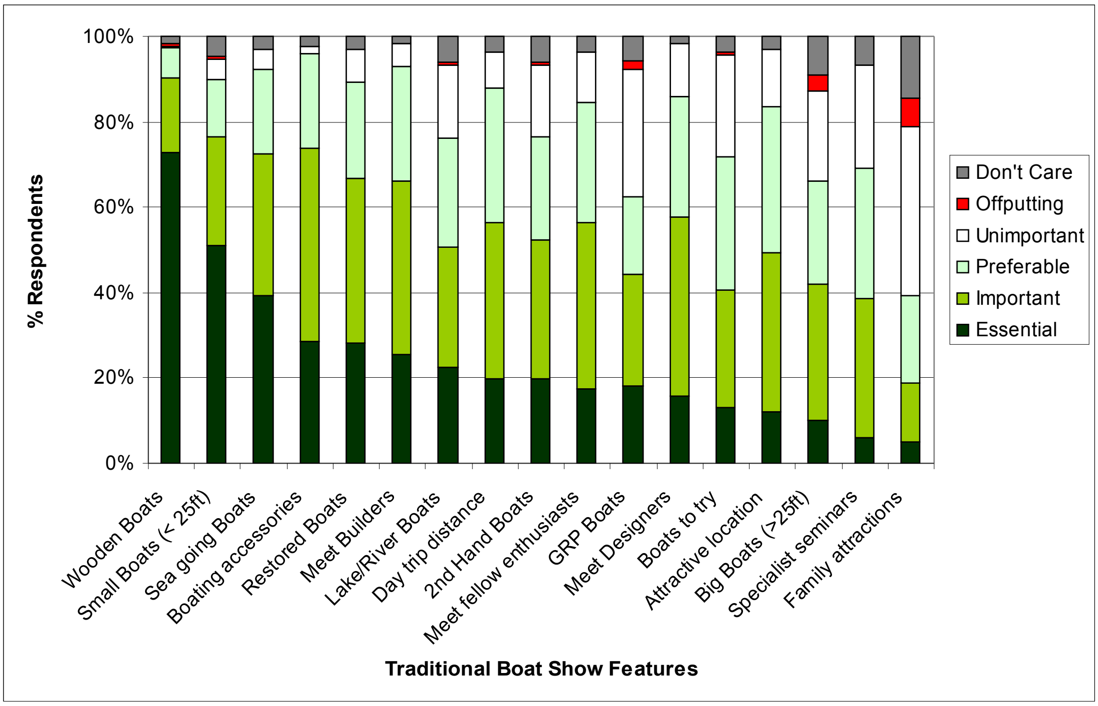

Figure 25 : Rating traditional boat show attractions

Only 2 features are seen as 'essential' by most subjects: wooden boats and small boats (i.e. boats less than 25 feet). Although the first of these is hardly surprising (given a show dedicated to traditional style boats), it is still interesting because only 53% of these people actually bought a wooden boat last time. GRP owners still like to look at and touch wooden boats and meet wooden boat owners even if they don't actually buy wooden boats.

- *"lots of deep varnish and gleaming bronze"*
- *"My working and family life and income don't really allow for an expensive traditional boat, but I'm hugely interested in traditional boats - their history, design and the community that builds, maintains and owns them."*
- *"Strange that people always crowd around the beautifully varnished wooden boat, sitting in the middle of a sea of white plastic".*

The gap between the ratings for small boats (under 25 ft) compared to big boats surprised us more. Was this an effect of a predominance of small boat owners in our sample? To some extent, yes, but we found that even those who had purchased big boats last time around were still twice as likely to rate the presence of small boats at the show as 'essential' compared to big boats. The small boat owners, though, showed relatively little interest in seeing large boats at the show. This might be because large boats suggest shows like Excel or Southampton where modern boats dominate? Alternatively, people might be taking into account the paucity of new, traditional style boats which are larger than 25 feet? Despite the focus on small boats, it did seem important that these were sea going boats.

GRP boats were not one of the more important show features even amongst GRP boat owners. Again, they may feel that they can readily find these at other shows - GRP could hardly constitute a unique selling point for a traditional boat show! The presence of 2nd hand boats at the show was not considered more important by people who had last bought 2nd hand. Featuring restored boats was more important to everyone regardless of whether their previous purchase involved restoration.

Only 3 features were considered 'off-putting' and even then by a very small number of people: GRP boats, big boats and family attractions. Most people saw family attractions as "unimportant", but given the age profile of our sample that is not surprising. Quite a few of the *comments*, however, did stress the need for family attractions:-

- *"Something interesting but related to boats for children, and others who tag along, and possibly something to take part in not just watch"*
- *"Anything for non boating partners, anything for kids"*
- *"Carousels etc. just to attract families with children. Boating things to do for children".*

We compared the ratings of show-goers and no-shows in case we could see a difference which might suggest ways to attract more of the no-shows. On the whole, ratings were very similar, but there were a few notable differences. In particular, the no-shows rated restored boats and 2nd hand boats as more essential than did the show-goers. Intriguingly, whether the show was within day trip range seems to matter more to show-goers more than it does to no-shows! At one level, that's obvious – why would someone who doesn't go to shows care how far away it is? At another level, it might suggest that distance is not itself the main reason why people do not go to shows.

Finally, we invited respondents to volunteer other features which would attract them to such a show. Here's a sample of their suggestions:

- *"Stuff on the history and prehistory of boats with replica examples."*
- *"Examples of coastal craft of Britain, yoles, cobles, skiffs, smacks etc."*
- *"Demonstrations/examples/ advice for amateur boat builders"*
- *"Places to get modifications and work not usually undertaken by amateurs and facts about traditional boats"*
- *"Cheap accommodation or campsite nearby"*
- *"Comfortable accommodations and restaurants within reasonable distance. Something for those who do not like boats (hard to believe) to visit."*
- *"Towing vehicles. Woodworking demonstrations."*
- *"Various engines - inboard and outboard"*
- *"Less Glitz - More practical boats and much more in the way of home built and kit boats - we are not all millionaires!"*

- *"The hardcore traditional boat world ignore the classic racing dinghies and therefore miss a very large potential clientele"*

- *"Festivals are more interesting than shows because you are meeting like minded owners with the love of their lives! We are lucky being close to Brest, Douarnenez and the Gulf du Morbihan. The second hand boat fair, run twice a year, nr. Trinity sur Mer Mille Sabords is my ultimate idea for a boat show with mainly second hand boats and parts mixed with new."*

13 Which boating magazines do they read?

We asked the respondents which boating magazines they either subscribed to or read. Figure 26 shows the results.

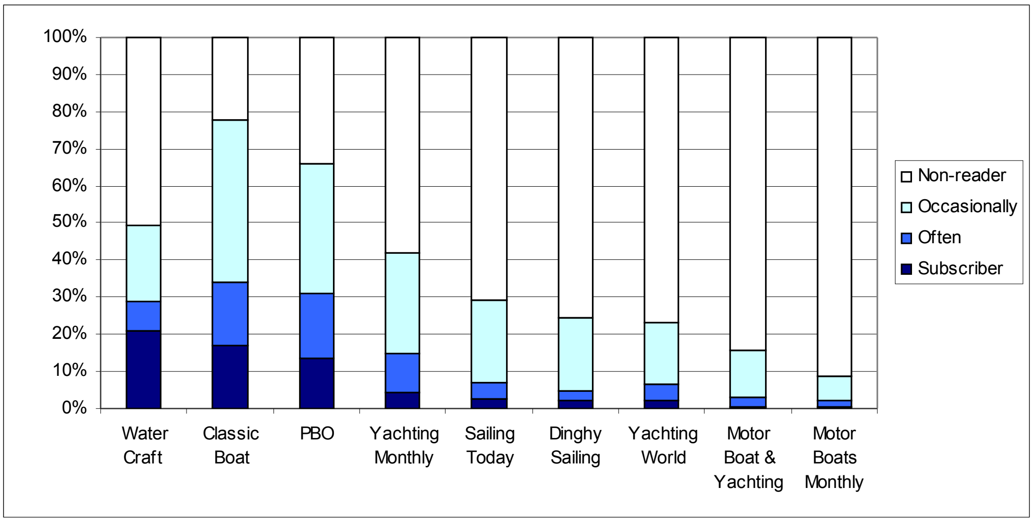

Figure 26 : Magazine readership

45% of our sample subscribed to at least one boating magazine. The main 3 represented were Water Craft (21%), Classic Boat (17%) and Practical Boat Owner (13%). The largest overlap was between Classic Boat and Water Craft. 41% of the Classic Boat subscribers (in this sample) also subscribed to Water Craft.

We had a brief look at the relationship between the subscribers of the top 3 magazines and the kinds of boat purchases they have made. This may be of interest to WBTA members deciding where to advertise their products or services.

Figure 27 shows the proportion of subscribers whose last boat purchase was new or 2nd hand.

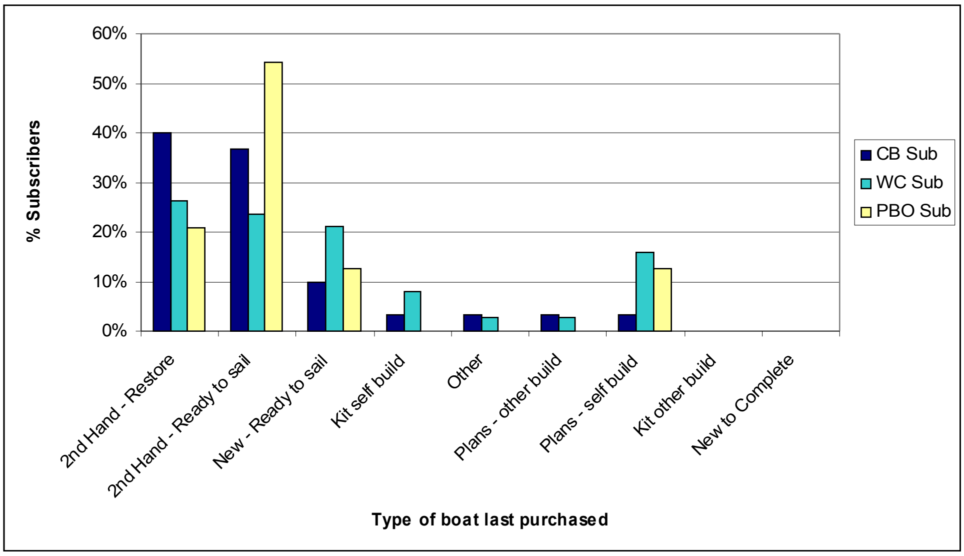

Figure 27 : Type of boat purchased by magazine subscribers

Interestingly, these figures suggest that Water Craft subscribers are more likely to buy new boats than the other two magazines and are twice as likely to do so as the general traditional-style boat owning population. Classic Boat subscribers are most likely to buy 2nd hand boats, especially ones which need restoration. PBO subscribers are most likely to buy 2nd hand boats which are ready to sail.

Next, we compared the size of boat last purchased.

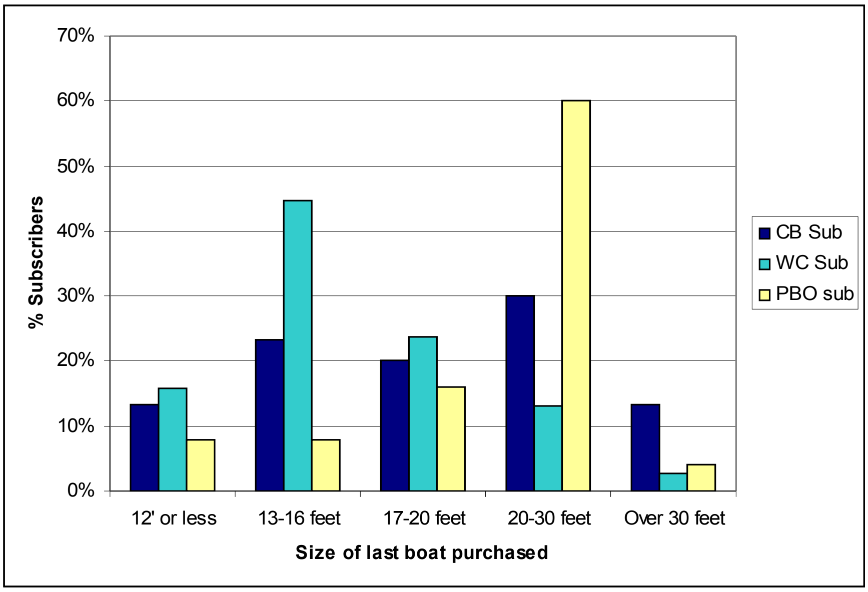

Figure 28 : Magazine subscribers and size of last boat purchased

For Water Craft subscribers, the most likely purchase is a 13-16 foot boat. For PBO subscribers, it is a 20-30 foot boat. Classic Boat subscribers have a more balanced spread with a small peak in the 20-30 foot range. Perhaps more Water Craft subscribers can afford to buy new because they are tending to buy smaller boats?

Next, Figure 29 compares the subscribers' choice of wood or GRP.

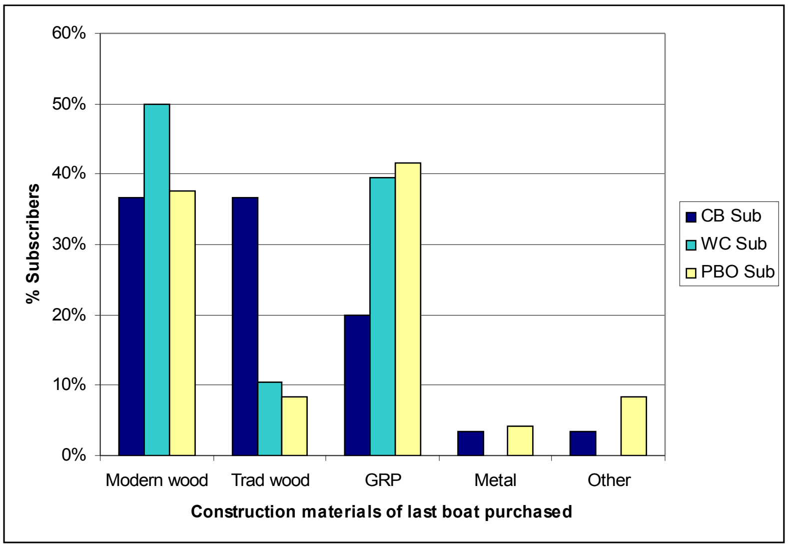

Figure 29: Magazine subscribers and construction materials

So, there are a few surprises here. The figures suggest that Classic Boat subscribers are the most likely to buy wooden boats and by far the most likely to buy traditional wooden boats (albeit 2nd hand). 50% of Water Craft subscribers bought a modern wood boat but, surprisingly, 39% bought GRP – a similar proportion to PBO subscribers.

Finally, we can look at the amount spent by each magazine subscriber on the last boat purchased,

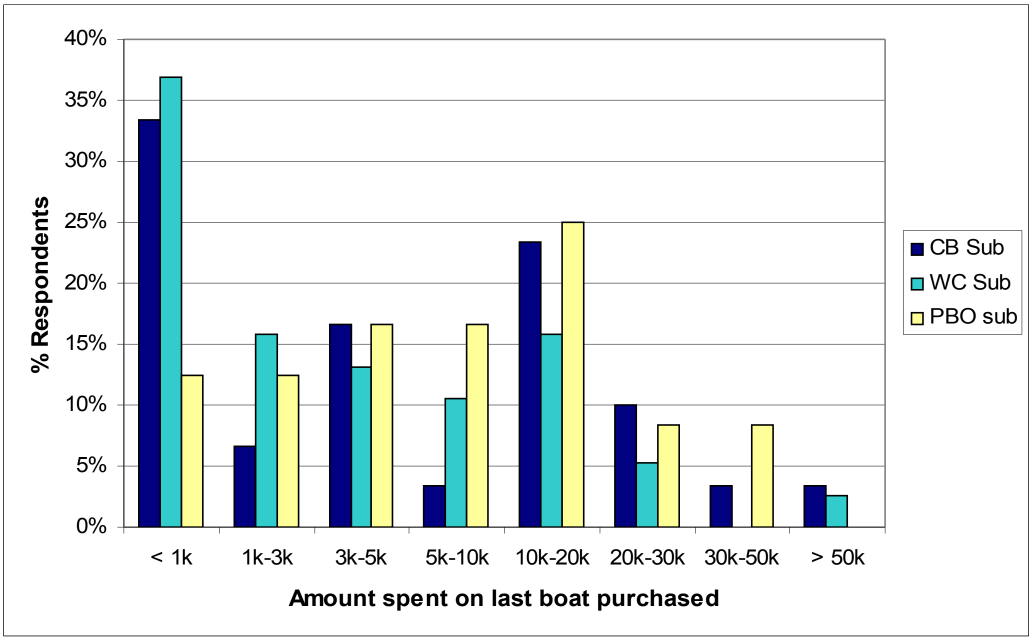

Figure 26 : Amount spent on last boat by different magazine subscribers

A significant proportion of both Water Craft and Classic Boat subscribers spent less than £1k on their last purchase. PBO subscribers rarely spent so little. The most likely explanation is that the former were often buying old boats in need of extensive repair/restoration. As we saw earlier, PBO subscribers were more likely to buy larger, 2nd hand boats which were (presumably) newer and ready to sail. These, it seems, were more expensive.

14 Conclusions

If our survey sample is representative of a wider population of traditional-style boat buyers (TBB's), then the good news is that they are life-time enthusiasts who buy a 'fresh' boat every 3-5 years. And acquiring a 'fresh' boat seems to stimulate, rather than satisfy their appetite for another one. Maybe their life circumstances change often enough to require a different boat or perhaps they like the novelty of trying something different or are searching for the perfect boat whilst happily never quite finding it. The good news is that they keep buying boats.

Unfortunately, the less good news for boat-builders is that only 11% of TBB purchases were <u>new</u> boats and none of our sample had recently purchased a new boat made of traditional (rather than modern) wood. The vast majority bought 2nd hand boats which were either ready to sail or in need some repair or restoration. And they spent remarkably little doing so. On the positive front, the new boat purchases (mostly in the £10-20k bracket) were likely to be large sailing dinghies or open boats, in a traditional style but made of modern wood or GRP. But the TBB's were as likely to buy plans and build the boats themselves as buy (complete) new boats.

Those TBB's who bought traditional wooden boats (clinker/carvel) did not buy new and tended to buy larger boats (not dinghies). Many of these required restoration.

Only 10% of those who had bought boats since 2000 were first time buyers. This suggests the main market is existing boat owners unless we can find better ways to penetrate new customer segments.

A healthy majority (60%) of the TBB sample (who lived in the South) went to one or more of the UK boat shows but very few go to the same show every year. Beale and Southampton were the most common combination. Unfortunately very few (10%) had ever bought a boat at a show or even found out about one that way, but this is mainly because they don't buy new boats. For those who do buy new (traditional-style) boats, the shows (especially Beale Park) play a much more influential role. Unfortunately, though, they don't seem to consider visiting shows as a way of finding their next intended boat, even if they want to buy a brand new one.

The Internet is seen as the dominant communication medium for finding 2nd hand, traditional-style boats but does not work nearly as well for finding new boats.

TBB's see the most important features of a dedicated traditional-style boats show as being wooden boats and small (salt water) boats. This is true even for those who actually own GRP or large boats. The ratings by no-shows suggest that the inclusion of 2nd hand boats and restored boats might attract more of them to come to a show.

Trying boats out, an attractive location, big boats, seminars and family attractions are considered least essential by this population.

It's clear that all 4 Southern-based shows are missing out on customers in the midlands, North, Wales and East coast. With regards to the individual shows though, it looks as if, within some reasonable distance limit, the nature of the show may be more critical than the travelling distance.

15 Some recommendations

15.1 Setting expectations for new boat sales at shows

We wanted this research to help us understand the relationship between traditional boat buying and show going. In particular, whether more dedicated traditional boat shows in this country could attract a much higher traditional boat buying footfall and sell a lot more new boats?

If we take our survey sample as representative (albeit at the more enthusiastic end of the market), then we can attempt to calculate how many new, traditional style boats we should *expect* to be sold at, say, Beale or Southampton given their visitor numbers.

Beale had 7000 visitors. Let's say that 3000 of them were 'serious' boat owners. According to our survey, if people buy a boat every 5 years, then 20% of the 3000 might be in the market to buy a boat THIS year – that makes 600 people. According to our survey, 60% of that 600 might buy a traditional-style (rather than modern) boat. That makes 360 people. According to our survey, only 11% of these people are likely buy a NEW, traditional-style boat. That makes 40 people. And finally, according to our survey, 24% (of the Beale goers) are likely to actually buy at the show – which results in 10 new boats purchased at Beale in any year.

I don't know how accurate this model is but it is, at least, thought-provoking. For example, even if we managed to create a show which increased the footfall of serious traditional boat owners to, say, 5000, the number of new boats sold would only rise to 16 which is not a huge number when divided between the exhibiting boat vendors.

Using a similar model, the Southampton figures are not much better for traditional-style boats, despite the much higher footfall. Southampton says that 50% of their show visitors are boat owners and only 9% may buy a new boat at the show. If we assume that only 10% of these are likely to purchase a traditional style boat[13], then, given a footfall of 127,000, and the parameters derived from this survey, our model predicts 21 new, traditional style boats might be sold at the Southampton show. [14]

This suggests that drastically improving the percentage of traditional boat buyers at any show is not itself going to radically increase the number of boats sold at the show. This is because the major limiting factor is the small percentage of the TBB population who currently buy new boats at all.

15.2 Helping people find <u>new</u> boats

The TBB's relied heavily on the Internet to find 2nd hand boats but didn't find it so useful for finding new boats and they did not seem to think about visiting shows for that purpose. Only 13% of those who planned to buy a brand new boat said they expected to find it at a show.

It is possible that more people would buy traditional-style new boats if there were a better gateway site or means of searching for and comparing different options, features and prices online. The 2nd hand boat sale sites are well designed for this in that they are (a) all collected in one place with short, consistent, descriptions and photographs, (b) they are categorised and

[13] This 10% estimation is based on calculating the percentage of 2nd hand sailing boats for sale on boatshed.com, boatsandoutboards.com and ybw.com which could be categorised as traditional in style. If someone has a better estimate, please let us know!

[14] We are happy to share these 'finger in the wind' spreadsheet models with anyone who thinks they'd like to play with the numbers or (hopefully) give us better ones ☺

(c) you can search for the type of boat or price range you are interested in. In contrast, unless you know the name of the new boat you'd like to buy or the name of its builder, you are unlikely to stumble across it in the Internet. Many of the WBTA boats are not widely known classes of boat.

An option for the WBTA would be to create and run such a gateway site where all their members' (and other traditional boat vendors') new boats could be listed so that potential buyers could search for the type of boat they were interested in and compare styles, features, looks and prices across different vendors. Obviously, this website itself would need to be brought to people's attention, i.e. it would need advertising in the relevant magazines and be linked from other sites.

Based on this survey, stressing the variety and flexibility of design and customisation which new wooden boats afford may be a more important message to get across to potential boat buyers (both at shows and online) than focussing on construction materials and methods as the principal selling point. Our research suggests that the latter may be less critical factors to purchasers than to vendors.

15.3 The role of a traditional boat show

On the basis of this survey, we suggest that simply increasing the density of TBB visitors at a boat show would not itself significantly increase sales of new boats.

The primary role of such shows should perhaps be to promote an attractive brand of traditional-style boats with a modern flavour to a wider, and hopefully, younger market. If it is reliant on the current demographic, this market is at risk of dying out[15]. For some builders, this could feel like a betrayal of their craft and weakening their brand, but it is arguably the only way to grow the market. The buyers in our survey are less sentimental about what they buy!

The shows should promote the attraction of owning a beautiful looking, novel or unique design of traditional style boat in a mass market. This may require a liberal approach to the construction methods and materials in order to promote this style of boat afresh to a younger market. The survey suggests that, when it comes to actual purchases, the type and style of boat is more important to traditional boat enthusiasts than the actual construction material or methods. The survey suggests that currently the most promising sector may be traditional style boats in the 13-20 foot range using modern materials and methods.

Arguably, the curse of the traditional boat market (at least to new boat builders) is the sheer longevity of wooden boats which provide TBB's with a ready supply of inexpensive (old) boats[16]. And the "top end" of this market, for some TBB's, is not a brand new boat but a vintage 'original' restored to its original glory.

And this product longevity and restoration is very much in tune with a more environmentally conscious society. Maybe future shows should promote both the appeal of beautifully restored boats but also the skills and services WBTA members can offer in this regard. A show that included (stylish) 2nd hand wooden boats with restoration experts on hand to advise and offer their services might attract traditional boat owners who today have no reason to go to a show and create new business for WBTA members who offer restoration as part of their business.

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[15] Although, given the longevity of the boats, it could last a while!

[16] For example, the average age of a sample of 200 sailing boats for sale on www.boatshed.com is 29 years. The median is also 29 years! And that's not counting traditional boats!

15.4 Investigating the 25-40 year old market

Our survey population were buying their first boats when they were in their 20's. What boats are today's young adults and families buying? Are they buying boats at all? The age profile of Southampton show visitors is certainly younger than our survey sample but this includes 50% of non boat owners visiting the show as an attraction. Maybe the younger element is attracted by the show rather than buying boats.

It would be good to try to understand better the younger sector and how and why modern, traditional style boats might appeal to them.