



OUR ANDY ...

Ashore and after the penultimate race of the Fireball Worlds a voice was heard to ask. “So, who is this Andy Thompson guy?” Quick as a flash his neighbour {at that yacht club bar} said; “Oh, I know him, he is, or was a member of my club. He’s a crew, but not any old crew.” Continuing he said. “Put simply, Andy is one of the most decorated sailors on the circuit. Not counting his amassed pile of local and regional titles, it is his national and international record that stands him apart from the rest of us.”

Andy Thompson’s love affair with competitive sailing hatched while crewing for his late father Ronnie at East Antrim Boat Club on Larne Lough. Father and son thereafter raced the Irish circuit. Andy got his first taste of ‘International’ sailing in 1991 when the Thompsons competed at the GP14 worlds at Cape May - Andy was hooked. His father however, was soon looking for a replacement crew as his son had moved away from a troubled Northern Ireland to find work with English sailmakers *Pinnell & Bax*. It was the dream job – sailing and getting paid to do it! On leaving *P&B* he moved to the west midlands and *Speed Sails* where his relationship with the late great Richard Estaugh blossomed. Currently Andy is employed at the huge *Sunseeker* superyacht shipyard complex in Poole Dorset...



‘THE THOMPSON TABLE of TRIUMPHS’

WHEN	WHAT	WITH
2000	GP14; World Champion	<i>Richard Estaugh</i>
2000	GP14; Irish National Champion	<i>Ruan O’Tiarniagh</i>
2002	GP14; British ‘Inland’ Champion	<i>Andy Hately</i>
2003	FIREBALL; British Champion	<i>Shane McCarthy</i>
2007	FIREBALL; World Champion (2nd)	<i>Vince Horley</i>
2010	SCORPION; British Inland Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>
2011	SCORPION; British Inland Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>
2012	SCORPION; British Inland Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>
2015	GP14; UK National Champion	<i>Shane McCarthy</i>
2015	GP14; UK Inland Champion	<i>Shane McCarthy</i>
2015	FIREBALL; British Inland Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>
2016	GP14; UK National Champion	<i>Shane McCarthy</i>
2019	GP14; UK National Champion	<i>Sam Watson</i>
2022	GPI4; Irish National Champion	<i>Shane McCarthy</i>
2022	FIREBALL; World Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>
2022	FIREBALL; National Champion	<i>Tom Gillard</i>

Whether– hiking or trapezing – Andy has raced in a variety of racing sail-boats, for example: the Merlin Rocket, 18 ft Skiff, RS400, Flying 15 and 1720’s to name but a few. The above table therefore reflects not only his favourite craft but in ‘pot hunting’ terms, the most successful.

Reflecting on his successes Andy is quick to attribute his learning curve to the late and great Richard Estaugh for whom he worked, sailed and celebrated. Together they won the 2000 GP14 Worlds in Durban, South Africa. Conversely, many of his leading helms are also quick to acknowledge Andy’s talents:

Lifelong friend and also a multi champion helm, Shane McCarthy from Greystones in Ireland said. “When Andy steps aboard, the boat comes alive – a taskmaster but a delight to sail with.” North Sails’ Tom Gillard – Andy’s Fireball world champion helm – echoes Shane’s comments, while Simon Relph mentioned, that while he never actually shared a GP with ‘Thompo’ (nickname) “Andy crewed both on my ‘half tonner’ and a 1720 keelboat creating more anecdotes than I would care, *not* to share! Yes, ‘Thompo’ was and is indeed a much sought after crewman, and rightly so.” The immediate past President of the GP14 International Association Curly Morris, said. “What Andy lacked in educational certificates he more than made up with his unique vision; he has this ability to ‘see the wind’ spot shifts that no one else can see. Truly he is a very special guy.”



Born in Larne, Co Antrim in 1972 Andy Thompson’s early years were no different from the average youngster/teenager dodging bullets and bonfires; Northern Ireland was not a comfortable place during what was termed ‘The Troubles’. Educated at the Antiville Primary School and Larne High School academia was not something he craved. He was very much hands on. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work in the marine trade which saw him departing County Antrim shores. At *Pinnel & Bax* he learnt his craft as a sail maker, rigger and GRP boat builder. But another opportunity had emerged; to work, watch and learn from the legend that was Richard Estaugh, was too good to ignore.

Richard took Andy under his wing and their relationship – both ashore and afloat – culminated in Durban, South Africa when ‘the big lad’ from Northern Ireland followed his East Antrim BC co-members, the Fekkes brothers, with a World Championship title. EABC Commodore Lucy Whitford said. “There’s not too many clubs around the UK that can count three world champions among its membership. Speaking on behalf of East Antrim, we’re very proud of our Andy.” Continuing, she said. “Although his life is across the water now, he continues to sail under the EABC burgee, regardless where in the world he’s racing.”

Final word is from Dot, Andy’s proud mother who remarked, “If he keeps his winning streak up, I’ll need a builder to extend the already cluttered ‘trophy room’ at Coastguard road. Yep, that’s my boy.”



