

Philips Innovator - the picture on the Welcome page

Philips entered a 17m aluminium sailboat PHILIPS INNOVATOR in the 1985/86 Whitbread Round the World Race, with Dirk Nauta as skipper. The Dutch built boat and its crew had spent the year before the event training and entered most big boat events such as the Fastnet to tune both crew and boat. In parallel Philips



Eindhoven and Innovator's co-sponsors were busy creating advertising material, which could capitalise on the worldwide event. Opportunities for promoting Innovator were planned, and advertising opportunities using the Philips Innovator logo specially created for the event. Competitions during the event such as distance sailed and daily boat positions were suggested. Plans were made for special customers to visit each of the stopovers around the world. Every Product Division, while participating in the concern organised activities, could also make local arrangements, including visits to Innovator for outstanding performers.

With the start and finish at Portsmouth, Philips UK was no exception. Philips Innovator envelope stickers were distributed to secretaries and posters started to appear on notice boards, courtesy of Eindhoven and Nigel Rigler of UK Central Publicity. But more was expected!

The precise sequence of events that followed remains unclear. Bill South, Technical Director, Gavin Goudie of ISA and Neil Mcmillan of MEL had met up sailing in the Solent. After a few phone calls they met together with Nigel to see what else could be done to support Philips Innovator. It was agreed to try and contact all Philips employees who owned a boat with the aim of getting as many as possible at the noon start off Gilkicker on Saturday September 28th. Nigel promised Philips Innovator flags and dodgers for every boat with the Crews kitted out in 'Innovator' emblazoned Helly Hansen wet gear, sweatshirts, ladies scarves and sports type peaked caps.

Gavin and Neil embarked upon the task of finding employee boat owner, their boat size and where it was moored. Vista emails and Sports and Social notice boards carried information about these plans and soon the replies and questions started coming back. 'I don't have a boat but can I get involved?' More help for Gavin and Neil was required so an informal Innovator team was formed.

Conveniently employees based in the London area formed the kernel. Tony M provided access to the Philips Electronic UK pages on BT's PRESTEL, later to carry the daily positions throughout the event, and to Philips own viewdata system MOVIES. These two media provided the link to many Philips customers and suppliers, inviting their participation in the competitions, joining in the spirit of the promotion.



Meanwhile Neil made contact with the Whitbread organisers to plan the gathering of the Philips sailboat fleet at the Solent start. Gavin made contact with Jop Geevers, the Commodore of the Dutch Philips sailing club PZV, to learn that they planned to sail several boats to the Solent, to be at the start. Nigel Rigler and his secretary Jean Fagg were the UK focus for the growing flow of poster and newsletters from Central Publicity about the Innovator boat and its crew. Bob Richardson, based at Mullard Southampton, made berthing arrangement at Port Hamble and liaised with everyone to make the 'Captains and Crew' dinner at the RAF Sailing Club next door an occasion worthy of Innovator.

It was a period of excitement and anticipation. The numbers of crew and those coming by road to the Captain Dinner changed hourly. The team relied upon Vista email as the means by which everyone else informed. In fact a number of the team not already on Vista were provided with ISA screens or Movies TVs for the period of the event. Everyone was contributing to make the whole thing a big success for Philips.

Nigel Rigler stimulated a number of divisions to take up exhibition space at the Whitbread Fleet base at Camper and Nicholson's marina at Gosport. In particular there were Consumer Electronics with In-Car (or Boat) Entertainment and the recently launched Camcorder, Philips Telecom then responsible for the DECCA Boat Navigator plus their wide range of mobile communications products, Lighting, and Small Domestic Appliances for Philishave and other personal products.



While individual divisions took on the task of distributing Innovator newsletters, press cuttings and the plans for support on the day to their customers and suppliers, the team took on the task of keeping all employees informed. Gavin's internal letters came into being during the July and outlined the plans and extending the invitation to all employees to get involved. Skippers planning to take their boat to the start were encouraged to make contact with the growing list of crew and eager enthusiasts in order to find everyone a berth for the weekend. Some 17 UK and 7 PZV boats were on the list with the PZV boats arriving during the preceding week. We could not just let these visitors fend for themselves! It was about this time that J

Veeneklaas the CE Managing Director emerged not only as a boat owner - the biggest in the employees fleet – he was experienced at FLEET SAILING. This skill necessitated a sailboat rally to Cowes on the Friday with Fleet Sailing mid Solent on the way.

After the epic sail to Cowes on a crisp clear cold day, the fleet returned to the Hamble and the Captains Dinner. Bill South and J Venenklaas gave speeches of encouragement and best wishes to which skipper Dirk replied. Before we left the RAF Yacht Club, the PZV challenged us to form a UK sailing club. Those skippers, crew and enthusiasts at the dinner were to provide the nucleus and to work during the Whitbread event on meeting this challenge. The Saturday morning was misty as the Philips fleet left the Hamble at about 7.00 am to make for the start line off Gilkicker Point. Bedecked in Innovator flags and dodgers, everyone had on their Helly Hansen wetsuit.

We were not alone! It seemed that the whole Solent sailing and motor boat fraternity was on the water all trying to anchor on the same spot. Plus many pleasure boats ploughed their way between the anchored small craft often with complete disregard for safety, one such boat

actually catching the anchor line and merrily towing it several hundred yards before the chorus of foghorns alerted the 'driver'.

At 10.00 am the competing Whitbread boats sailed up and down the spectator fleet giving everyone an opportunity to see these up to the minute Ocean going boats with their crews lining the decks and flying their sponsor's colours. Nearing the time of the start the shallow waters became choppy from the weaving power craft requiring everyone to have 'one hand for themselves and one for the boat!'

The start was over quickly as the Whitbread fleet made for Hurst Point and the Needles, followed by hundreds of spectator boats. The Philips fleet broke up and boats made for their home port in time for work on Monday. After the excitement of the start, the team kept everyone informed of Innovator's progress through the various media. While similar supporting activities were being organised at every Whitbread stopover, the team started to put their ideas together on the constitution of the Philips Sailing Association.

An inaugural meeting of the Philips Sailing Association was held at the Chichester Yacht Club on 8th March the following year. With 40 people in attendance, the officers were elected. After these formalities photos and videos of the Whitbread start were on show followed by a dinner. Two prime tasks were put in hand, one to draft a constitution, the second to organise events around the return of the Whitbread fleet.

Innovator's return was in high winds, which prevented a Philips sailboat fleet greeting Innovator. However many PSA and Philips employees were at Camper and Nicholsons to welcome Innovator home 2nd overall on handicap. Those present will remember sharing the cans of 'special Whitbread' with the crew. The formal reception for Dirk Nauta and his crew was held on the evening of the finish. Among those present were the crew and their families, the press, PZV members and PSA members. During this reception, the PSA Commodore Bill South presented Dirk

Nauta with a set of Uffa Fox books to commemorate Innovator's achievements. This was followed by an evening afloat on the 'Solent Scene' where a cake cooked by Innovator's chef was eaten accompanied by a cocktail created by the Cocagne Hotel Eindhoven barman, a blue explosive mixture 'Innovator'.

The PSA constitution was ready for a formal acceptance. It featured strongly on getting people afloat which takes the form of the Annual Novice Open day, rallies organised for the two main locations of boats on the East and South Coasts, and for the early years no subscription of Philips employees and pensioners. In 1993 the increasing numbers of retired and ex Philips members required that the eligibility for membership had to change. Also with more stringent work regimes, subscriptions became necessary to cover printing and postage.

Note. I wrote this article in 1994, with apologies to anyone I've omitted.
Tony M.