

Freedom *n.* – the ocean is the limit!

**Freedom *n.* “the power to order one’s own actions”, “ability”, “leeway”.
These are a few paradigms associated with Dis-Able Sailing’s yacht Freedom.**

Bob Schahinger

If you sometimes think that sailing gets tough, ponder this. Would you be up to it if you lost say your sight, or legs? This story by new RSAYS member Bob Schahinger is about such sailors and the special craft in the Squadron pool that gives them the freedom to have a go. Read on and be inspired.



Bob Schahinger

Yachting takes many forms; from sociable, relaxing leisure pastime, to high adrenalin, high performance sport at the frontier of innovation and technology. It has something to offer all ages and abilities, regardless of their gender, race or creed. Although the group Dis-Able Sailing Inc. on our yacht *Freedom* does not offer the high performance aspect of sailing, it certainly offers people with a disability a chance to enjoy sailing and all that goes with it.

An Unusual Genesis

Freedom is a Payne 7.4 metre yacht designed specifically to be sensitive to the needs of disabled sailors, with a large, open clear cockpit with sufficient seating for at least eight people. To minimise foredeck work, all halyards lead over the cabin. Constructed of western red cedar and reinforced with double bias or plain weave fabrics with an 800kg bulb lead ballast, *Freedom* was built in 2000 on the Gold Coast by young unemployed people ‘Working for the Dole’. The project was organised by the Salvation Army, hence the design is affectionately known as ‘Salvo’. Salvo’s are cruised and raced by sailors with disabilities in Queensland, Tasmania and on Sydney Harbour. *Freedom* carries a full set of sails including spinnaker and was purchased second-hand from Sailability Gold Coast by Dis-Able Sailing Inc. in 2007.

Dis-Able Sailing Inc. was formed in 2006 by a group of Sailability enthusiasts from Adelaide Sailing Club to make it possible for people with a disability to learn to sail a yacht and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow sailors.

During the past three years *Freedom*, initially based at the Cruising Yacht Club of SA and now at the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron, has competitively raced the Twilight series with several people with a disability, from a leg amputee who uses a wheelchair to one who is totally blind, and accompanied by at least one able bodied sailor. With over 20 years of experience at state, national and international level Bob Schahinger, the primary skipper, is always at the helm at the start of racing. All crew have the chance to perform most of the different tasks involved in making *Freedom* sail to its potential.

Freedom in the Port Line Cup

Recently, *Freedom* competed in the annual Port Line Cup regatta sailed along the Port River. With a crew of four sailors, including Craig our blind main sheet hand, we were allocated to Division 2 with many yachts a few feet longer than us. This did not faze any of the “gun” crew!

The wind was perfect and after the start, which was not our best effort, we got into our stride and headed for the first rounding mark near the grain loading wharf at Outer Harbor. We reached to the bend in the river then beat to windward. On approaching the turning mark there is a hiccup; which way to round the buoy, port or starboard? We rounded it both ways to make sure!!



Freedom runs the river in the Port Line Cup

Up with the kite and away we go back up river. No sooner had the spinnaker been raised it needed to come down as we round the river bend and spend the next leg on a close reach to the most southerly rounding mark. Without hesitation we rounded it the correct way. The spinnaker was once again deployed and we carried it comfortably to the last rounding mark. It was full steam ahead for the finish, once again on a close reach. Although we did not get the winner's gun, *Freedom* had performed admirably and the crew had a satisfying sail. At least this year we did not have to use our navigation lights!

Reaching the Unreachable

Dis-Able Sailing's aspirations are to create opportunities for people with a disability to achieve goals in sailing that were formerly deemed unreachable. Earlier this year, *Freedom* was used to train Craig towards competing in the Homerus Blind Match Racing International Championships in Perth (Homerus is a system of beeping buoys on a windward/leeward course). Being totally blind, Craig was the designated skipper in the crew of three. Not having met the rest of the crew from Victoria before the event expectations were not very high even though the foredeck hand had been a World Blind Match Racing champion on two previous occasions. And Craig had never skippered a Sonar yacht before.

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With seven teams competing, it was going to be tough. After a couple of early setbacks Craig and his crew managed to qualify for the finals, a huge achievement! Eventually they placed fourth in the championships and were highly praised on their effort. Craig is now looking forward to the next World Championships to be held in the UK. He would like some local blind crew next time.

Freedom is a great little yacht and will continue to offer opportunities for many more people. However, the more established sailors want more. They want offshore sailing; e.g. the Lincoln Race and Week, beckons. Dis-Able Sailing is investigating ways to make this a reality.

Dis-Able Sailing Inc. is a charitable organisation and relies on grants, donations and volunteers to operate and provide a fantastic service to the community.

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SA MOTOR TRIMMING CENTRE



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Freedom's cockpit is adapted for crew who sail with a disability.

