

behind {closed} doors

CATALINA



Strathclyde’s Department of Naval Architecture, and Marine Engineering is distinctive in having its own sailing yacht- Catalina- to give students practical experience of, and qualification for, handling a sailboat. Prism climbs on board to look around.

PICTURED

- 1 Catalina setting sail for the Holy Loch
- 2 Catalina's barometer
- 3 Below decks accommodation

Despite considerable competition from road, rail and air, the marine industry in its various forms remains hugely important internationally.

Most of the world’s freight is still carried by boat, allowing goods such as iron ore, coal and grain to be moved inexpensively. It also retains its significance as a mode of passenger transport in areas with widespread island populations- notably Scotland- and in

regions where road infrastructure is underdeveloped, while, locally, Glasgow is still an important centre for the management of trading ships.

Graduates of Strathclyde’s Department of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering (NA-ME) are likely to become involved mainly in designing and managing ships and offshore platforms for oil, gas and renewable energy. However, practical knowledge of navigation is useful in cases such as planning offshore windfarm installation or maintenance, or investigating a marine accident.

Catalina, a 33-foot Sigma Class sailing yacht, was acquired in 2009 to replace a previous, smaller vessel, Renegade. Berthed at Rhu Marina on

the Firth of Clyde, near the entrance to Gare Loch, Catalina gives students the chance not only to gain valuable insight into handling a boat but also to gain a Royal Yachting Association Day Skipper, Yachtmaster Coastal and Yachtmaster Offshore certificates- qualifications

that demonstrate competence to be in charge of a boat, from short trips to crossing oceans. NA-ME is thought to be the only department of its

kind at a UK university to have a craft for the specific purpose of offering this experience to students.

Catalina has also appeared in the Glasgow River Festival and trips on the yacht have been offered as prizes in the Faculty of Engineering raffle, for charities in Malawi and India.

The boat usually sails to comparatively close destinations such as Rothesay and Millport but has been known to voyage further, to the east coast of Ireland and the Hebrides. In 2010, the yacht’s crew won the Vega Bermudian Challenge Trophy in a race in the Sail Hebrides Festival Week at Stornoway Harbour.

“All of our first-year students are invited to be taken out on the yacht for

a day at the beginning of their course,” says Professor Nigel Barltrop of NA-ME, who runs the courses on Catalina.

“It’s a chance for them to be introduced, in a marine environment, to things they’ll encounter, like sea and ship waves, wind, fluid dynamics, stability, structures, propulsion, manoeuvring and safety. Most also choose to take a two-semester RYA Day Skipper theory course as part of their degree.”

Although Catalina can sleep seven, the boat usually takes groups of four students for RYA courses. The five-day courses are taken in spring, summer and autumn and include experience of overnight sailing. Below deck is the galley- consisting of a cooker and sink- along with a CD player to provide a sailing soundtrack.

Sailing and navigating a boat through often challenging conditions and managing a crew all call for a highly complex, intricate set of skills which require practical training of a high calibre.

“By the end of the RYA Day Skipper practical course, which follows the theory course, the students should have gained enough experience and knowledge to be able to skipper the

boat and to take a crew out for a day’s sail,” says yachting instructor Martyn Letherby, who works with the University to provide the courses.

“On the practical course, they learn the basics, like tying knots, securing the yacht to a pontoon, motoring to and

including collision avoidance, basic yacht maintenance and dealing with emergencies.

“Some of the students will have their own existing interest in sailing and some will have family involvement in the shipping industry but for most,

Catalina provides an introduction to being responsible for a ship in open water, with the knowledge obtained being applicable to

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from the marina and sailing in the Firth of Clyde. In addition, they’ll be expected to be able to interpret and apply their RYA theoretical knowledge including tides, meteorology, rules of the ‘road’

much larger ships. “Students enjoy the experience and are very positive about it; it combines theory with practice and gives them a better idea of what the practice is really like.”

