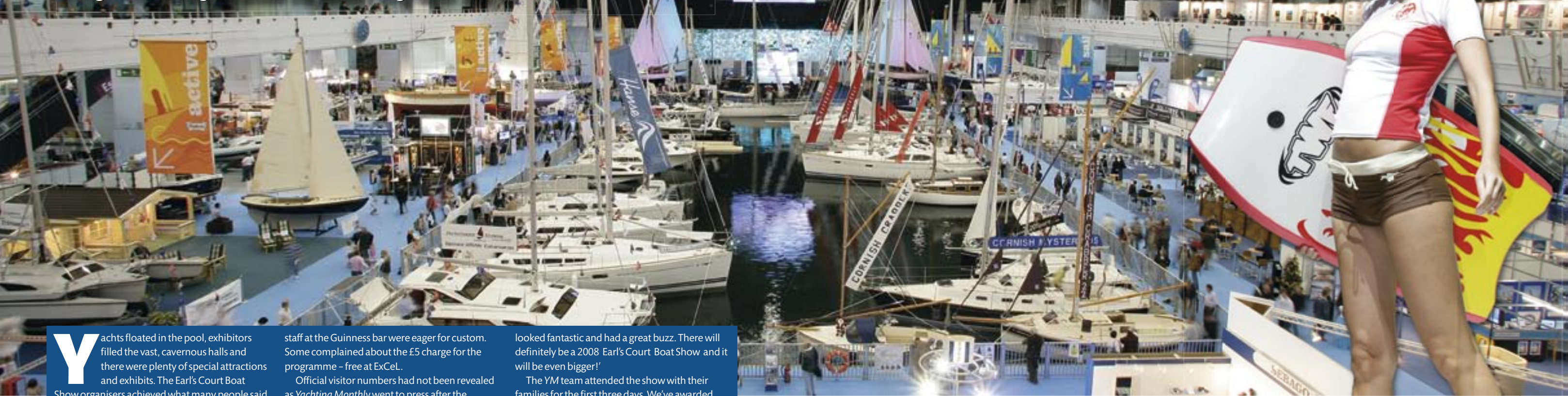


Earl's Court Boat Show – THE VERDICT

MARKS OUT OF 10

The organisers put on a family show with plenty of attractions – but did they entice enough visitors to guarantee the event's long-term future?



Yachts floated in the pool, exhibitors filled the vast, cavernous halls and there were plenty of special attractions and exhibits. The Earl's Court Boat Show organisers achieved what many people said was impossible: they put on a family show with plenty of attractions. But wandering the aisles, the exhibitors sometimes seemed to outnumber the visitors. Queues were non-existent and

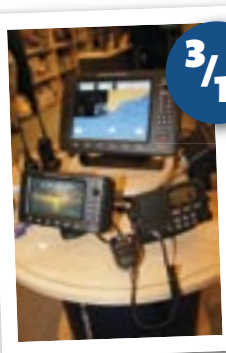
staff at the Guinness bar were eager for custom. Some complained about the £5 charge for the programme – free at ExCel.

Official visitor numbers had not been revealed as *Yachting Monthly* went to press after the opening weekend of the show, but they surely must have been below expectations for both organisers and exhibitors. James Brooke, who dreamt up the show, bullishly declared: 'The show

looked fantastic and had a great buzz. There will definitely be a 2008 Earl's Court Boat Show and it will be even bigger!'

The YM team attended the show with their families for the first three days. We've awarded marks out of 10 for the show's essential elements. We'll be doing the same for the London Boat Show at ExCel, in the March issue.

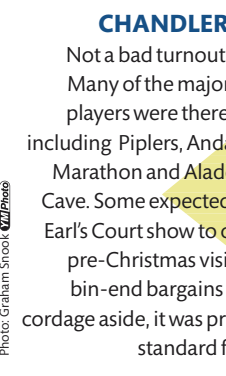
Dates for 2008: 29 November – 7 December.



3/10

ELECTRONICS

There were only two dedicated marine electronics retailers – MES and Redcor – though there was some interesting kit on show, including Class B AIS sets. Chandlers had special offers on VHF radios and chartplotters. There was also a Raymarine stand that offered hands-on experience with a room full of E120 multi-screen plotters.



6/10

CHANDLERY

Not a bad turnout. Many of the major players were there, including Piplers, Andark, Marathon and Aladdin's Cave. Some expected the Earl's Court show to offer pre-Christmas visitors bin-end bargains but, cordage aside, it was pretty standard fare.

DINGHIES AND DAYBOATS

A pretty good showing. Hartley Laminates brought the standard dinghy favourites – Mirror, Oppy, Wayfarer – and there were clinker-built heritage options on the Heyland Marine stand and some slick raceboats, too, including Hilary Lister's sleek carbon fibre Artemis 20. A very respectable turnout.

6/10



4/10

YACHTS

Not a great selection, but credit to those who showed faith. The pool featured Hanse Yachts, Southerly, J-Boats, British Hunter and Cornish Crabber, as well as *Gipsy Moth IV*. But there were only two new cruising yachts at the show: the Telstar 28 trimaran and the handsome Hans Christian 41.

FAMILY

Children really enjoyed the show. They could go climbing, scuba diving, ice skating, watch Santa abseil from roof and make turtles from egg boxes. Our family testers did not visit the crèche as the kids were having such fun at the show. Non-boating partners were also impressed with the variety and layout of the show.

8/10



8/10

CHARTER COMPANIES AND SAILING SCHOOLS

Some new faces and a good variety, but not as comprehensive as ExCel. Big charter firms included Sunseeker, The Moorings and Sailing Holidays. Sailing schools included UKSA and British Offshore Sailing School (BOSS), which does not exhibit at ExCel, but was attracted by Earl's Court's inclusive approach.

FOOD AND DRINK

There were two poolside bars and the Guinness bar. Eating options included pies and baked potatoes, juice and coffee outlets and a Pizza Express.

6/10



OTHER EXHIBITORS

There was plenty of variety among the other stands with sailmakers, engines, books, clothing, paintings, gifts and toys for sale. The Cowes High Street area was popular with plenty of smaller stands to browse through. Good for Christmas gifts.

7/10



8/10

TRANSPORT

Earl's Court is a short hop on the Tube from the capital's main railway stations and appeals to anyone travelling by car from the south or west, avoiding a trek through the capital or around the M25. There's on site parking too.

ATTRactions AND ENTERTAINMENT

Marines dropped from the ceiling, models paraded in lifejackets and hotpants and a band played each evening – but the real draw were the boats that weren't for sale. Shackleton's whaler, *James Caird*, Chichester's *Gipsy Moth IV* and a pair of stunning Metre-class yachts. The Hall of Fame and other displays were interesting but poorly presented.

8/10

» VERDICT

A good first effort, especially in the face of stiff opposition from the BMF, organiser of the London and Southampton Boat Shows. It wasn't the right show if you needed to refit a 40ft yacht, but there was plenty to do and see if you wanted a good family day out. Children got in free, but perhaps the £16 tickets put casual visitors off. Worth a second chance.

6.5/10

What visitors said about Earl's Court



Paul Lees, 56, proprietor, Crusader Sails

'The show is suffering from an identity crisis. When I saw the boats afloat on the central pool with their masts up it took my breath away. But the first Saturday was the scariest day I've ever spent at a boat show. However, we've taken orders on every day so far,' he said on day four. 'If I get to ExCeL and visitor numbers are down, I'll have a real dilemma.'



Tony Bennett, from Sail Scotland

The verdict is 'Could do better.' The number of visitors is about one-third of what we get at ExCeL. A million people drive past Earl's Court every day, yet there was no boat on the forecourt to advertise the show! But our charter skippers reported more positive inquiries in the first two days than in 10 days at ExCeL.'

Tony Bullimore, 68, solo ocean sailor

'The thing to remember is that this isn't the old Earl's Court Boat Show brought back to life, it's a completely new show. It doesn't have lines of big expensive boats like ExCeL. It's an opportunity for new smaller exhibitors and there's room for two shows in London.'



Danielle Harkin, 36, housewife from Barnes, Middlesex

'My husband Tony and I enjoy cruising and charters in the Med. We don't have our own boat yet, but our dream boat is the Hans Christian 41 and it was great to look over her at Earl's Court. It's a great show for the family.'



Ian Welsh, 44, proprietor, Classic Sailing Club

'Cassandra's Dream, our South Coast One Design (SCOD), afloat on the pool, proved a hit with visitors. To achieve the same thing at ExCeL we'd be outside in the cold. Boats at ExCeL are so expensive that it's intimidating. Earl's Court is more real.'



Brendan O'Moore, 70, retired welder from Dublin

'My partner Marie, 69, and I have always loved the Earl's Court show. ExCeL didn't do anything for me and obviously people are not happy with it, otherwise this show wouldn't have made a comeback. I missed the RNLI. They should be at all boat shows.'



FAMILY VERDICT

Dick Durham, YM's features editor, went to the show on the first Saturday with his wife Cathy and eight-year-old son Richard. He writes:

'It was almost eerily quiet as we entered the show at 11am. "Chelsea are playing at home and the Oxford Street Retailers Association has closed off half the West End for Christmas shoppers," we were told.

'After Richard had tried out the skating rink, enjoyed his first scuba dive in Andark's pool, paddled a coracle and climbed into the mouth of a life-sized, inflatable shark, he exclaimed:

'This is the best place I've ever been!' Cathy was fascinated by James Caird, the 23ft wooden boat in which Ernest Shackleton and crew made an epic 800-mile voyage from Antarctica to South Georgia in 1916. I picked up some heavy weather tips from Jeremy Rogers as we sat down below in his magnificently restored Contessa 32, *Gigi*.

By the end of the day the only complaints we had were from our aching legs.'

Go online to take YM's video tour of the new show: www.yachtingmonthly.com



Photo: Graham Snook ©ZYX®

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