



Photo: Brendan Pyatt

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# Wave rider

**Christine Ottery meets 29-year-old champion windsurfer John Hibbard, who is keen to dispel a few myths about his sport...**



#### How did you get into windsurfing?

I read a book and thought it looked like fun. I badgered my parents for a lesson, and they gave in.

#### What was your first lesson like?

Quite funny, I didn't have a clue what I was doing but was trying to tell my instructor how to teach me! It must have been really annoying. I was 14.

#### Did it take you a long time to learn?

When I started, equipment was not really geared to learning the way it is now, you had to use what there was. So it took longer than it might have done nowadays.

Anyway, you're never too good to keep learning. There's no final goal in windsurfing, it's one long road.

#### When did you start competing?

I was 17 or 18 when I started racing. Racing is the most accessible competitive discipline as you can do it as long as you can go in a straight line and stay on the board. I did it for three years but

wasn't very good – I kept falling off. After this, I got a bit better and got into wave sailing. To me it's the pinnacle of the sport, and a natural goal I wanted to reach. It's never a level playing field with windsurfing waves, as the conditions and waves are always different.

#### What title are you most proud of?

I was National Freewave Champion in 2005. It was a series of four events in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. In the final event, I won, and it pushed up my point average so I was overall winner.

#### What have you been up to in the last year?

The Red Bull Storm Chase was a big thing. The idea was to wait for a Force 11 storm and windsurf in it. It was fun, because it wasn't competitive and it was different. The selection process was the most competitive thing about it.

#### What are your aims for 2007?

I'm ranked second, currently, at wave sailing in this country, after the first round of the UKWA championships. So I want to win back my crown.



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To keep track of John's progress, visit his website [www.k007.co.uk](http://www.k007.co.uk)

For more info on the Red Bull Storm Chase, see [www.redbullstormchase.com](http://www.redbullstormchase.com)

For info on how to get started in windsurfing and events, see the UKWA website, [www.ukwindsurfing.com](http://www.ukwindsurfing.com)

For a list of windsurfing centres see [www.rya.org.uk](http://www.rya.org.uk). For Neilson holidays, visit [www.neilson.co.uk](http://www.neilson.co.uk)

More than ever, though, I want to just get out there and enjoy windsurfing, and have fun with it.

#### Where are your favourite places for windsurfing?

Cornwall has big beaches and some of the best surf in the UK. Apart from that, you'll find me in Cape Town in January and February, where most of the top wave sailors go to train together.

#### What advice would you give to someone who is interested in taking up windsurfing?

It's a lot easier to learn than it used to be in the Seventies and Eighties. People still remember the bad press that windsurfing got, saying the sails were too heavy and the boards too hard to turn. With the modern technology that there is now, the sails are lighter with carbon masts, and boards are more stable and easier to turn. I'd say, 'don't be put it off'. The UK is one of the best places in the world to windsurf, because there's such a range of conditions here: coastal, flatwater, inland, waves. It would be stupid not to!

#### Where is best for beginners?

Look for an RYA recognised centre, as they will have the equipment and a good standard of teaching. Or you could try going on a Neilson holiday and learning in warm water. ●