



## **Town Loch National Training Site (NTS) & Coaching Report October 2024**

### Introduction

With the 2024 season now concluded, we are now starting to put plans in place for the 2025 season with the objective of making it an even more successful season. This report has been drafted to document a detailed summary of the 2024 season and display the fantastic work carried out by the team and coaches.

### Staffing

The 2024 season saw some new faces volunteering and familiar ones returning to allow us to build on the excellent season we had in 2023. Chris Heron started his third season as our Head Coach. This enabled us to continue the consistency on the coaching and driving front for another season which addressed some of the feedback received in previous years from members, where there was a rather high turnover of coaches and drivers each season or during the season itself. It has been a busy season for Chris, pre-season consisted of a lot of on the water training preparing for the competition season, planning the 2024 season at NTS, building strong relationships with local community groups and qualifying as a fully-fledged BWSW Coaching Tutor. During the season itself Chris, competed at various events including multiple Rankings Lists events – one of which was the first held in Scotland in over a decade, one of the Pro Tour Stop competitions in England, British Nationals and the IWWF 35+ Europe & Africa Championships in Spain where he was Team GB's Team Captain. Success wise, he brought home (with the other Scottish members of Team GB) the first European & Africa medal to Scotland in over a decade in the shape of a bronze, took bronze at British Nationals, won The Scottish National Championships for the third consecutive time along with a number of other podium places at other events. He also obtained his D3 Competition Driver qualification, which now makes him the most qualified driving tutor and competition driver in the Scotland. Allowing him to drive his first Rankings List event at The Sultan of Slalom at Cirencester Ski Club. He also continued his work as a J3 (2 Event) Judge. Off the water, Chris continues to represent Waterski & Wakeboard Scotland and NTS on the Waterski Tournament Committee, the British Team Selection Board and the British Waterski & Wakeboard (BWSW) Disability Committee. Whilst also providing high quality driving and coaching to all the NTS members and customers.

We also welcomed back Tegan Brady to our Front of House (FoH) team, Tegan lead the FoH team extremely well again this season, taking on many additional responsibilities and providing great customer service to all. Not to mention taking on more coaching and driving duties after qualifying as a Level 2 coach during the season. Tegan also continued her work as a J3 (3 Event) Judge during the season, judging at the Backyard Series, British Nationals, Cirencester Sultan of Slalom, The Town

Loch Scottish Slalom Cup and Hazelwoods June Multi. Tegan has also nearly completed her training to be a recognised Scorer which will be an integral part for Scottish waterski competitions moving forward. Tegan also competed in her first Rankings List event this year, taking home a silver!

Chris and Tegan were also joined by a number of our young volunteers – Oliver Quigley, Ellie Morrison, Lexie Forbes, Murray Cameron and Aaron Johnston. Who were all an asset to the business, displayed a great attitude and learnt their respective roles very quickly, which enabled us to provide a seamless service to our members and customers.

Katrina Paley also returned as our other FoH member. Katrina had various other commitments this year outside of NTS but aided us greatly during the peak seasonal hours. Often aiding the volunteer drivers on busy days, some of which we couldn't have operated without Katrina's help.

We would also like to thank all the volunteers who aided us throughout the season. Special thanks goes once again and always to Matt Mills for ensuring all our equipment and machinery was in working order without fail, servicing boats, site maintenance and aiding with driving when needed – there are many more aspects that we would like to make reference to here, but mainly the help that Matt, Alisdair Roger and Stuart Ballie gave Chris in the lead up, preparation and on the day of The Town Loch Scottish Slalom Cup 2024. Special thanks also go to our volunteer driver Gordon Christie who took on driving duties on a Sunday with the help of Alisdair Roger to enable Chris to have a day off and the site to operate 5-6 days a week depending on the time of the year. Finally, a big thank you to Andrew Haslam for his bookkeeping and driving/coaching duties that he performed throughout the season.

This staff compliment with the help of our volunteers has worked well together allowing the team to work flexibly, proactively and accommodate any last-minute bookings, special requests, or changes extremely well.

The staff have done a fantastic job this season which has shown in terms of a continuing improved customer experience and feedback, improved skiing for many, the engagement of many more local community groups and a healthier looking balance sheet.

This season would not have been possible without each and every one of these people, as well as our member volunteers not mentioned above.

#### Site, Equipment & Maintenance

It would not be right if we did not start by thanking Matt Mills again for his hard work in keeping the centre and boats in good condition and passing on some valuable lessons to some of us along the way. It would also not be right if we didn't recognise Alisdair Roger who has stepped up and aided us here at NTS with various aspects, including some fabrication jobs for our trailers and winch, not to mention the construction of what could possibly be the best looking podium in the world, and aiding the staff if we were a little short on busy days. This help does not go unnoticed.

The aim this year was to maintain and improve on the standards set out last season, with the added task for the staffing team taking on full responsibility of the cleaning regime of the site. This included but was not limited to, revised Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in relation to boat cleaning, changing room cleaning, overall site cleanliness and customer service journeys.

This season saw us start the process of bringing NTS back up to an International Rankings level site, which included the resurrection of both the jump and trick courses as well as having the slalom course fully homologated. We also invested in our competition technology, which consisted of new

gate cameras, boat camera with transmitters and black magic box, a new end course camera with housing and renewed cabling to power all the various remote power points the site has to enable competitions to be held. Our boat fleet was still led by our 'flag ship' 2023 Nautique 200 official competition ski boat – new 2024 model en route for the 2025 season, which accompanied our 2019 Ski Nautique Carbon as our day-to-day school boat. This offered our members and customers 2 top of the range boats to use, which is exactly what the National Training Site for our country should offer. We also had our trusty Malibu Response ski boat as a back up to ensure that operations could continue if we encountered any problems with any of our fleet. We also ensured this boat was fully maintained in case any other Waterski & Wakeboard Scotland (WWS) affiliated site required this to ensure their operations were not affected if their boat broke down.

We also did a full reconciliation at the start of the season on our wetsuits, flotation vests, helmets, skis, wakeboards and kneeboards to ensure all were fit for purpose and ordered replacement equipment if it was required. This enabled us to provide first class equipment to our customers/participants. This included providing jump and trick skis of all shapes and sizes to enable more members to start and continue 3 eventing.

### Advertising & Marketing

We took the lessons learned from previous seasons and a large amount of research was carried pre-season in relation to how we market and advertise NTS. The findings allowed us to focus in on the most appropriate and effective methods to ensure that we got the NTS brand and the services we offer in front of wide and varying demographic across the local community and the wider country.

Like last year, there was a large focus on our social media presence. Our accounts on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook ensured that viewers were kept up to date with the daily happenings and activities around the centre as well as any special offers and competitions we were promoting.

We continued our research into the best forms of advertising for our site and the services we offered. To that end we focused our efforts on numerous social media advertising campaigns with offers and promotions online which proved extremely lucrative for the site, reaching a vast number of new participants, these included Women & Girl Taster Sessions, Local Community Development Bundles and a Weekday Beginner's Experience offer which was then used as part of Fife Outdoor Activities Week. We also had some good success with our Christmas Voucher campaign in 2023 as well.

This season saw the third full season of our dockside advertising campaign where local businesses pay for a board to be advertised at NTS and as part of the package are given reduced rates to utilise our services. We had a revamp of the businesses this year and gained some new advertisers in the form of a house builder, Camp America style company, plumbing company and a sign writer. We hope to see these businesses repeat their advertising in 2025 along with some new additions too.

Kevin & Tegan also attended a Knockhill event with the Nautique 200 to promote Town Loch to likeminded adrenaline chasers. This was one of many different avenues we explored to promote the site and sport. We also got some different types of video footage from drones, on person cameras and slow-motion shore cameras to use for social media and advertising purposes. Along with Chris being invited on an international podcast to discuss all things skiing and Town Loch.

## Development, Coaching & Competitions

This year the objective was to build on the great work carried out in 2023 in relation to coaching, development, competitions and opportunities for our members to have access to the best coaches in the country and enhance their skills no matter what age they are.

We believe we managed to achieve this and then some this season and have detailed some of the major events below that contributed to a very successful year in relation to development and coaching.

Before the actual season started, we held a Club Gathering for all the Scottish affiliated clubs, where we discussed the previous season and what went well/could be improved, plans for 2024 and the support required from the Development Coaches and Town Loch. Tegan, Alisdair & Chris attended the British Waterski Judges Seminar in Lincoln. We also delivered a SBD2 course in February which saw us qualify 4 new SBD2 qualified drivers, a full First Aid Course in March for our staff and members to ensure all were up to date with the qualification and the site was set up to be as safe as possible. Calum Reid and Chris also attended the BWSW Tournament Ball to represent Scotland at this networking event.

Chris & Calum also aided BWSW with all the UKAD work required as a Sports Governing Body.

In May we held a guest coaching clinic with Glenn Campbell. Where he and Chris delivered a coaching clinic to our members. This enabled our members to have a more focused one-on-one coaching experience to help dial in their technique, equipment and mindset. Feedback from the members who took part was extremely complimentary and positive and we are looking to do something similar next year.

The following day we then hosted our Friends of Tournament (FoT) Day with Glenn like we did in 2023. We had a record attendance for FoT at NTS this year with ten U18's participating in the event, we even had a waiting list for this year with various participants traveling up from England for this. The Development Day is designed to give each participant four sets over the course of the day, to be coached by British Waterski Coaches and introduce them to the other disciplines of the sport. Each and every one of the participants improved greatly, from running the slalom course for the first time, to learning how to trick ski or putting on jump skis for the first time and going over the jump. We also provided extracurricular activities for our U18's (and parents) to ensure the day was fun filled and exciting such as a Nintendo switch, Corn Hole and board games. In 2025 we hope to have another FoT day and send our Head Coach to deliver one at another site. This is all currently being planned with the help of FoT Committee.

On the back of the FoT Development Day we named our first ever U18's Scottish Development Squad. This squad will act as a pathway to help aid these athletes with their 3-Event waterskiing, give them access to squad coaching clinics and have access to a coach when competing at Rankings List events. We managed to hold two Development Squad Coaching Clinics in 2024, both of which were a great success, and we look forward to holding more in 2025.

We also sent Chris (and Ali) on the road to provide guest coaching clinics at other affiliated clubs such as Aberdeen and Kyle. The clinics that managed to go ahead (some had to be postponed/cancelled due to weather, boat issues and staffing shortages) were a great success and the feedback provided from the clubs after these was extremely positive with the theme being they hoped to see these planned for 2025.

With the help of the FoT Committee NTS also hosted two Jump Coaching Clinics, which were designed to allow members to try out jumping for the first time, improve their jump skills or get some more competition practise in. This ranged from jumping the wakes on jumpers, learning how to 'cut' and improving ramp work. We also taught a couple of members how to safely drive in the jump course. Both clinics were fully booked and a great success, with us now having more than 10 jumpers in the club. Our plan is to continue the trajectory we have within trick and jump into 2025 to allow us to really showcase NTS as a 3-Event site.

NTS also hosted two stops of the Scottish Backyard Slalom Series in May and September. Both events went extremely well, taking on the feedback from 2023 and attempting to improve the experience in 2024. Our first stop had a good turnout, some great competition on the day and a fun day had by all. The second and third stops were held at KWSC and were fantastic events for all participants and great to see another Scottish waterski club get involved with the competition side of the sport.

The last stop of the Backyard Series was held on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September in conjunction with The Town Loch Scottish Slalom Cup 2024 which was the first International Rankings Event to be held in Scotland in over a decade. As previously mentioned, the sheer amount of work, energy and effort that went into the planning, preparation and execution on the day was colossal and we would like to reiterate our thanks to all the organisers, volunteers, officials, photographers, tech officials and athletes for what we think was an extremely successful event. We had a total of 55 skiers competing across both competitions, coming from all over the UK which saw the largest waterski competition held in Scotland for a very long time. We were also fortunate enough to have 9 officials whom the majority travelled from far and wide to attend, a site that looked fantastic, great technology with a live boat camera feed onto the big screens, a fantastic commentator in the form of Dusko, BBQ and lots of off the water activities to keep everyone entertained. We couldn't have asked for a better day.

This year also saw some outstanding performances from our members here at NTS. Well done to the following athletes who between them have broken Scottish Records, performed personal bests at the highest level of competition, won various medals, championships and represented Great Britain.

Cilleán Morrison, Lorcan Morrison, Ellie Morrison, Aaron Johnston, Chris McKeown, Alistair Joyce, Matt Mills, Georgina Hutchison, Tegan Brady, Alisdair Roger, Kevin Lochhead, Oliver Jessop and Chris Heron.

### Community

The 2024 season also saw NTS build some fantastic relationships with various local community groups.

We welcomed Fairway Fife who are a Peer Mentoring Charity involving people with learning disabilities from 16 years of age. We delivered a 6-week development programme for them over the months of May and June which was such a success that we then promoted a 'donate a ski session' to our members to deliver an end of season activity day for 6 of Fairway Fife's members, where they got to have some fun on the water before the season concluded.

BRAG who are a Fife Employability and Training Consortium that brings together a range of partners to provide specialist employment support services across Fife also joined us for a 6-week physical activity programme during the season. This gave their members the opportunity to try our sport for the very first time.

NTS also applied for a Development Grant through BWSW which was successful and allowed us to offer our local LGBT+ centre – The Hive, a 6-week Development Bundle for 6 of its community. The feedback from their director was that the positive impact that the 6 weeks has had on their community members who attended was fantastic!

Throughout the season we also offered Women & Girl Taster Sessions in conjunction with a national campaign of BWSW – which saw us offer discounted Beginner's Experiences. This was also very successful as we welcomed circa. 15 new women & girls into our sport due to this campaign alone.

We hosted various BBQ evenings to help grow the community feel here at NTS and have invested in new BBQ equipment to help with this including some new garden furniture as well.

Finally, we continued our relationship and support with Scottish Autism, in displaying their advertising banner, posters and sharing relevant information via our social media channels.

### Difficulties

This season wasn't without its troubles, we had the normal (albeit fewer than previous years) issues when it came to our boat fleet – mainly mechanical and electrical issues that occurred. However, thankfully due to the proactive and quick responsiveness of our staff and volunteer team, they ensured that these issues did not prolong longer than they needed to, and we thank them fully for this.

The major lesson learned from the 2023 season was our staffing profile, with a site and business of our nature, staffing profiles are not easy to forecast and plan. This year we believe we improved this, but it still requires some fine tuning to ensure we provide adequate cover, so our members and customers are still provided a great service with our staff being able to get a better work/life balance. This is a priority during our off-season planning.

We also worked tirelessly to provide a 'Learn to Ski & Water Safety' programme for our local primary school but could not secure funding to provide this. We have applied to additional funding sources in the hope one is successful that will allow us to provide this programme in 2025.

### Off Season and 2025

NTS will be open over the winter to our members with Chris managing the site, driving and coaching to allow you all to continue your skiing with consistent and effective coaching on and off the water (watch this space!). We are also aiming to have the Ski Nautique Carbon on the water, so you all have the opportunity to be towed by an industry leading boat...even in the cold months. Winter set bundles and Christmas vouchers will also be available as we get into the winter season.

On the staff side of things, we hope to see some of the familiar faces return for next season and are already starting to train up and prepare some new members of staff so we can hit the season running in 2025.

We intend to continue with and improve upon the various coaching clinics, FoT days and competitions we held in 2024. We hope to be able to hold a full International Rankings 3-Event competition as well as The Town Loch Scottish Slalom Cup next season. Alongside a SBD2 course in February.

Calum and Chris continue to work on the strategy plan for NTS up until 2025 – including the Strategic Review that has just occurred. They will be aiming to achieve more of the objectives contained within this road map to ensure we keep on track to achieving the overall goals.

With the negotiation of the lease at Town Loch still ongoing with Fife Council, we await the final outcome. This is however dependant on the outcome of negotiations. Once these negotiations have concluded we will inform every one of these and arrange for the next steps to take place.

Overall, we believe that this year has been a fantastic year for NTS and the sport in general in Scotland. We would like to take this opportunity again to thank all of our staff, volunteers, members and customers for a great year! Roll on 2025...

**Chris Heron**

**01/10/2024**