

Geoff Holt

Inspirational Yachtsman & BBC South Sports Personality of the Year

Geoff Holt became an inspiration to thousands when he completed his 'Personal Everest' challenge. Geoff sailed 1,445 miles, solo, around Great Britain in a fragile 15-foot dinghy. Hailed an extraordinary and courageous achievement, Geoff is a passionate yachtsman who uses a wheelchair. Paralysed from the chest down at just 18 years old after a swimming accident, Geoff secured a place in the history books on 5 September 2007 when he completed his courageous feat of endurance to become the first disabled sailor to go around Britain single-handed. As someone once joked, Geoff is now the most admired disabled sailor since Nelson!

Recognition of Geoff's achievements came swiftly. He was voted BBC South Sports Personality of the Year (2007) with a record 57% of the public vote, the highest-ever winning margin for the BBC South Awards. Geoff was also short-listed for the prestigious Yachtsman of the Year (2008). In an incredible twist of fate, Geoff realized while celebrating his record-setting circumnavigation that he had finished his 'Personal Everest' challenge exactly 23 years after his life-changing accident - an extraordinary co-incidence.

Geoff's 'Personal Everest' story is highly motivational and told with humour, thoughtful insight and great photographs and film footage. He has faced adversity, challenged limits and continues to inspire others to maintain a positive attitude no matter what the challenges ahead. His marketing background ensures his business messages are rooted in experiences both on and off the water – a powerful combination. He enjoys both after dinner talks and conference keynotes.

Geoff's story has some powerful messages about overcoming adversity. At just 18 years old, Geoff Holt had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean three times, completed several solo voyages and sailed over 27 thousand nautical miles.

And then his life changed. All hopes, dreams and expectations of earning his livelihood as a professional yachtsman were brutally destroyed after diving into the sea and breaking his neck. Geoff spent a year in hospital and then, with characteristic spirit, he retrained in a different career and went on to lead the marketing department of an international firm of chartered accountants for 12 years. Geoff later became a qualified auctioneer and valuer (specializing in early European ceramics) and eventually returned to his first love of sailing. He is the fastest disabled sailor to circumnavigate the Isle of Wight and firmly re-established himself as a yachtsman with his successful Personal Everest challenge. Geoff visited 51 destinations and took 109 days to complete his voyage in dreadful weather. Geoff has a very inspirational view of life and the opportunities it holds. His positive outlook comes over strongly in every speaking engagement when he shares his 'personal Everest' story.

Geoff is passionate about creating opportunities for others through a long association with the charity Sailability and encouraging Paralympians. Geoff represented the UK on the International Disabled Sailing Committee and was Chairman of the RYA's Paralympic Steering Committee that selected the Gold medal winning team in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympics. He has competed successfully himself too representing Great Britain in Australia and America taking the bronze medal. In 2003, Geoff was awarded the prestigious RYA Award for 'Services to Yachting' and in 2006, Geoff became the first person to gain a powerboat licence while using a wheelchair. Geoff is currently writing his autobiography.

Accolades

'What Geoff achieved was quite extraordinary and took an awful amount of courage.' *Her Royal Highness, Princess Anne*

'Just to say a big AWESOME!!' *Dame Ellen Macarther*

'It was a tremendous effort and we are all very proud of you. You have set up a great marker for others. Well done.' *Sir Robin Knox-Johnston*

'I am really excited about your accomplishment of your personal Everest. Congratulations! You have proved to the world, in true British style, that sailing is a sport open to all.' *Dee Caffari*