



The BMF

The British Marine Federation (BMF), of which the MLA is a part, is the industry's trade association but, of course, it indirectly helps customers too. After all, it's in their interest to safeguard standards and inspire confidence. To that end, they involve themselves with just about everything, from boat construction to purchase agreements – and are worth consulting when buying almost anything from one of their members. They also run boat shows, promote boating, liaise with Governments, Agencies and Authorities – and help with training and recruitment.

A brief history

- 1913** – Boat, Yacht & Allied Trades Association formed.
- 1947** – Changes name to the Ship and Boat Builders National Federation.
- 1954** – First London International Boat Show – at the Empire Hall, Olympia sponsored by the Daily Express.
- 1973** – The labour government imposes 25per cent VAT on boats. The Federation fights to change it and wins.
- 1986** – Name change to British Marine Industries Federation.
- 2010** – Changes again to the British Marine Federation representing 12 regional associations, 19 Group Associations and 1,550+ members.



What can the MLA do for you?



Whatever you want to buy, it's clearly important to have confidence in the firms you do business with. **Teri Dyer** examines the role of the boating industry's main trade association, along with one which aims to ensure that your sailing holiday is a total success – from start to finish.

It goes without saying that a charter holiday should be something to look back on with pleasure and satisfaction. That's the general idea but, as we know, life doesn't always go according to plan. So perhaps the question we should ask ourselves at the outset is, what happens if something goes wrong?

That's where the MLA comes in, because their members are required to meet precise and predetermined standards which should eliminate much of the uncertainty.

WHO ARE THEY?

The Marine Leisure Association (MLA) is a membership organisation for firms offering RYA training, charter and sailing holidays. In September 2005, the National Federation of Sea Schools (NFSS), Yacht Charter Association (YCA) and Association of Bonded Sailing Companies (ABSC) agreed to merge and the MLA was formed, to offer us better protection, guidance and advice. They also provide a valuable financial safeguard when booking with one of their members.



Case Study

A number of RYA Recognised Training Centres who weren't actually MLA member companies but had recently gone into liquidation left a large number of customers without their courses for which they'd already paid – so the RYA Training Department asked the MLA for help. The MLA was able to advise consumers how to obtain a credit refund where possible, how to register with the administrator. In addition the MLA contacted the membership to find out which companies could provide training courses for these customers at cost price. It meant that customers could get their chosen course without being out of pocket.



Photos, opposite main: chartering in Poros with MLA member Neilson; this page, clockwise from top left: fun in the sun with MLA member Nautilus, Pete Tyler, MLA Chairman (Neilson Active Holidays); flotilla in the Med; the MLA at the Southampton Boat Show last year.

Contacts

MLA

Tel: 02380 293822
Web: www.marineleisure.co.uk
Email: info@marineleisure.co.uk

BMF

Tel: 01784 473377
Web: www.britishmarine.co.uk
Email: info@britishmarine.co.uk

A group association within the British Marine Federation, the MLA represents the views both of the firms they represent and their customers within the BMF council, and are recognised as the national body by, amongst others, the government, MCA and Royal Yachting Association.

WHAT CAN THEY DO FOR US?

Looking to gain a qualification or brush up on your existing skills? If so, before setting off on a training holiday it's nice to know that, to start with, MLA training companies offer fully MCA/RYA coded and equipped vessels – as well as providing tuition for a range of professionally organised courses that lead to internationally recognised RYA and MCA qualifications.

In practice, members are encouraged to keep abreast of developments and use the latest technology – but combine it with traditional skills and techniques. Their fully qualified experts also never forget that learning – and sailing in general – should be fun.

If, on the other hand, you just want to get afloat, all MLA charter and holiday companies provide a wide variety of boats in some of the world's best cruising areas, so the choice is fantastic. Alternatively, if you're feeling adventurous you might try some of the many water sports available or explore somewhere 'different' with the help of the professionals. Above all, the MLA can give you the chance to get afloat even if you don't have your own boat.

WHAT GUARANTEES DO WE GET?

Before being allowed to join the MLA, all members must fulfill certain criteria. They must have been operating for over 12 months and Training Members must have also been RYA recognised for the whole of that period prior to joining. All British registered yachts must also comply with the MCA Code of Practice for Small Commercial Vessels while foreign flagged yachts must comply with the regulations of the country of registry. Charter companies must

comply with the Package Travel Holiday and Package Tour Regulations 1992, using appropriate bonding, insurance or trust fund arrangements should their business activities require it.

When registering, all members have to sign a declaration to ensure that they agree to follow the MLA code of conduct as well as the BMF code of practice. If members fail to follow such procedures they may be expelled – and suffer the consequences of bad publicity. That's why members rarely break the rules and why the organisation is so respected. As a membership organisation it's easy to check that every member adheres to all the conditions – which is particularly reassuring.

However, it's also nice to know that the RYA are responsible for carrying out annual inspections.

WHAT IF IT ALL GOES WRONG?

There have been times when expectations have failed to match the reality. That's why, in the rare case of a customer being unhappy with the service, anyone who books with the MLA can be assured that problems

will be dealt with appropriately. The grievance procedure offered by the MLA is endorsed by Trading Standards – which is further reassurance – and there's no charge for the MLA's services which are designed solely to reach a satisfactory resolution.

In practice, once the MLA has considered all the facts from both parties they will make appropriate judgements, but there's no obligation for you, the customer, to accept them. This process exists merely to help reach a fair and reasonable settlement of the dispute. If the MLA feels that a member company is acting unfairly that will be addressed separately under the MLA rules and code of conduct.

Since members of the MLA are also members of the BMF, if further mediation is required, a Dispute Resolution Scheme is available – though it carries a flat charge of £375, because the scheme is independent of the BMF and MLA.

