

# Waterskiing *W*<sup>*in*</sup> Wigan!

The reduction of the speed limit on Windermere didn't stop Stuart Lillis enjoying his favourite sport – he built his own waterskiing lake in his back garden. Emma Mayoh reports

**W**hen the speed limit on Windermere was reduced to just 10mph, the howls of protest were almost as loud as the powerboats which were banished from the water.

Local businesses were hit hard but the most audible complaints came from the boat owners and water sports enthusiasts who had spent years in this idyllic setting.

One of them was Wigan waterskier Stuart Lillis. But instead of moaning, he did something about it.

'I came up with this crazy idea of building my own lake,' said Stuart. 'We were left with nowhere to waterski and I was having to travel to Lincolnshire. I thought I would dig a big hole and make my own.'

The words 'big hole' do not do justice to the scale of the project. Stuart and a small group of loyal, patient friends dug a hole 650 metres long and 70 metres

wide on 150 acres of his land that turned into the lake. It took two summers to do and it was built to world record standards.

The lake is stocked with all the professional equipment you could think of including cameras lining the slalom course with transmitters that link to the speed boat that pulls skiers along. Experts were also brought in to make sure the lake, which has attracted a lot of birdlife, met exacting standards.

But the 48-year-old was never put off by the magnitude of job. 'Of course it was hard work but it was something I really wanted to do. We desperately needed something here in the north west,' he said.

'There were days when I thought I might have taken on too much but to see it now, it's been worth it.'

Although Stuart had initially planned to build it just for him and his friends to use - he didn't want 'people messing



**Below:** Malcolm Bethell, Andy Finlay and Stuart Lillis



The lake that Stuart built

about with boats,' - more and more waterskiers heard about his plans.

Among them were fellow enthusiasts, Andy Finlay and Malcolm Bethell, who have helped get the Three Sisters Water Ski Club up and running.

This passionate group - there are now 25 members - turned it from a hobby to a non-profit making club. It provides a facility for other enthusiasts to enjoy and promote waterskiing with coaching sessions and national competitions.

Most significantly, the club held its first Three Sisters International ProAm Grand Prix last September. The two-day event attracted world class sportsmen

and women from around the globe including world champion, Will Asher.

It is a professional competition but it also gave amateur skiers the opportunity to compete in groups alongside the more experienced competitors. The event got global live coverage and, even though it was the first time the club had held the event, word of its success spread quickly. It was commended by a professional during commentary at a subsequent ProAm tournament in America.

The event was made possible, again, through Stuart and the members' hard work. Together they raised the money needed to stage the event and the prize money to attract some of the bigger sporting names.

The hard working group is now anticipating this year's ProAm on August 31 and September 1. This year's

competitors, including last year's winner Will Asher, will fight for a cash prize. Professionals will also be able to get elite world ranking points.

Young Arron Davies, one of the club's stars, will also be hoping for success on the day. He has won several competitions including the annual Seaton Classic at Thorpe, Youth Trials at Gosfield and last September he was chosen to represent Great Britain in a youth competition.

Stuart said: 'I didn't expect it to take off like this or have a reputation so quickly, especially since I was only building it for me and my friends. But the members have really taken it to their heart and they're really passionate about making it a great club. It would be great if we could now get the recognition with the European Championships.

'I always wanted it in Lancashire so I'm proud it's here. It's where I'm from and it's about time it got a proper waterskiing lake.' 🍷