



doubt Phil would like to do more than emulate Nick Rogers. He's one of the targets that Phil has to beat if he's going to turn his youth success into Olympic success. 'British competition is really strong, but all we can do is get as good as we can. The Olympics, that's the dream goal but we've loads of things to improve on first.'

Balls in Barbados

The Fireballs go to some very interesting venues for their World Championships, but next year's event looks set to be exceptional. Barbados is the destination, not somewhere that one normally associates with sailing. But after speaking to Andrew Davies, secretary of Fireball International, maybe that's all about to change. Andrew has done the scouting for the venue and has been busy brokering deals and partnerships with a number of companies and organisations to make sure this is a worlds that will leave competitors with long and happy memories.

Arguably the most important supporter of the event is the Barbados Government itself, with Andrew having met a number of dignitaries including the Prime Minister and the Minister for Sport. One of the benefits to the competitors will be that their boats have been promised a clear route through customs, avoiding the sort of hold-ups and delays that can sometimes make attending foreign events more trouble than they're worth.

With Geest Shipping offering to subsidise container transport of the boats, which leave from Portsmouth and Le Havre, teams will have to pay a maximum of £355 to get their Fireballs

safely from Europe to the sailing club.

Virgin Airways have also been keen to get involved, offering return flights from London Gatwick to Bridgetown, Barbados for less than £500, around a 30 per cent discount on standard prices. The list goes on, with one of the local cell phone providers offering free SIM cards, and Mount Gay helping to lubricate the social events.

Andrew has been blown away by the enthusiasm of the Barbados authorities and businesses to bring the Fireball worlds fleet to their island. 'The yacht club ticks all the boxes for boat parking, showers, catering, all the stuff that you need to run a great regatta,' says Andrew. 'The weather is excellent, the water temperature is 29 degrees, and the wind most days is 15 to 20 knots, so it's amazing really that there hasn't been a major sailing regatta here before.'

It does all sound too good to be true, although as Andrew points out, the commercial benefits are there for the Barbadians. The end of the holiday season is 15 April, and with the pre-worlds and worlds taking place over two weeks from 24 April to 7 May, it brings in extra revenue for local businesses that otherwise might not have been there.

Chips Howarth and Vyv Townend, who won this year's Fireball worlds in La Rochelle, will be flying out to Barbados to defend their title. Perhaps they would have gone anyway, but the decision was made very easy for them thanks to their world championship win earning them free flights with Virgin Atlantic and free accommodation courtesy of the Barbados Tourist Authority - it's sort of hard to turn down an invitation like that.

For those that have to pay their own way, the price of competing is not that onerous, not for a trip to the Caribbean. And with the event taking place so early in the season, sailors won't lose their boats for too long. Geest's banana boats should have the Fireball containers back in Europe not much more than two weeks after the end of the regatta.

With other good deals having been put together for Fireball sailors from other countries too, Andrew is expecting entries from 13 or 14 nations, with a few boats entering from Barbados itself, as well as from nearby St Lucia.

The Fireballs blaze the trail for many exciting venues that have been largely unnoticed by the rest of the sailing world, such as Pattaya, Thailand, for the 2008 worlds. The 2011 worlds are in Sligo in the west of Ireland followed by a venue just south of Perth, Western Australia, for 2012. The risk of heading into 'uncharted waters' is not knowing if the quality of the racing will be compromised, but Fireball International has such a strong template for how it likes things to be run that it appears to suffer few problems here. Going to untested venues certainly makes life harder in some respects, but Andrew has been out to Barbados enough times and met enough of the people to have a good feeling about this one. Tempted? Get more info from www.fireball-worlds.com ■

LEFT The Fireball class is arranging subsidised travel for UK entries to their Barbados worlds in 2010.

BELOW Fireball owners who transport their boat to the Caribbean for the worlds are assured of a smooth path through customs for maximum training time.



PHOTO: PETER MURHEAD