

Sailing dream is brought true for plucky Marchant

A YOUNG boy from Clifton who has very severe cerebral palsy, had his dream come true when he was given his own boat to sail on Chew Valley Lake.

Marchant Barron, 10, cannot walk or sit up, hold anything or speak.

He has always dreamed of owning a sailing boat and he has now set sail in Speedshark, a boat given to him thanks to children's charity Rays of Sunshine.

Despite his disability Marchant attends a mainstream school, Christchurch School in Clifton, where he excels in maths and English.

He discovered a passion for sailing two years ago, when he was taken out on his first boat trip.

Marchant returned full of excitement because the motion of the sailing enabled him to relax his body, an experience he otherwise finds almost impossible.

Since then he has sailed with the Chew Lake Association of Disabled Sailors (CLADS) group, where he has inspired others and was voted Sailor of the Year for 2005.

Up until now Marchant has been sat on his mum's lap as the boat is sailed.

But his mum, Sue Pringle, discovered that an access dinghy, when adapted, would enable Marchant to control it himself.

She contacted children's charity Rays of Sunshine and asked if they could help fulfil Marchant's dream of sailing by himself. The

charity specialises in fulfilling the wishes of seriously and terminally ill children.

Staff at Rays of Sunshine enlisted the help of the Bristol office of The Business Environment Group, which agreed to sponsor Marchant's wish.

As an ardent Bristol city fan, Marchant insisted the boat would be in red and white and he named the boat "Speedshark".

He said: "The boat gives me freedom — from mum!"

Sue, 47, who cares for Marchant full time, said: "The boat really gives him his freedom. He is very physically disabled but he has so much courage and he's such a daredevil."

"We've been sailing for two-and-a-half years. But he does not want to be with his mum all the time, he wants to be on his own."

"So the boat allows him to be independent."

"The charity were fantastic in raising the money."

"Marchant is always up for having fun. He's very competitive, like any 10-year-old boy, and in a few years he might be able to start racing."

Laura Barnett, a volunteer for Rays of Sunshine, said: "We were delighted to help because it has really helped Marchant's quality of life."

"The wishes we grant can be really diverse and can be anything from meeting a footballer to being a football mascot."

For further information on the children's charity visit www.raysofsunshine.org.uk.

Heading for a brighter future: Cerebral palsy sufferer Marchant Barron, 10, with his mum Sue Pringle trying out his new Speedshark boat for the first time at Chew Valley lake

Photograph: Chas Breton

