



JOBS FOR THE BOYS

With summer fast approaching, Jo Moran and her three sons had to find time to finish the Limpet sailing dinghy kit they were building together – see W68, 69 & 70. In the end, they made it – pity summer didn't.

With photographs by Seamus Moran.



With only a few more jobs left to do on our little boat, the boys – Brendan 8, Aidan 6 and Finlay 4 – had started planning where we would take it and imagining what adventures we would have. But though my 'to do' list looked short, it still took ages. It has been a struggle to find enough time to work on the dinghy. I had to be disciplined and make time wherever I could. I also tried to involve the boys as much as possible, making the most of the time that we had. We had come to the stage where we were ready to paint the outside of the boat and make the rudder and daggerboard.

Having turned the boat upside down again, the boys enjoyed helping me to sand it using an electric sander; the promise of using a power tool is the best way to get Brendan in the mood for boatbuilding. The pieces for the rudder were already cut out: the inner core for the stock, cheeks for either side and the blade which pivots. The blade needed to be tapered and a mortice created in the core to the tiller. Brendan could easily understand how it would go together but once they had helped me fit everything ready for sticking the boys left me to it.

The daggerboard just need to be given an aerodynamic shape by rounding the front edge and tapering the back. We drilled a hole at the top for a rope stopper.

The mast had been supplied roughly rounded, so we all took some sandpaper and rubbed it smooth. It needed a tapering section at the top and a slot for a sheave for the halyard. The yard needed tapering at both ends and rounding. That left just the tiller, which was supplied already shaped except for the tenon at the end to fit into the rudder stock.



It was very satisfying shaping and sanding all the bits of Douglas fir. Aidan worked hard; he is very thorough and does not get bored easily. Brendan has a good understanding of what needs to be done and can read diagrams well but he is less inclined to try any job that doesn't immediately excite him. True to form Finlay found more entertainment playing with wood shavings, dead bees and bent nails. He hasn't contributed very much to the building but he has been content being in the shed much more. His ability to make long and complicated games from any mundane objects he can find has been wonderful to witness.

The boys had agreed that *Stingray* was to be the name of the boat and it had to be green with electric blue spots. I did the painting over a few days, using a one-pot top coat called Sintolin, from Skippers Paints, over their Unifibre Primer. Each coat didn't take long using a roller, and we were soon ready for the blue spots. Aidan, often prone to sudden feelings of self-consciousness, decided that the spots would look stupid but he was out-voted. I pointed out that they could always paint over them if nobody liked them. So with half a potato each, they attempted to print the spots on. It was difficult not to get little rivers of blue running down, so we tried using a circular toy to print a thin outline then carefully paint inside. Brendan decided, in a pleasing moment of leadership, that the spots must be symmetrical so he evened up each side.

I added a brass strip to the stem and bilge runners, before taking the boat out into the garden for them to play in and go off adventuring across the wild sea, battling with pirates and monsters.

To the boys, the boat was now finished but I still had things to do. The spars needed varnishing, which with the boat outside, I now had space to do in the shed. The kit comes complete with all the rig fittings in a bag. It felt great to finally be screwing on staples and jammers, shackling on blocks and whipping the ends of lines. I enjoyed this part so much I was disappointed when it was done but it was truly exciting when we hoisted the sail on a sunny day in the garden, sorry, beach on a tropical island. Aidan wanted to make a flag, so I found him some green and blue material and inventive as ever, he busied himself with scissors and glue.



The boat was ready to launch at last but the weather was not good. A bit of rain is one thing – we do live in Cornwall, after all – but strong winds and unrelenting rain was too much. It had taken a great deal of my spare time to get the boat finished and I had so many other things I should have been doing, not to mention the domestic stuff. The house was filthy and I had a washing pile which had become a small hill taking over half the bedroom and we were all running out of clean clothes. To put it mildly, I was not happy.

Finally, on a slightly better Sunday morning, I could wait no longer. We towed the boat to the lake and between rain showers shared a fairly rushed glass of champagne with a few hardy friends. With the boat in the water at last, I loaded the children in and off we went. It was fairly breezy and cold, despite it being the beginning of July.

I was completely unprepared for their reactions, Brendan was scared and shouted every time the boat heeled even slightly, Finlay just cried and screamed "I want to get out", Aidan shouted at the other two to shut up and enjoy it. The noise from our little dinghy must have been heard for miles. I shook my head in disbelief.

It could not have been more different from their expectations and I felt bad that I had not anticipated it. I took some of their friends out for a sail who loved it despite the increasing wind.





Perhaps with no previous expectations, they were able to simply accept it for what it was but for the boys, the months of building and imagining had led them to have greater expectations..

There was no opportunity to get back out in the boat again for another three weeks, which was why I had been so keen to launch even though the weather had not been ideal. Brendan admitted to feeling scared but was stoical and bravely swallowed his fear. He came out several times and after two or three days declared that he had "found his sea legs".

Finlay the fearless, renowned in our village for his reckless behaviour, took until the end of August to realise that the Limpet dinghy was a lot of fun. It came to the crunch one day, when he was crying on the pontoon. I had had enough of being patient and impulsively picked him up by his lifejacket belt and plonked him in the dinghy and sailed off. After a while he stopped crying and decided that it was OK after all. By the time we came in, he was having a great time and admitted that he had quite enjoyed it.

We have sailed the Limpet in most conditions now and it is stable and steady in any gust. It happily drifts along in light airs and it is straight-forward to sail. Aidan is a natural: he takes the helm, finds the wind and shifts his weight automatically, anticipating the gusts. Brendan is happy to be more of a passenger for now but already has eye on the faster racing boats that fly past us on the lake.

From the beginning of this project to the end, my children have not ceased to amaze me. I have learned so much about each of them and they have seen a whole new side to me too. They have grown and changed over the 10 months that we have taken to build this small boat, with one broken and mended arm, several new front teeth and a worn out Super Ted suit which carries memories of boatbuilding and other adventures that will never wash out.



There were times when I had wished I hadn't started it as it seemed that it would never be finished and that I would be fighting forever to find time to do it. Despite all the other things in my life and the childrens, we did get it finished and we have found time to sail it, which seems a bit of a miracle now. If I had been sensible I would never have started it but I am a great believer in just doing things anyway. If I think about anything too long, I will always find a reason not to do something; the time is never quite right and actually it probably never will be... so I do it anyway.

We now have a 10' (3m) sailing dinghy which we can take anywhere easily and be out on the water in minutes, with the satisfaction of having built it together out of a few pieces of wood. When I originally looked at the cost of the kit, I was wondering if we could afford it. I never imagined that it would give us so much as a family. It is too easy to see only the cost of something in pounds so it's good to see that that is not really the issue.



Seashell Boats' Limpet dinghy kit is so complete and supplied to such a good standard that it is a cost effective and pleasurable way to make your own boat. It can be built in a fairly small space, with fairly basic tools and no previous experience is needed. The kit contains everything except the paint and includes a very comprehensive manual.

My intention when starting the project was to show the boys that things have to be made and that there is a reward in making something yourself and then having the joy of using it. I wanted to pass on to them the buzz of creating something so desirable. Also to show them the importance of completing a project even when it seems too difficult. For me too, it feels good that when asked "Have you built any boats recently?" I can say "Yes", even if it's just a sailing dinghy. But better than that was when, up at the lake recently, I heard Brendan proudly telling a complete stranger that he and his brothers had built the boat themselves.

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