



JOBS FOR THE BOYS

The autumn boatbuilding season is upon us and this year, it seems they're all at it. *Water Craft's* Jo Moran begins a family project to build the Limpet dinghy kit.

With photographs by the author.

Building another boat was something I had accepted I would not be likely to do again. I'd built two plywood pocket cruisers after completing the boatbuilding course at Falmouth Marine School but then I became a Mum which seems to mean being surrounded by unfinished jobs.

I found boating and babies a frustrating combination on the whole, especially as my husband never got into boats. He does know one end from the other but that's about it. In fact, he made up a rhyme to help him remember: "The bow is like a plough and the stern is where you turn". The children found this helpful; I found it sums up his input nicely.

My attempts at woodwork were also frustrating, every time I picked up a tool, within a minute or less it would have to be put down again or worse, put away. Even the smallest task could take days. So I turned my desperate need for a project to the garden where the children could be happily out there with me. I dug up a large area for vegetables, fenced off a bit for some hens and created a house and enclosure for pigs. The children enjoyed all this with me and it taught me that involving them went a long way towards getting to do what I wanted to do and how to make things fun for them.

Boatbuilding, however, seemed a thing of the past. I had thought that by the time I had the money, time, enthusiasm



and commitment for another project, it would be too late and I would have forgotten too much. Growing my own vegetables and eating our own eggs and bacon was rewarding in its way but working for *Water Craft* was re-kindling my interest – and going to the Beale Park boat show was the final spark. I remembered why I love boats and the desire to build again and get out on the water was too strong to resist.

Roger Dongray's 10' (3m) Limpet dinghy, which I'd sailed at Beale and is now being produced as a pre-cut plywood kit by Rob Rainsford at Sea Shell Boats, seemed like a ticket back into my old life. It is such a complete and simple kit, small enough to build in my shed but big enough for me and the boys to sail in together. I felt it was not unrealistic for me to build and more importantly, finish. I felt that the boys, although still very young could be involved. In fact, it would be their project – no matter what the finished boat looked like, as long as it was sea-worthy and they could say they did it. If I could pass on the 'bug' to them then maybe I could justify the money, time and commitment from me. Suddenly weeding around the vegetables and slopping about in mud to feed the pigs had lost its attraction, so the pigs are in the freezer and the veg plot is a wilderness that the chickens freely enjoy once more.

So Brendan, age 7, concientious, practical and – usually – sensible. Aidan, age 5, over-imaginative, quietly determined with a 'need' to make things. Finlay, age 3, thinks he's Super Ted; he has a knack for destruction but loves water to the point of stripping off to go bodyboarding in the pond or to run around naked in the rain. It was going to be a challenge but I couldn't wait to begin.

The first thing to do when Rob Rainsford delivered the kit was to go through each piece, identify and organise them into some sort of order. I was surprised how well this task went. Brendan took to it straight away, finding the shape on a numbered chart and cross-referencing to find out what it was called. It was part of the project I'd totally overlooked as potentially 'interesting'.

I discovered as we unpacked that when Rob had said "complete" he really meant it. Apart from all the obvious bits of ply and softwood, we had a large cardboard box containing the sail, various lengths of rope and a fairly weighty bag of hardware: cleats, fairleads, eyebolts, screws and nails. It was more than I could imagine we would need! I was pleased to find that even the epoxy had been supplied: two 3kg packs of SP, with microfibrres and microballoons, even stirring sticks, brushes and pots! I would not have to source anything else until we were ready for the paint. The cost for the rowing-only kit is £900, and the sail version is £1700. Initially this seemed expensive but when all the components were laid out on the patio and we had checked off every bit, I could see it really was value for money. Every piece of shaped ply was cleanly cut and would need little or no sanding before assembly; I hope that the boat when the boys and I have finished it will still show the same quality!

The Limpet has a multi-chine plywood hull with a plywood spine, incorporating the daggerboard, into which plywood frames are slotted. It became clear that the names of the various plywood parts, however logical to me, made no sense



Facing page top: The designer Roger Dongray helms the Limpet at the Beale Park show. **Below:** The pre-cut components in the kit.

This page: Jo's boatbuilding boys. From the top: Finlay aged 3; Aidan aged 5; Brendan aged 7.





Left: *The spine is strengthened by doublers epoxied in place. Right:* *Painting the daggerboard case and mast slot before assembly.*

whatsoever to the boys, so we made up our own names for things according to their shape. Instead of having doublers, bulkheads, the keelson and so on, we had an elephant, spectacles, a boomerang and a cat!

The spine/elephant was in two sections, forward and aft of the daggerboard, which would be joined by the daggerboard case. So we screwed them to the floor making sure they were spaced accurately for the daggerboard and true to the waterline. This all went well but to be honest, the novelty of being allowed in the workshop and playing with my tools was more interesting. So while I was busy with the dinghy, the kids were banging nails into the floor and drilling holes in everything – with a hand drill I should add. I wonder how long I will find it amusing tripping over nails in the floor.

Then it was time to do some glueing. In our eagerness to begin I made the first crucial mistake: I had not insisted that they all go to the toilet before we started. Just as we had nearly covered the plywood and some of Finlay with epoxy – or baby porridge, as they called it – 2 out of 3 wanted to go. After cleaning hands, I waited for them to come back. When Fin returned, he charged in wearing only a T shirt and ran over the epoxied ply in his bare feet. It was a lesson for us all; none of them were too keen on being cleaned up with thinners especially between the toes.

On the whole, this phase went well. Roger and Rob have put together an instruction booklet which I found logical and easy to follow. Brendan could grasp the diagrams so far. With the distraction of having the boys in the workshop, it is helpful not to have to do much clever thinking.

There were various bits to glue onto the spine – strengthening doublers and packing pieces – and these little jobs fitted in well with our lives. The children's attention span is fairly short so we just glued a bit at a time: an 'elbow' in the morning, then we out to play; 'swords' in the afternoon, then ride bikes...

The inside of the mast slot and daggerboard case needed to be epoxied and painted before being finally glued together. We used Skipper paints. The Unifibre primer can go straight onto sanded epoxy, followed by their 1 part Topkapi top coat. I think this particular paint is a good choice for this project. Both were easy to apply and I was pleased how well the top coat dried, especially considering how 'artistically' it was painted on. Brendan and Aidan both had a similar method: start with blobs in the middle – very pretty – and keep brushing the same part over and over. After I pointed out it had to go right up to the edges, this was done really enthusiastically. Finlay was thankfully pre-occupied saving the planet – as Super Ted.

Once the spine section was complete, we glued on the



The packing case in which the Limpet kit arrives provides a good sturdy base for the building jig. Brendan checks the frames are vertical.

spectacles, pussy cat and the crab – the bulkheads – which is just like making those wooden dinosaur skeletons but more satisfying. The bulkheads simply slot onto the spine, the slots needed a little bit of adjusting to make a good fit and we made sure they were on at a perfect 90° to the centreline. They were held in place with Gripfast ring-barbed nails while the epoxy cured. The whole skeleton was fairly wobbly at this point and nearly ready to go on its frame which very cleverly is supplied as part of the packaging for the whole kit.

This was the most tricky part so far and did involve a little careful thought but it's very satisfying when everything is level, square and as accurate as possible. I decided to do this part without the boys' help; doing it bit by bit had been all very well but it was taking a long time. I felt we needed to crack on: Finlay was in danger of forgetting what a boat was; the word 'boat' had come to mean a pile of wood. When the boat was upside down on its frame, Aidan thought it looked

a bit spooky, like a huge beetle that would crawl right out of the shed. I was just glad to have got to this stage with no disasters, and still plenty of enthusiasm all round. Now we are ready to start planking and I'm really excited: maybe I should get out more.

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