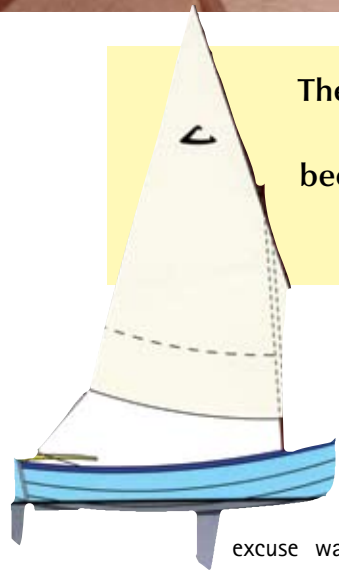




JOBS FOR THE BOYS

The boys – Brendan aged 7, Aidan 6 and Finlay 4 – are helping to build a Limpet sailing dinghy from the Seashell Boats kit. So far they have been enthusiastic but – notes *Water Craft's* fascinated student of the male psyche, Jo Moran – they've now reached the stage where nothing much seems to happen.



In my last instalment – see W67 – my three mercurial young males and I had reached the stage of completing the hull; my fourth mercurial but not so young male's excuse was still pressure of work. After the satisfaction of seeing the planking finished, there was a lot of filling and sanding to be done along the planks and edges. The boys soon lost enthusiasm – so I did it.

Then the keel band had to be fitted. This is a boat-length piece of 1 7/8" x 3/4" (47 x 19mm) Douglas fir, tapered at the forward end, with a 12" (310mm) slot for the daggerboard and a 19" (0.48m) cut-out at the aft end to receive the skeg. The daggerboard and skeg are also supplied with the kit, both pre-cut from 5/8" (15mm) ply. Brendan had helped me to plane the tapered end and wanted to cut the skeg slot with the jigsaw but I preferred to use a handsaw as it is easier to make a straight-line cut – and easier for me to let them help. Aidan and I did it together; Brendan, disappointed, wouldn't help.

The forward bottom planks had to be planed to give a flat surface 1" (25mm) wide to which the keel band and stem laminates would be fitted. I enjoyed doing this on a peaceful afternoon without interruption when the boys were out with

friends. Using lengths of wood wedged to the ceiling as shores to the keel band in place over the gentle curve of the boat, it was glued in place easily.

The stem is made up of four 1/8" (3mm) laminates of ash. This took a little patience – maybe lost a little patience would be more accurate. The Limpet has a plumb stem going into a pronounced curve to the keel and although the ash laminates take up the curve smoothly, when covered with epoxy they become very slippery. The first one went on well to begin with but I managed to pinch the floppy end of Brendan's gloved finger in between and it wouldn't pull out so we took the laminate off again. Trying again minus glove, it was so sticky and slippery it was hard to get it on again dead centre. The hammer was sticky, the nails were slippery and impossible to pick up and my language was becoming foul. I stamped my foot, pointed to the door and was left to finish gluing and cursing; I did the other 3 pieces after the boys had gone to bed. I have to say, though, that once the glue was cleaned off and a shape defined, the curve of the stem looked great.

Now it was time to turn the hull over and see the inside for the first time – for me, anyway; Finlay had spent lot of time under the boat while the rest of us were working on it. He had made quite a camp in the wood shavings and sawdust. I was



Opposite page: *Brendan, 7, fills all the gaps with epoxy filler.*
Above: *Finlay, 4, works hard at keeping everybody amused.*
Below: *Aidan, 6, helps Brendan coat the inside with epoxy.*

excited about turning the boat over and I probably overdid the build-up to it; when the moment came, they muttered things like "It's a boat" and went back outside to play. Finlay said "It's finished. Yeah".

Thankfully, there wasn't too much epoxy to clean up along the plank joins. I did the worst of it and the boys did some using scrapers and coarse sandpaper, partly because this avoids fine particles and because it shows the results quickly. Then I finished off with finer paper. They were not interested in more filling and sanding, which suited me fine. I did it in the evenings – the ones which weren't too cold and damp, so it took a long time.

Christmas came and the dinghy took a back seat both in terms of attention and interest all round. Then Aidan and Finlay both had birthdays and trying to find time for the dinghy was difficult. But some good weather came to visit and so did Grandpa, so we moved the dinghy outside onto the patio to fit the gunwales in the sunshine. We worked on the boat while the children rode their bikes round and round us, then kicked a football at and around us and all the while, the boys' Christmas presents, three guinea pigs, sat and watched us nervously from inside the dinghy.

The outer gunwales are also Douglas fir and at 1 1/2" x 3/8" (32 x 10mm), they were not difficult to bend. But the ends wanted to droop and the midships wanted to rise, so knowing how slippery epoxy can be, I wasn't going to depend on the clamps to hold the gunwales in place while the epoxy cured. I put in three temporary screws, one at each end and one in the middle.





Above: Right way up at last, the *Limpet* awaits her rubbing strakes. **Below left:** Brendan cuts out the polystyrene pads which will add buoyancy to the undersides of the seat tops and Aidan cleans up after him. **Below right:** Brendan checks the shape of a quarter knee.



The bulkheads need a 1 1/2" (32mm) bevelled cut-out at their upper corners to allow the inner gunwale – the inwale – to sit right. Aidan helped with this but Finlay was making a robot out of a cardboard box and a piece of L-bend guttering and Aidan just had to help. I was glad of Grandad's help with the inwales: they are tricky to get in and out and to decide how best to trim them to make a good fit.

The next job was far more captivating for the boys: fitting the fore and aft seat tops. These also come in the kit, pre-cut from 3/8" (9mm) ply but inevitably need a little trimming. So Brendan helped to plane them down a little and we made them fit snugly. Before they could be stuck down, the locker spaces they create had to be epoxied and painted.

The best bit, though, was the layers of polystyrene which are glued to the underside of the seat tops to add buoyancy. Using the drawing in the manual, Brendan and I marked out the shapes to be cut and the next day we cut them out with a handsaw, Aidan vacuumed up the bits as Brendan was sawing. Aidan now loves the vacuum cleaner and frequently comes out to clean out the interior of the dinghy; he even 'hoovers' in the house now too. Curiously, Brendan who loves all the electric

power tools has no interest in the vacuum cleaner. The layers of polystyrene are glued together with PVA adhesive and then painted with white emulsion to make them harder. Finally, we could stick the locker tops in place and fillet around them. It had taken us a long time to get this far and it seemed like a landmark.

During the cold, damp weather, when the boys were not much involved in working on the boat, I suggested we think of a name which might help us to decide what colour the boat should be. They needed prompting as Aidan thought *Limpet* was already a good name and Finlay can be a bit abstract when it comes to choosing names. He called his guinea pig *Name* and has many strangely named toys from a rabbit called *Yoghurt* to a teddy bear called *Electric*.

I suggested they think about sea creatures to find the right name. When we put all the suggestions in a hat, it was interesting. Brendan's were all fierce: *Piranha*, *Tiger Shark* and *Stingray*. Aidan's were cute: *Dolphin*, *Seahorse* and *Turtle*. Finlay wanted *Fishy* or *Po-la-la* after a favourite toy. *Piranha* was the first name out of the hat but Aidan was so unhappy about this, we picked again. When *Stingray* was pulled out I



anticipated a similar reaction but all liked it. Aidan had loved the rays at the Aquarium and thought that green with blue spots would be cool. We have a small plastic stingray toy which the boys want to stick on the bow. I was relieved that we hadn't picked *Fishy*.

We are very lucky to have a large tree in our garden which fell down during a bad storm, creating a wonderful climbing and hiding opportunity for the boys. They were so happy playing in this that I was able to crack on with epoxying, sanding and painting the inside of the dinghy more or less in peace. I had fitted but not glued the middle thwart, to make it easier to paint around, but with this done and the pre-cut plywood bow and stern knees in place, the interior seemed to be soon finished – even with the multicoloured paint scheme they had agreed on.

All three boys were brilliant at leaving me to it, although it still makes me laugh the way they would come in and watch me painting, then put their dirty hand on the wet paint and

say "It's wet". We have used Skippersline paints throughout. Their Unifiber primer covers well over the epoxy but it's a strange spearmint green colour which I found hard to cover with a light coloured top coat. Because I wanted white inside the lockers and the boys didn't, we settled on cream. The cream is from the Sintolin range, a one-pot paint and quite thin; I found it covered best using a roller. The 'stingray' green is also Sintolin but was no problem to paint over the Unifiber primer. Skipper also do a one-pot paint called Topkapi which we used for the blue and it was thicker and easier to apply.

While I was busy with the paint, Aidan got the idea in his head to build a dinghy out of paper. So Brendan wanted to make one too. It was interesting that they remembered that the pieces were strange curved shapes. They found their first attempts frustrating so I showed them the diagram from the manual which showed the shapes of the planks flat. Using this and at least half a roll of Sellotape, they managed to get a boat shape they were happy with. Well, Aidan was not that happy with his; it wasn't quite as good as the picture in his mind, so, discouraged, he didn't want to finish it. I made the sail for him and told him that he was a great boatbuilder. Finlay, with no interest in paper boats, got two brooms and decided to learn to row.

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