



JOBS FOR THE BOYS

As if being the mother of three young boys and working for *Water Craft* was not enough, Jo Moran is building the Limpet sailing dinghy kit from Sea Shell Boats – with the help of the boys, of course.

With photographs by the author.

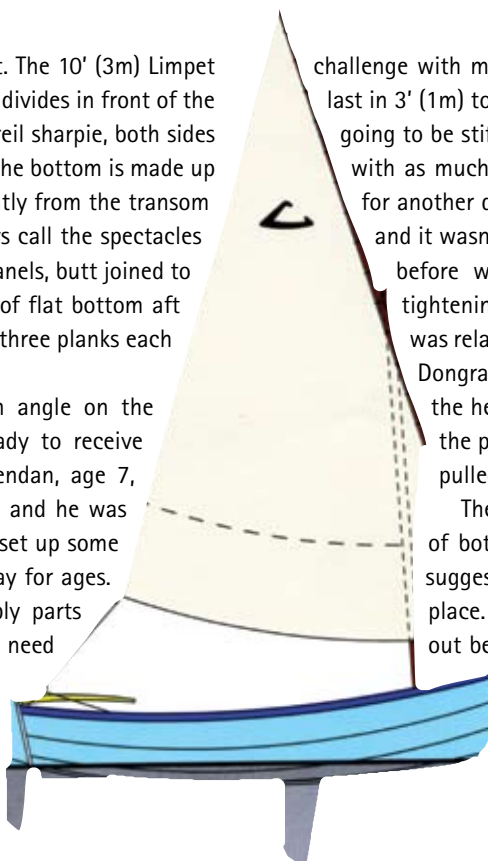
The planking got off to a good start. The 10' (3m) Limpet dinghy has a flat bottom aft which divides in front of the daggerboard slot and like a Nonpareil sharpie, both sides then twist to vertical at the stem. Thus, the bottom is made up of three panels: the aft piece curves gently from the transom to the midships bulkhead which the boys call the spectacles and ahead of it are port and starboard panels, butt joined to the first piece. Above this combination of flat bottom aft and pair of garboards forward, there are three planks each side, all in 1/4" (6mm) ply.

Eager to get started, we planed an angle on the transom and on the first bulkhead ready to receive the first part of the bottom plank. Brendan, age 7, did this with me: it only took a minute and he was disappointed when we had to stop, so I set up some softwood in the vice and he planed away for ages. The pre-cut plywood panel – all the ply parts of the kit come ready cut to shape and need little sanding – was glued and fastened with Gripfast ring-barbed bronze nails, without incident or difficulty.

The forward section was more of a

challenge with most of the twist needed coming in the last 3' (1m) to the stem; with 1/4" (6mm) ply, this was going to be stiff. We clamped both sides into position with as much of a twist as we could and left them for another day. As it happened, real life intervened and it wasn't another day but another three weeks before we came back to it. But I had been tightening up the bow clamps every few days, it was relatively easy. The Limpet's designer, Roger Dongray, suggested using a plywood pad under the head of the screw at the bow to even up the pressure and this worked well; the plank pulled in neatly along the stem.

The daggerboard slot needed to be cut out of both forward sections which the manual suggested we did once they were glued in place. However, I decided to make the cut out before we glued, leaving an overhanging edge to clean up afterwards. Brendan and Aidan, 5, had helped prepare the keel and bulkhead, planing a gentle taper from the middle, to a steep taper





at the stem. I had to finish it off as they had given up, finding it hard work and the plane heavy holding it at an angle. I glued and fixed the starboard side on my own, glad to be left to do it without them. Aidan came in to help with the port side. He was very thorough with the epoxy and once the plank was in place, he helped with the clamps and screws. I found he gets absorbed in little tasks and will help for quite long periods but getting him to hurry up is the hard bit: none of the boys has realised you need to keep ahead of epoxy.

With the first plank fitted, it gave the whole structure great rigidity, especially with the twist at the bow. Finlay, 3, instantly saw it as a new thing to climb up and jump up and down on, really giving it a test for strength. Brendan helped to plane the plank edge and bulkheads ready for the next plank, I asked them if they thought it looked more like a boat yet but they agreed it looked much more like a scary beetle because it now had a body. But I was pleased when Brendan commented on the shape the bow was taking. "It looks fast," he said. And then added "Are we going to have a big engine?".

Finlay hasn't contributed much to the Limpet so far but he has made great progress "building" a spaceship out of a large cardboard box, a junior hacksaw and a pair of pliers. I have a feeling he will be wanting sticky tape next.

The second planks needed to be scarfed together, so I did this outside on the patio where there is more room. To ensure the two pieces would be glued together in correct alignment, I laid them out and drew two long straight lines across the join. Then I laid one on top of the other to plane both sides of the scarf at the same time. The children ignored me and left to me to get on with it but just as I was finishing, Fin wanted to help, so he did. Or rather, I let him feel that he was helping, which I realize now is the most important thing to keep up their enthusiasm and sense of involvement. Contemplating

Above: Aidan applies the epoxy glue before clamping one of the twisting bottom panels into position. Below left: Super Ted! Below right: Before he broke his arm, Brendan put some real muscle into tightening the screws which held down the panels.





this when we were mixing the epoxy, I went back into the shed to get the microfibres and when I came back, he was stirring in handfuls of wood shavings.

We are getting through huge amounts of epoxy, with excess often left in the pot and huge dribbles over the boat which I have been trying to clean up as we go. It all takes so much longer with the children involved and I confess that I have wondered why I am doing it. It is so tempting to say "just let me do it" especially as it's been difficult to find the time and I am anxious not to waste it. But I keep telling myself, it



will be worth it in the end when we can be out on the water. To help keep us all focused, we have been reading *Swallows and Amazons*, which the boys are enjoying. It's livened their curiosity and helped them to see roles for us all. I am Captain Mum, Brendan is the Mate and Aidan the Able Seaman. Fin is supposed to be Ship's Boy but he does not like this at all; he still thinks he is Super Ted.

The second plank needed trimming in places. Between the stem and the first bulkhead, the overlap was too great, so I planed it back ensuring it remained a fair curve. At the





bow, the planks merge together to finish flush at the stem, so they need a tapered half-lap join along the overlap. I called the boys in to help me fit it. They measured and marked 6" (150mm) intervals along the length and 3/4" (20mm) down from the overlapping edge.

They also made adjacent marks along the bottom plank and then drilled the holes for the cable ties. I let Brendan use the electric drill, which is now his favourite thing. With Finlay jumping up and down on top of the boat, Brendan's trigger-happy eagerness to drill was starting to scare me, so I had to unplug it. It was a great relief when Grandpa turned up. We glued up and set the plank in position, with two screws in the bow and pulled the planks together with the cable ties, clamping at each bulkhead and using screws at the transom. Both boys worked well together, Aidan pushing the ties down the holes and Brendan underneath pushing them up. The boys lapped up Grandpa's encouragement and Grandma lured Finlay away with strawberries.

It was a satisfying day, and the boys now think it looks like an upside down boat – hooray! But Fin's spaceship had to be dismantled and moved out of the shed because we were all tripping over it. Fin now wants some sticky tape and Aidan is confident he can rebuild it. Success.

Just as we were getting a good pace going, the next planks



on, everything speeding up, and everybody happy, Brendan fell out of a tree and broke his arm, so things came to a halt yet again. With the last two planks all scarfed and ready to go on, it was hard to resist doing it myself. I did one side, and they all helped with the other. Aidan helped to make the half lap join at the bow, using a small block plane while Brendan marked out the holes for the cable ties and then everyone fought over whose turn it was to do the drilling. After they all had happily had a turn, and we'd put the drill away, they all disappeared. So I spread the epoxy quickly before they came back, ready for them to position the plank and fasten it on. Brendan was determined and managed very well with one arm. It was almost a shame that it was the last plank, as we finally all worked well as a team. Well, Finlay was busy looking for a lost hen; whenever he came back, somebody would suggest a new place to look and off he would go.

The boys were eager to turn the hull over but I pointed out that we had to fillet the seams and fill all the holes – or "windows" as Fin called them when it was his turn to drill. We did the filleting using a small sandwich bag filled with the epoxy and microballoons mix or "chocolate icing". I twisted the top and snipped off one corner and Aidan "iced" the boat.

Facing page top: Brendan, Aidan and Grandpa fight over whose turn it is to drill the holes for the cable ties.

Facing page bottom: Aidan planes the gain while Jo makes up epoxy filler for filleting the seams.

Above: The fully-planked hull on its building frame is rigid enough and light enough to be carried outside for filleting.

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