

I bought a J24 in January this year... Why?!

I have since asked myself this question on several occasions too. These are some of the random thoughts that have sprung to mind when I have sought to justify this rash and rather selfish course of action...

I had been a bad foredeck person for 4 years, and had an impending sense of growing older and even clumsier as time went by. Also, x number of years ago, I had great fun at Salcombe on family holidays sailing a Mirror dinghy with my sister, who I managed to

terrorise by sailing VERY close to expensive moored boats!

I recall one incident when a Naval vessel entered Salcombe harbour as the gaggle of junior Mirrors were tacking up towards the Blackstone at the harbour entrance. Everything went rather cold, dark and quiet as mysteriously the other Mirrors tacked off one by one, I looked up at the burgee to check on what the hell was happening, only to see the overhanging bow of a huge metal ship about 20 feet above the top of my mast. My sister started squeaking about tacking

and I told her to "Shut up - Dad said motor ALWAYS gives way to sail!"

The sense of power that holding the tiller gives, and the sure knowledge that everyone else on the boat has to "get on with it" (or GET OFF!) no matter what dark and incomprehensible forces guide the helmsman's hand - is totally addictive. This authority is especially appealing to those of us housewives who are normally the servants of teenage children, who have the uncanny knack of making you feel constantly stupid and rather inferior.



“ In fact as well as being a “sad old house cow” I also have a very “uncool” job. It is smelly, unglamorous, hard work and unfashionably physical AND involves wearing white rubber gloves, white wellies and a PINK hairnet! I am to my children’s ultimate shame - a cheesemaker. Can you wonder then, that once a week I don my baggy shapeless red sailing trousers and puffy yellow bouyancy aid, look in the mirror and think “Well that’s a huge improvement!” ”

cont...



Apart from the relative power and glamour that J24 sailing brings me, I have learnt the skill of lying convincingly, a necessity when it comes to persuading more experienced crew to sail with a less experienced helmsperson let alone a helmswomen.

Telephone in one hand, large glass of red wine in the other, (essential bullshit prop when trying to cajole some of Ju Ju's old crew into accompanying me) I was heard to say in the most laid back masculine voice I could manage without coughing, "Well of course, when I was sailing a National Twelve...". What I did not say was that I was 6 years old at the time and only got taken along in my dad's National once, because my mother was about to kill me for scattering sand for the third time over the same sun bathers.

I used my artful skill to great effect to get a crew together for the first race of this season in Plymouth. With toes crossed uncomfortably in wet socks - I was still in foredeck gear - I confidentially told my new crew before the first race of the season, for which I

had turned up horribly late, "Well we needn't worry about getting out to the committee boat, the outboard is VERY reliable... " What I should have said was "Sorry I am late, thank you for rigging the boat - I promise I'll put it away and buy the beers.." Instead, never doubting my word for a moment, dutifully nodding the crew confidentially cast off mooring lines.... the next second we were fending off Sun Seekers and Benetau yachts left right and centre as not daring to look up I pathetically tugged at the starter cord of the "VERY reliable outboard "- to no avail. In the end, after making several shambolic attempts to tack against the tide out of the marina, humiliated, I handed over the tiller to one of my crew who is a better helmsman than I shall ever be. Once underway we resumed normal positions - that is

normal for everyone else except me. After starting 2 minutes after all the other J 24's, waiting for someone else to say "ready about..." all the way up the first leg, hitting the first windward mark, and getting the tiller extension stuck under the rail at the next downwind mark even I couldn't hide my complete ineptitude and total lack of experience.

Conversely, at some of the regattas we have attended since, it can actually pay to appear like a complete idiot.

- a) people tell you more because they don't regard you as a threat - which I'm not - yet,
- b) when you do have blonde moments which are fairly frequent in my case, people dismiss this as normal and this can lull the opposition into a false sense of security

I had a VERY expensive blonde moment recently though, where I nearly fooled myself that I was actually no threat even to an old J 80 helmsman. I lost the TIC TAC thing overboard AND I didn't know the dammed thing was designed to float until several beers later in the bar. I never did understand the instructions about how to put it on the mast properly, let alone what you were supposed to do about flashing numbers. Mind you, this is the woman who tried to add up May's cheese sales figures on a TV remote control!! Draw your own conclusions, am I a threat or not?!

The Southern areas at Falmouth saw me using my idiot identity to great effect; sidling up to Stuart Jardine on Saturday morning as the halyards clanked restlessly on masts and whispers of gale force winds abounded. I asked innocently "Is there any advice you can give me?!" Stuart looked up casually from his coffee and said rather solemnly, "Make sure you close your hatch downwind!". I went back to Ju Ju, looked inside at the Italian style open lockers underneath the cockpit, and silently thanked Stuart for this good advice.

The wind moderated and we survived, and that evening in the bar, Stuart came over to suggest that we might like to lend Ju Ju to two Australians who were looking for boat and three crew to compete in the Worlds. At that

time we were thrilled! Getting a J 24 was certainly opening doors onto new horizons, and seductively attractive horizons at that, where work, time and earning money have no great importance! Pure escapism surrounded by other similarly afflicted beings, you can almost kid yourself that it's all quite justifiable!

Emails flew back and forth from Adelaide to Cornwall, and due to the time differential between Northern and Southern Hemisphere, most were late at night after a glass or two of the "essential bullshit prop" I think I had convinced the Aussies they were getting a good boat and some good crew. Unfortunately first impressions count, and I had a classic blonde moment when we eventually first met for our first practice sail. Again, I was late onto the pontoon at the marina, having failed to give myself enough time to deliver the cheese that I was supposed to on the way, I tried not to park the car in the full sun! Things got worse as in high spirits, clutching a pile of sailing gear I approached the boat, giving a fellow crew member a friendly shove by way of greeting. To my horror and in full view of the Aussies to whom I was about to introduce myself, my car keys fell slowly through the boards of the pontoon into the water. I couldn't pretend it hadn't happened, because I would have looked even sillier later standing helplessly outside my car,

besides I still had to deliver the damn cheese. There was nothing for it, still continuing as intelligent a conversation as I could about North Sails versus Hydes, I stripped down to my knickers and jumped in. Luckily my prehensile toes saved me from having to put my face into the water, and keys firmly gripped between big toe and second toe I lifted myself dripping back onto the pontoon and struggled to get my trousers over my wet pants, all vestige of credibility totally annihilated. I was lucky though, we had found 2 from the Southern Hemisphere who were total boat addicts and my antics went unnoticed. I later learnt when I was attempting to call the start line during the worlds that the only thing that grabbed their attention was to shout "Bundy!"

I was subsequently introduced to the technicalities of optimised keels, x length forestays, something rigging and a new race manoeuvre which involved chasing other Australian boats all over the course. New phrases became familiar like "Popping the chute" and "Fatten it up" and "Gift wrapping" (applied to an old slow female foredeck who reaquently got stuck behind the genoa).

(For the record, Ju Ju is a joint venture which halves the bills and doubles the fun!)

I have learnt the hard way already that levelling experiences that some pay the earth to get on outward bound expeditions and courses are part and parcel of the J 24 scene. But so too are the people I have got to know since I have had Ju Ju, and this more than anything is a good answer to my question, "Why on earth get a J 24!?"