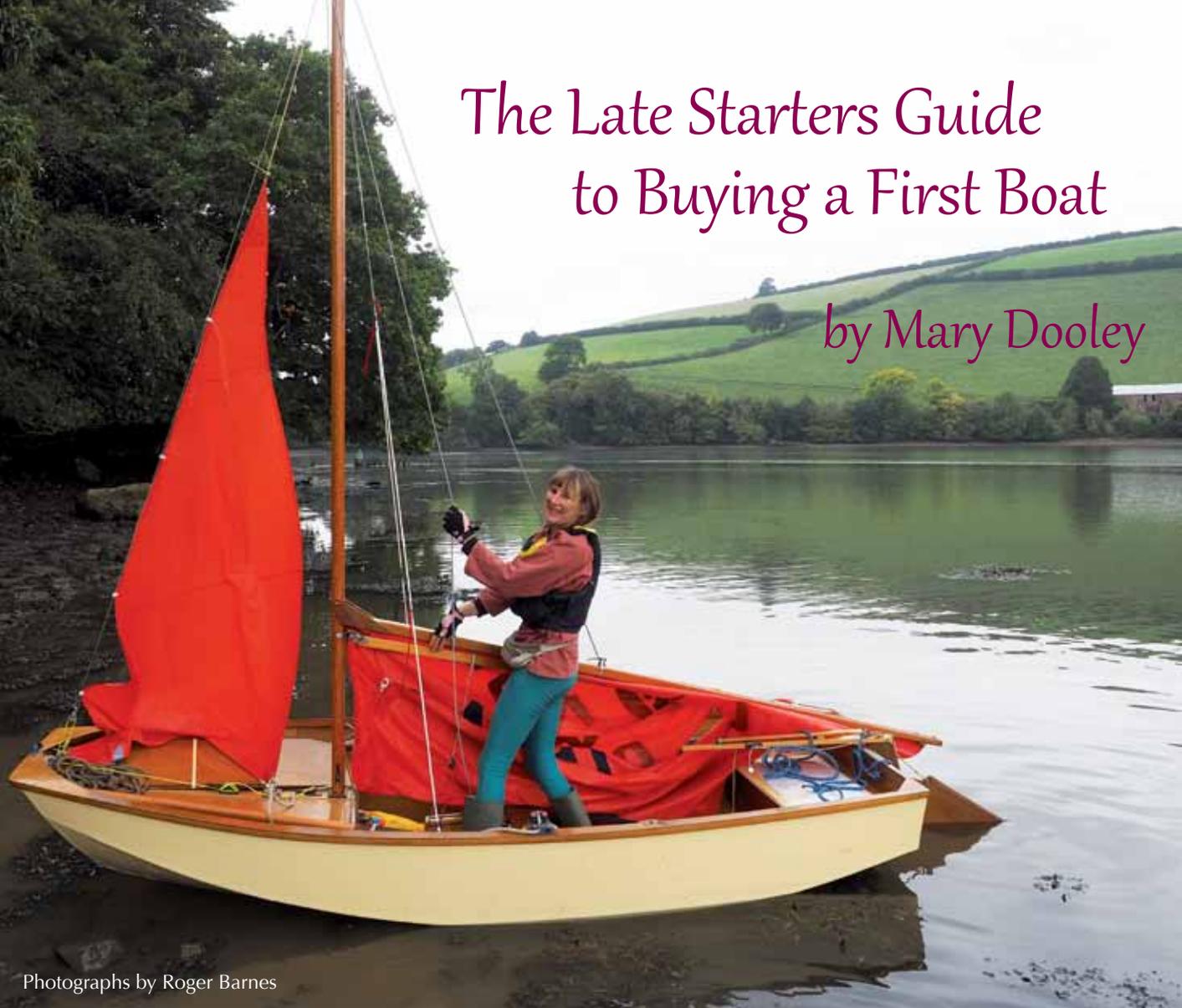


The Late Starters Guide to Buying a First Boat

by Mary Dooley



Photographs by Roger Barnes

IN 2015 I JOINED THE DCA, which was one of the best uses of £24 ever. I didn't own a boat and was very content crewing for other DCA members who generously let me aboard their vessels. But the time bomb ticking at the back of my mind was the idea that one day I too could be a boat owner. Tick... tick.... tick..... like a teenager tapping up parents for money, I kept casually mentioning my idea until I got the answer I wanted. The answer came from Sarah ... who owns a lovely Lune Pilot called *Pampootie*. Sarah wisely suggested to me that whilst crewing is a valuable experience, I would only really learn about boats if I got my own. Her final words on the matter were 'But you will need to be interested in things like splicing'. Not knowing what splicing was I ignored that bit.

In 2016 I bought my boat... so here is my snappy 10-point guide:

1. Several years before you even set foot on a boat, choose the name you will give your own boat. I have a Buddhist friend and at the bottom of every email he tranquilly advises, 'from the seed comes the tree'.

2. Ask advice, because everyone will give you a different view. You will be swirled in giddy circles and realise that advice is a form of prevarication and in your heart you already know what is important to you. I

chose a Mirror dinghy because they looked very light to pick up, proven by the fact that I distantly remembered a cute picture of one on the roof of a Mini.

3. Embrace your doubts. Welcome the big internal debate about whether to do it. Do you need a boat? No. Can you afford it? No. But answer this doubt with, 'What is happiness?' and, 'Can you manipulate your finances?' Yes of course you can, (some people were even giving boats away, but try not to dwell on why). What else could you buy? Dogs are smelly and very environmentally unfriendly and a boat makes a much better best friend.

4. Check that your subscription to the DCA is up to date. DCA members are lovely encouraging people. Sailing Superstars like Liz Baker will be shining role models of kind advice. DCA members like Phil Oxborrow will show extraordinary patience and help you to rig your boat, even with your fledgling knowledge of what all the bits are called. You will learn nautical terms such as: Topping lift (sounds like an instant milky pudding); Battens & Bungs (these alliterating dodgy solicitors are actually vital, trustworthy and cheap); Yard (an inexplicable name given to a piece of wood that has nothing to do with measurements, back gardens, or Jamaican DJs).

DCA members like Josephine Street, who are trustingly kind spirited, will come with you on your inaugural trips

and boldly go were lots of others have gone before, but with more understanding of how to get there. When I was making substantial backwards progress in tidal currents, Josephine knew the counter intuitive fact that sometimes to make forward progress you have to make millions of tiny tacks in impossibly shallow waters at the edge of the creek.

5. I am looking at my notes, I don't seem to have a point 5.

6. Ignore the 'don't do it devils'. They are mean minded fun spoilers. They will keep you awake at night lining up reasons why this is a foolish decision. This point is very much like point 3 so you can see how much doubt I was having.

7. This bit is probably sexist, but my mantra became, 'Think like a man'. Now some readers will find that they are already men so may be glowing with pride at this stage. But read further. I have crewed, helmed, and capsized in many locations but I acknowledge that when it comes to more exposed tidal waters, I know as much about sailing as the nation knows about the meaning of Brexit. However I know men whose only marine experiences have been on the pedalos in Hyde Park who have decided to helm yachts on flotilla holidays in Turkey. Now if any of you can point to a woman who has such irrational self belief then I am prepared to accept my mantra as being sexist and inaccurate, but the real lesson is that (apart from when it comes to leading nations) sometimes being a bit gung-ho is what you need.

8. Find your boat. If you are attracted towards numbers there is a wealth of information, it makes me realise where the term naval gazing came from. There are statistics on hull shapes, beams, sail ratios, buoyancy and ballast, to name but a few. If you are not attracted to this information just ignore it and feel assured that if a boat is reasonably popular with DCA members then at some stage someone on a forum somewhere will have already done some mathematical calculations. You will find boats advertised in many places. I had had previous success buying a bath off Gumtree so it seemed the perfect place to also buy a boat. And I was right, It was packed with Mirror dinghies, like animals at a rescue centre looking out pleadingly for a new home. I couldn't take them all so I chose one that looked like it was house trained and cared for; my view was don't pity the dejected looking ones they were bound to have deep seated psychological issues. But if you prefer a challenge you may go for one that looks like it bites as a result of cruelty and neglect.

9. Check out the current owner. You may have thought you were looking for a boat but we all know it is not the talent of the child that makes the child genius; it is the determination of the parents behind them. The owner of the boat I chose had many qualities. He was a previous DCA member. He was proudly devoted to his boat and I could detect concern on his behalf at the possibility of selling her to someone who talked about the pointy end and the back bit. Not only was he an excellent owner but he could provide the calligraphically hand annotated building instructions of the original owner. This boat had

had love lavished on her.

10. Actually buy it. 'Think like a man'.... 'Think like a man'.... 'Think like a man'.... Panic, panic , panic. Look for a good omen – my pay inexplicably came a week early, so I sent the money to the man on my phone called Bob the Boat.

11. Resolve outstanding issues. How to feed the children for the next month? Where to keep a boat that is expecting to be pampered? How do you tow a boat when you don't have a towbar? How do you insure a boat? How do you sail a boat with a strange triangular-shaped front sail called a jib? How easy is it to right the boat if she is capsized (resolved by having the celebrated Youtube chronicler of capsizes and president of DCA on board at the time, well actually looking a bit surprised in the water at the time).

So there you are, my 10-point plan. I bought *Oranges* and immediately had 5 wonderful days sailing with the DCA at Cobnor. If I never sail again it would all have been worth it, and I still have no idea what splicing is. *MD*

