

Women Making Waves

As we reported in the summer edition of *Australian Boating*, women are taking to the water in growing numbers. Briar Jensen profiles a few she's met on the waterfront.

Take a look around next time you're out and you'll see motor cruising is no longer a predominantly male pastime. It's increasingly becoming a family activity, where couples, sometimes with children in tow, share the responsibility and excitement of recreational boating.

While some women grow up around boats and are confident, competent boat handlers at a young age, others come to boating later in life, often via a partner, and have little or no experience. This can be daunting, even frightening. But the women we spoke to said previous boating experience is not a prerequisite for having fun on the water.

What is important, they say, is active participation – the more involved you are, the more enjoyment you get.

Although Jo Carmody loved the water as a child, she didn't begin boating until the late 1980s when she and her husband bought their first family cruiser. They're now onto their fourth boat, having updated as family needs changed. Jo says they chose their latest boat, a 42-foot Integrity, "For its style, seaworthiness, fuel economy and excellent accommodation."

"I love being on the water," she says, "The water is very calming and relaxing. It makes you feel a million miles away."

When they bought their first cruiser Jo enrolled in a boat-handling course, and recommends others do the same. "I think a lot of women are a bit frightened. If they tried to do things and understand what it's about, they might enjoy it more. I mean, I've had my frights and accidents too; you're learning all the time. But I think you've just got to get involved."

Sherry Donaldson of the Australian Marine Industry Federation agrees, "Women interested in getting into boating need to think of themselves as participants rather than passengers and learn how to operate the vessel." She also points out that age is no barrier, "You don't have to be young or fit to go boating."

At 79, Elaine Jackson has dealt with cancer, a triple bypass and two knee operations, yet still gets out on her boat almost every weekend (when she's not away travelling). Elaine started cruising forty years ago, when she and her husband bought their first boat. Like Jo, they continued to update as family needs evolved. Their last boat, a Ranger 39.5, was built shortly before Elaine's husband died, nearly 14 years ago. She decided to keep the boat and uses it as often as she can, "I had a dozen out from Probus last weekend."

Ongoing knee problems have recently prevented her from driving the car, so the boat allows her to get out and catch up with friends. "I don't have to use my knees driving the boat. So long as I've got someone to pick up the mooring."

By having the boat serviced regularly, Elaine rarely has any mechanical problems. "I had to have my first tow in the last long weekend! There was a battery problem, but that's the first time I've had to be towed in nearly forty years."

Elaine offers the following advice to new widows, "Don't rush into anything. I've seen a lot of women sell their boats straight away. I didn't know how long I'd keep the boat. I never imagined it would still be in these waters all this time. And I don't know how much longer I'll be able to manage it, but while I feel as well as this, yes I can."

Christine Chamberlain didn't let lack of experience hold her back when she fell in love with a beautiful old Halvorsen, "What I knew about boats could be written on the back of a postage stamp," she says, "But I loved her lines, the gloss varnished timber – the classic elegance of a bygone era." So when friends offered her a 50 percent share, she leapt at the opportunity. "I was divorced, so part ownership represented an inexpensive 'weekender' and a wonderful new lifestyle."

Determined to be able to handle the boat in all conditions, Christine sought tuition from willing (and patient) friends. She gives an hilarious account of learning to pick up a

Barbara Leptig aboard her Kevlacat.

