

# 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.



Jo Carmody



Jo Carmody's Integrity.



mooring by herself in windy conditions, a manoeuvre her instructor made her practise repeatedly until she had it down pat, much to the amusement of neighbouring boats.

"I enjoy the freedom and independence of being able to take people out for a day or a weekend," she says, "I have more dinner parties onboard than I do at home." She eventually bought out her friends' share, but has since taken on another partner.

Christine says maintaining a timber cruiser is definitely a labour of love, "I do as much of the maintenance as I can, such as sanding, varnishing, painting, polishing, checking

batteries, engine and transmission oil, etc." But she no longer antifouls, "A 30-foot boat up on the slip takes on the proportions of the Queen Mary."

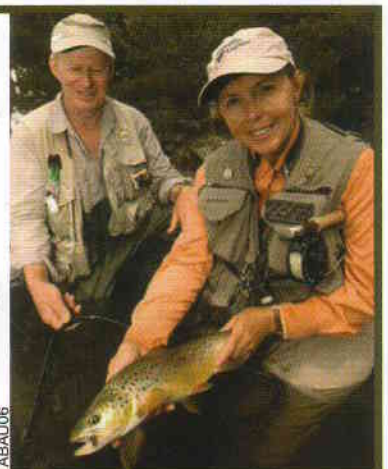
She strongly encourages other women to take up the boating lifestyle, "With instruction and experience you can manage manoeuvring a boat just as well as a man," she says, "And people are very generous in sharing their experiences and advice."

Boating has been part of Trisha Sheehan's life since her parents started taking her fishing on the Hawkesbury River when she was nine. And she's still in the area, running a real

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Elaine Jackson's Ranger Sentosa

Elaine Jackson



estate agency in Brooklyn that specialises in water-access-only properties. Her five female staff all drive their own boats to the office.

Trisha is currently on her sixth boat. "My husband bought the first two and I have bought the last four," she says, "I've been upgrading our boats every two to three years." Her latest purchase is a 43-foot Riviera flybridge cruiser, which she chose for family reasons, "We really required more accommodation with two children and their various friends."

Along with 'boating buddies' Trisha loves the sense of relaxation that begins as soon as she boards her boat, and

the freedom to navigate the extensive New South Wales coastline. Her only warning is, "Boating gets into your blood!"

While boat dealers didn't take her very seriously back in the 90s, Trisha says this attitude has changed, "They realise that women do make purchasing decisions and that we are taking into account not just décor, but capacity such as water and fuel, engine power, navigational equipment and handling."

Barbara Leptig says driving a boat is easier than driving a car, "And females make better drivers, right! You don't need a man to help you buy and operate a boat – it's easy."

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Christine Chamberlain on her Halvorsen Corranga.



Trisha Sheehan aboard Cool Change.



## 'Women on boats' fills a niche

Diane Halden knew nothing about boats before she and her husband purchased their first cruiser, nearly eight years ago. As a complete novice, she had to search out the services she needed, from how to drive a boat to where to buy accessories. As a busy working mother she found this difficult and time-consuming.

"I decided that one day, when the time was right, I would try to create a network of products and services to make it easier for other women."

In March 2005 she launched *WOMEN ON BOATS*.

"Whatever you need to know or learn, whatever you want to buy, from the boat itself to the bedding, *WOMEN ON BOATS* can assist," she says. The Queensland company provides an Australia-wide database of marine services, including accredited training courses. They also run workshops and seminars locally, which Diane plans to extend interstate.

Through the *WOMEN ON BOATS*

website you can buy accessories, book courses, build confidence and form friendships, says Diane, "It's about assisting women in obtaining skills, knowledge and confidence to enhance their boating lifestyles."

Visit [www.womenonboats.com.au](http://www.womenonboats.com.au)

And it's a great lifestyle, a healthy activity, and the kids (if you have any) will love it."

After competing in the inaugural Ribbons Tournament in Cairns in 1984, Barbara was hooked on big game fishing. "I had an estuary boat at the time, but it didn't provide me with the thrill and excitement of blue water fishing for pelagics."

As a widow since 1980 she couldn't afford to buy a larger boat, so when she came into a small inheritance in 1992 she snapped up a second-hand Kevlcat with twin 60hp four-stroke motors. "I couldn't afford to buy a big game boat, but the Kevlcat was perfect for my requirements."

Barbara completed an outboard motor course at TAFE, enabling her to do her own maintenance (though her son is

now a mechanic), but she says rust and brake maintenance on the trailer is more of a chore.

What Barbara loves most is being able to get out on the water whenever she wants, instead of having to rely on the hospitality of others. "There's also a sense of achievement at having entered a male dominated area, and occasionally beating the big game boats (and the men) in tournaments."

Barbara's advice to women thinking of buying their own boat is, "Go for it!"