

# Safe fun FOR KIDS

on board



Text: Aad Huijs assisted by Peter Van Roy, with photographs by both.

For many Linssen owners, being joined on board by their children or grandchildren, adds another dimension to their boating pleasure. What could be better than inspiring love for being on the water in children, and – when they get older – sailing itself? However, having children on board also requires added attention and care, not least to ensure their own safety.



Children or grandchildren in each age group have a unique charm. Each age group provides a special experience, although the adults will have to be able and willing to adapt.

### **BABY ON BOARD**

Something different has to be considered for each age group, even the baby age group. A route involving a lot of locks can really throw the necessary baby naps into disarray. The forward or aft cabin might seem to be an ideal place for baby to nap but is less ideal if the route involves passing through locks, when the bow and/or stern thruster has to be used. In this case, the side cabin would be a better solution. The sound of the bow or stern thruster is seldom used as a lullaby.

### **COLOURED PENCILS, PUZZLES AND GAMES**

Children aged from 2 to about 7 mainly want to be kept occupied when underway. Whereas adults enjoy the passing countryside, this is not automatically the case for children in this age group. All too quickly, we hear "Are we there yet?" It is therefore essential to have games, modelling clay and coloured pencils on board.

What's learned in the cradle lasts till the tomb. Bram learns how to check the seaweed filter and oil level

When children in this age group are a little older, it's a good idea to encourage games that involve their surroundings, such as "I spy..." or "Whoever is first to see...". But this also comes to an end fairly quickly. Long cruises are therefore less suitable for this age group in particular. Two or three hours in succession is long enough. For example, cruising with children of this age from the Netherlands to Berlin (or vice versa) is not such a good idea. Even a cruise from Limburg to Zeeland would be better split into short stretches, as three or four hours' sailing is more than enough for 4 and 5-year-olds.

### **GIVE THEM THEIR OWN JOBS**

From the age of about 7, you will be able to get children more involved in the actual sailing. For example, they can learn to tie simple knots or get involved in routine maintenance. At only 5 years of age, Bram, for example, learned from his granddad that the seaweed filter always has to be checked, as well as the oil level in the diesel engine, before departure. But don't think that granddad was ever allowed to set off without performing this basic check after that – a check which, incidentally, Bram was able to perform all on his own as he grew older.

It may not be officially permitted, but now that Bram is 9, he sometimes takes the wheel – with the skipper by his side, of course – and is already developing a natural feel for steering. His little sister Elise, who is two years younger than him, is very quickly learning to tie knots and helps grandma with the mooring.

### **KEEPING THEMSELVES AMUSED**

Teenagers can cope with longer cruises. Active involvement in sailing (performing tasks, helping to navigate) prevents them from getting bored. There is so much to experience during the cruise that their curiosity is aroused. These experiences will certainly be the subject of stories told at school or among friends at a later date. Yet you often have to have more up your sleeve to make boating a pleasure for both them and the adults on board.

The Linssen alone is no longer enough. A dinghy can work wonders. Initially, it may only have oars but soon enough the child will ask for an outboard motor. If children like sailing, an "optimistje" sailing boat is of course an ideal diversion. The moment when a child rows or sails

A lot of space for playing and even lunch in the cockpit of the sedan



away unaided for the first time gives both the parents or grandparents and the child a real kick. This does of course have to happen in properly supervised conditions with the necessary joint instruction given beforehand.

And, of course, there will come a time when they really don't want to come sailing any more. Don't despair. If children have basically experienced sailing not as an obligation but as the ultimate form of relaxation, they will come back sooner or later. They may begin by asking to borrow your boat...

### **RULES ON BOARD**

This may detract from the motivation to go sailing, but even the young sailors on board will have to adhere to the basic rules on board to ensure their own safety and the safety of the other crew members. They may initially regard these rules as an unpleasant restriction. But a clear and repeated explanation of why the rules are in place will really help even the youngest children to accept them. Children often fail to see any dangers for themselves.

One good basic rule is that from the time that they can walk until they are good swimmers, children must wear a lifejacket at all times, both on board and on the jetty. As far as we are concerned, there can be no discussion about this, only explanation! A child who can't swim and falls into the water will disappear under water immediately – you don't even want to think about it.

There are certainly times – e.g. in bad weather and/or in wide expanses of open water – when a lifejacket alone is not enough and it is recommended that children (and sometimes even adults as well) have safety lines attached. Another good basic rule for the youngest children is not to go on to the foredeck without being accompanied by an adult, and to teach children always to hold on to the rail with one hand.

Children will also have to learn and accept that there are occasions when it is simply not possible to give them time and attention, e.g. in a lock. With younger age groups, it is certainly the preferred option to keep them inside on these occasions. This is often the rule with skip-

pers of commercial vessels as well. Otherwise children could easily get in the way.

This is not always feasible, but there should actually always be a third adult on board to supervise the youngest children. After all, two adults are generally needed to take action, e.g. when passing through a lock and mooring. If this is not possible, it's a good idea in any case to agree which of the adults will keep an eye on the children at a particular time, especially when the yacht requires a lot of attention (mooring, lock, busy traffic).

### **MAKE SPACE**

It is even more essential to have a tidy deck when children are on board. It's easy to trip over loose lines, so the motto is: stow them away and/or hang them up in coils (also without children on board, of course!). Toys left lying around can also cause nasty tripping injuries. Teaching children to clear away their toys or keep them in a specific place – especially when the boat is approaching a lock or mooring – will help everyone on board. It may also prevent toy cars from spontaneously

That's right, Elias – always keep one hand on the rail

As long as you can make sandcastles and swim at the final destination





A net spread along the guard rail provides additional safety when the youngest kids are on board.



Who is the helmsman? Elise, Lenthe or Bram? Before you know it, they'll be asking to borrow your Linssen!

driving into the water when the aft deck (of the AC) leans slightly to port or starboard.

In any case, having room for people to move about on board is also important to provide children with a positive sailing experience. Sometimes even the standard Linssen furniture will have to give way. For example, the saloon table from the *Cómplice* (Grand Sturdy 40.9 sedan) is now in the attic at home to provide more space in the saloon.

It will be different for everyone, and each advantage has its drawbacks. And the occasional cruise with children or grandchildren on board may not be the deciding factor. But, on balance, it has in any case been our experience that the single level sedan version is more suitable for children and infants than the AC version with different levels and steps. The aft deck of the sedan also makes for a spacious and reasonably safe play area for the youngest children in particular. That is, provided that they are taught not to stand on the bench leaning over the cockpit!

In the case of the AC, the tendency may be to put a safety net around

the guard rail. It may not look so pretty, but it is effective in ensuring the safety of the smallest children. With the AC, you could also consider closing off the space between the aft bench seats giving access to the bathing platform! A simple wooden plank cut to size and tied to the guard rail would suffice.

#### WE'RE THERE!

Ask Linssen crews what they like so much about sailing and nine out of ten will reply that it's the sailing that counts rather than the destination. For adults, the pleasure they get from sailing is the sailing itself but for children the destination is more important. That's when the pleasure begins for them. This includes catching crabs with other children, going fishing, sailing in the dinghy, foraging along the water line, swimming and building sandcastles. And, as they get older, it may also include visiting an educational and/or interactive museum.

With children on board, the choice of destination therefore takes on even greater importance. A beach, playground and swimming pool will work wonders. In the Netherlands, Zeeland in particular has many suitable marinas with "something for all ages", e.g. Sint Annaland, Bruinisse and Roompot Marina (with a visit to Neeltje Jans). But (the youngest) kids could also have fun on some of the islands on the Grevelingen (e.g. Archipel). For example, along the Meuse, Leukermeer provides a lot of opportunities for kids to let off steam. And those who think the seaside is ideal for children could moor in Katwijk or on one of the Wadden Islands (Terschelling, Vlieland).

These are enough opportunities for "serious pleasure" for sailors of any age!

#### MANY THANKS.

This article was written with the assistance of Aad Huijs and Peter Van Roy. Both of them regularly go sailing with small children on board, with ages ranging from 1 to 9.



Aad and Tonny Huijs in the cockpit of their Grand Sturdy 40.9 Sedan *Cómplice*.



Peter and Faby Van Roy in the saloon of their Grand Sturdy 40.9 AC *Ruppasaari*.



### **BASIC RULES**

- A tidy deck, as children can also trip over loose lines and toys left lying around
- Children should not go on to the foredeck unaccompanied until they can swim
- Teach children to hold on to the guard rail with one hand at all times
- Get children used to the idea that there is sometimes no time to give them attention
- No running along the gangway
- Agree who is to keep an eye on the kids, especially when sailing requires a lot of attention (passing through locks, mooring)

### **LIFEJACKETS FOR CHILDREN**

For small children, wearing a life-jacket on board and on the jetty is not an unnecessary luxury. It should be a child's lifejacket with good buoyancy at the neck. From the age of 4, it's possible to use the range of automatically inflatable lifejackets for children, which can be worn over many years. For children, 150N life-jackets provide sufficient buoyancy to turn a child who has fallen into the water on to his or her back even if wearing foul weather clothing (in this case, adults require a 255N life-jacket). In the event of bad weather, a lifeline can be clipped on to the lifejacket as a preventive measure.

### **CLOTHING**

Children cool down quickly but only notice this at a late stage. For this reason, good wind and water-proof clothing is an essential requirement for children. This clothing must not have ties or belled pockets as they can get caught. Good anti-slip shoes are another important requirement.