

# Sailing

Sheets, halyards, vang, clew, stays, shrouds, pulpit, pushpit, close reach, beam reach and the list goes on. It's the end of my first day of sailing on a five day training course and the terms are spinning around my head. Head that's the toilet, but I still haven't a clue about some of the others or should that be clew? We've raised and lowered the main sail, furlled and unfurled the genoa, tacked, gybed and heaved to, trimmed the sails and tied knots. Hopefully I'll remember what these are and how to do them by the end of day five.

I've always wanted to learn to sail and this trip to Western Australia seemed like a good opportunity. There are just three students on this course; Belinda, like me, is a novice sailor and we are both doing our competent crew course and Bob has sailing experience and is doing a day skipper practical course after completing a theory course. Don is our trainer and he is very supportive and patient with us as we forget what he told us five minutes earlier.

The yacht is Madeline, a Benetau 411 based in Bunbury and she has just returned from winter cruising around Exmouth, lucky thing. There are four cabins and up to eight friendly people can sleep on board but the maximum on these courses is five students. There is a good sized table and the cooking area is compact but has everything needed. Judging by the food today we certainly won't go hungry.



Day one started with an explanation of parts of the yacht and safety instructions. This course emphasises safety at all times and both the yacht and crew arriving safely at the destination on all trips. Later we sailed out to a wreck off shore which is popular with divers and returned to the outer harbour at Bunbury for the night but on day two we are heading further.



We try for an early start but by the time we have the boat prepared and we have topped up with fuel it is already 8.30 before we are sailing out of the harbour and south toward Busselton. The weather is good, there are some clouds about but

no rain is expected until maybe Friday and the winds are brisk, good for sailing but chilly so warm windcheaters are needed.

Bob's homework last night was to plot the course and we all take turns on the helm and trimming the sails. After four hours sailing averaging five to six knots we reach Port Geographe Marina at Busselton in time for lunch.

We spend the afternoon practising berthing the boat in the marina both in forward and reverse and we learn different ways of securing her firmly and neatly to the jetty. By the time we finish I'm weary and my hands are red and sore from handling the wet ropes. It's nothing some moisturiser can't fix and I'm sure they would toughen up with more work.

After a peaceful night in the marina we wake to beautiful sunny skies and in here the wind is slight so I sit on the deck enjoying my breakfast, what a great start to the day.

The first exercise of the day is on the use of the dinghy so to an amused audience of marina workers we take turns go up and down and doing figure of eights with both the little outboard motor and the oars. We all get the hang of it with no mishaps other than one slight bump into a boat but these dinghies are so light they can scoot in the wrong direction very quickly and handling one in rough seas could be quite tricky.

Next we head out of the marina and set course for a gentle sail to Quindalup. The sky is filling with clouds now but it is still a lovely day and the breeze, while not as strong as yesterday, is enough for us to reach our mooring in time for lunch. After lunch we all take turns steering the boat alongside the mooring and then Don teaches us how to reef the mainsail.

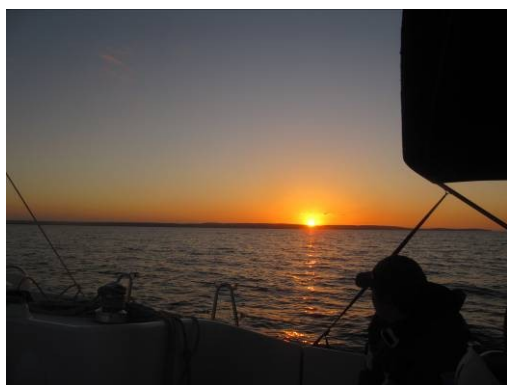


We take a leisurely sail along the coast past Dunsborough and Meelup to Eagle Bay. The wind drops so much we have to put the genoa away and use the engine and then we turn and retrace our path to Dunsborough. At quiet times Don teaches us yet more terms; luff and leach, head and foot, tack and clew, all parts of the sail and covers more of the theory we need to know. We also spot dolphins and whales as we travel, what a bonus.



By 4.00pm we are on a course plotted by Bob for our return past Busselton and then up the coast to Bunbury. Don likes all people on these courses to get some experience at night sailing as it can be quite different. It is certainly a good experience and I get to practice cooking while we sail, the stove moves with the swells so it keeps steady and as the swells

are gentle I have no problems. Everyone has good appetites from all our activities so the plentiful food is appreciated.



After a lovely sunset and twilight the stars appear and the moon doesn't rise until late so it is a good opportunity to star gaze. I spot three satellites and one falling star and then the big yellow moon rises in front of us.



The night air is cold, then very cold so we are all rugged up well in windcheaters, beanies and gloves. Weather proof pants and jackets are provided and on top of them we are wearing life jackets and harnesses, it can be quite an ordeal taking a trip to the loo. Any bits of exposed skin get chilled so I imagine balaclavas would be useful in colder weather.

It's after 1.00am when we finally arrive at our berth in Bunbury and after making everything safe for the night it is lovely to crawl into bed under a warm doona. We're not starting until 9.30 tomorrow so we have time for a sleep in.

Day four arrives all too soon and we are back on deck with all the pre sailing preparation completed by 9.30 and then we head into Koombana Bay. Days four and five, our last two days are spent in the bay and on a short sail up the coast and we practice all the skills we have been learning. Belinda and I are definitely getting the hang of gybing and tacking and we get more accustomed to reefing the sails and keeping her on course. We've covered all the knots we need for this course and even remember them most times. Bob has been setting all our courses, the navigation is certainly a lot more complicated than I realised, and he has been participating in all the crewing chores as well. We finish the course with a time trial around a triangular course in the bay so we all get practice at the helm with the rest crewing in a sort of race situation. It's fun and we all go okay with no mishaps.

At the end of the course I am physically and mentally weary but I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and now feel reasonably confident that I could be of some assistance crewing on a yacht. With more experience I will get better and more confident. If you have something you have always wanted to do I thoroughly recommend making the opportunity and getting out there and doing it and if sailing is it and you're in the west South West Yacht Charters are a great company to go with.