

small boats when used sensibly and carefully. In fact nowhere in the UK is more than 72 miles from the sea. Inland, few places are far from a safely navigable river, canal, lake, broad or reservoir.

Most of our ancestors actually arrived here in small boats, and as an island nation it's no surprise that boating comes naturally to many. Boats were the main means of long-distance transport in Britain before railways, motorways and air travel were even thought of. Now we use them for fun.

The phrase 'messing about in boats' will be familiar to everyone, but sailing involves much more than this. Skills have to be learned and precautions taken, but with a small boat and a gentle breeze you can take it easy in sheltered waters. You can explore shallow creeks, visit remote island beaches and, either in a tent or the cabin of your own small cruiser, you can enjoy an overnight stay in idyllic surroundings.

Family fun

Most children are fascinated by water, and getting afloat will thrill them. Much is said about children being over-protected from adventurous outdoor enjoyment, but if you work together as a family everyone can learn to sail safely. Some family members may require persuasion, but on a warm sunny day with a gentle breeze even the most cautious can be converted to the joys of sailing.

For older children and teenagers there's the thrill of racing sailing dinghies. This is as exciting and challenging as any sport, with all the health benefits of exercise and fresh sea air. Plenty of clubs, sailing schools and sailing organisations provide opportunities for youngsters. A particularly appealing spectacle is the host of red sails to be seen when dozens of Mirror dinghies are raced by young enthusiasts in 'Nationals' at locations such as Brightlingsea in Essex and the coast of North Wales.

Families used to camping or caravanning will find it easy to adapt to sail cruising, which will enable them to enjoy the adventure of anchoring or mooring overnight in remote and scenic locations.



Above: The whole family can enjoy getting afloat.



Above: Sailing estuaries and creeks, you can encounter some magnificent sights in both natural and man-made settings.

Below: Red sails line the horizon as young enthusiasts race their Mirror dinghies.



The exhilaration of high-speed sailing.

Excitement if you want it

Speed is relative. In a boat you're close to the water's surface, and your speed may seem slow compared with land, but the combination of balancing and coping with the unpredictability of winds, waves and currents whilst slicing through the water gives a thrilling sensation not experienced ashore. Adrenalin rushes abound if you want them. Sailing a dinghy in a strong breeze on a choppy lake or estuary is as exhilarating, all-absorbing, exciting and vigorous a sporting activity as you could hope for.

As in any other sport, developing racing skills with the help of a local sailing club can lead to national, international and even Olympic competition, where highly-skilled competitors from the UK always gain many medals.

A larger boat may be your eventual ambition, for either fast or gentle sailing according to choice.

Scope of the book

Any book has limits on its content, and the huge variety of boats and equipment available mean that sailing and boat maintenance is a vast subject. Many books concentrate on particular aspects of boat ownership and use, and go into great depth and detail on their chosen subject. This book by contrast covers a wide range of topics, but concentrates on those that are within the capabilities of the majority of sailing boat owners.

The emphasis is on simple and basic maintenance tasks. The very large and extensive topics of sailing dinghy and sail cruiser modifications and the installation of additional equipment are not included, as these would require a whole series of books in order to cover them adequately.

Having coped with the basic topics set out in this book, more advanced sailing skills and more complex boat improvements can be learned. You can go on to take courses in offshore sailing, navigation, advanced engine maintenance or boat building. You can also buy more specialised publications, such as books on modifying dinghies for racing, and the monthly magazines that thrive on topics such as the addition of the latest equipment. But you should always remember that, in the interests of safety, a number of practical aspects are best left to the professionals. These are indicated in the appropriate chapters.

Nautical terms are often confusing for new and experienced boat owners alike, and are therefore explained both in the text and in the detailed Glossary.

