



SPECIAL REPORT

Baby on board

Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn describes the challenges and rewards of starting a family while long-term cruising

Like any couple on the brink of starting a family James and I would talk about having children, but couldn't really comprehend how it would work on our boat. It felt as though there was a set, rule-book understanding as to how you go about having kids normally, which also seemed to involve buying an immense amount of gear.

But where was the manual for the expectant parents on a yacht? How do you baby-proof and what gear is really necessary in so small a space? What do you do once they're crawling, walking or potty-training? And then what happens when they reach school age or you have teenagers on board?

Marvellously, the single thing that calmed our parental nerves and made us see the ease and joy with which you can sail, liveaboard and even cruise the world with little ones was meeting other families. 'Boat kids' are a great advertisement for the benefits of sailing with children.

The advantages are not necessarily to the sailing itself, but to the family and way of life as a whole. Cruising children are generally very friendly, conversational,

undaunted by interactions with adults and relatively hardy. They look you in the eye when they address you and scramble up the mast, onto the boom or jump off the boat into the anchorage with the ease and coolness of one who has been doing so their whole lives, probably because they have.

A boat baby, however, seemed like a more overwhelming prospect to begin with so we began with baby steps. When our daughter, Rocket, was born we had the boat in a marina for a long stretch just to get used to the new arrival in a more controlled way. The usual kit of a cot, a buggy and a car seat were clearly not relevant to us so instead we focused on how to handle the essentials on board for sleeping, feeding, carrying and changing. Surprisingly, all of these are fairly simple with a newborn.

Our aft cabin has a bed that stretches from wall to wall so would be perfect for co-sleeping with no worry of her falling out. I planned to breastfeed so there were no issues with sterilising bottles or buying formula. A simple sling or soft-structured baby carrier was the easiest way of getting her on or off the boat, taking her out and

▲ Above: a cosy place for a nap at anchor. ▲ Above right: under sail as a family. 'Boat kids' are generally confident and self-reliant



about and for helping to lull her to sleep as we walked the docks or the deck. We also chose to use cloth nappies as we aim to be green on board and didn't want to make the huge contribution to landfill that you get with standard disposables and, while in the marina, we had plenty of water for laundry.

If it sounds all very straightforward and idyllic it's because it truly was. We began to think we'd completely got the hang of being boat parents. But two things change all that: the boat moving and the baby moving. Leaving the marina and resuming our lives at anchor, but this time including an infant, meant every trip ashore needed a strategy.

We had to have a bag packed full of nappies, wipes, extra bits of clothing as well as all the things the adults needed for the outing. This was also when we first started using a baby lifejacket. Even when your journey ashore is over still water the wind can kick up and give you a wet and bumpy ride for the voyage back.

Then there is the matter of passagemaking. We had to get used to being at the helm with Rocket strapped to us in the carrier, learn how to change nappies while

under way and find a comfortable, safe place for her to nap in, all while taking into account the heel of the boat or the lumpiness of the sea. However, all that seems an absolute breeze in retrospect once your baby becomes mobile.

No longer can you turn your head away for a moment and expect the child to be in the same place when you look back. A husband and wife can be an exceptionally efficient and capable sailing team. Throw a crawling baby into the mix and, more often than not, the man suddenly becomes a single-hander and the woman is on damage control, struggling to stop the infant from falling and attempting to ensure those curious pudgy little hands don't get where they shouldn't.

But we, like so many naïve new parents before us, had decided that starting a family on board was not going to quash or limit our sailing ambitions. So much so that our first real passage as a family was the 26-day, 2,850-mile crossing of the Pacific Ocean.

It was on this crossing that Rocket learned to crawl, which meant that I saw a lot less of the sea and a lot more of the cabin



Photos this page: Kate Melville

than I was used to. However, we made one major concession to our new status and enlisted an extra member of crew. It turned out to be a smart decision. In fact, since arriving in French Polynesia, we've been fortunate enough to pick up casual crew to lend an extra hand to make up for the fact that my energies are called on elsewhere.

The payoff of these moments of struggle is a huge gain that we are

▲ Above: at school while on board. ▲ Right: boat kids climbing like monkeys in the rigging



CRUISING

definitely aware of. Our daughter has had two utterly engaged and attentive full-time parents at hand. My husband has been present for each milestone: first steps, first words and as an invaluable supportive teammate for me as we adjust to what our new existence as parents throws at us.

A boat is a highly complex, rich and stimulating environment for a child of any age and we can clearly see the benefits of Rocket learning, growing and thriving in such a setting. She gets spontaneously plucked from our arms by welcoming strangers in every country we visit and is regularly adopted by older children on other boats. None of it fazes her in the slightest.

Older sailing couples without kids or whose children have grown up and started families of their own have also become involved with us in a way that we hadn't

“Just because they may still be too little to hoist the main doesn't mean they can't get involved”

anticipated. As they too are world cruising they know the pangs that one can get being so far from family, friends and loved ones back home. Phonecalls, emails and Skype chats are all well and good, but being offered a smiling, cuddly baby to squeeze when your own grandchildren are thousands of miles away can be a great substitute.

Likewise, James and I get surrogate parents from whom to ask advice and even get the odd bit of child-minding. Yachting friends at our marina even threw us a baby shower in expectation of our new addition and it was a great way for everyone to swap stories about when they first had kids.

Just how long and how far we'll be sailing as a family we don't know, but the next stages of having children on board are also well-represented in our cruising fleet. Once they can walk, talk and have a greater level of independence, boat kids can begin truly to love their lives at sea and appreciate the magic that the water can offer.

In rough conditions or if the parents simply need a break then you can resort to distractions: a movie to watch, a book to

read, or a game to play. But you also have the opportunity to include your children in the everyday business of sailing. Just because they may still be too little or weak to hoist the mainsail or stand a watch at the helm doesn't mean that they can't get involved. Seeing a bird, watching for when the main is luffing, helping to catch a fish, answering questions about the speed and depth shown on the instruments can all help younger kids to join in.

We've known children as young as six who can steer quite competently under engine and that sort of trust exhibited by their parents goes a long way to helping their abilities grow. As they get older so their roles and responsibilities can evolve and the knowledge that they are contributing more to the operation of life aboard gives children a great sense of satisfaction and self-worth.

Personally, we've found that sailing as a family so far has been hugely fulfilling. We've actually ended up needing a lot less gear on board than you might have thought.

Our one major change to the boat has been the addition of 'baby netting' all along the guardrails, pushpit and bow. This allows our daughter the freedom to roam without having to have a worried parent hovering over her and has the added bonus of saving items thrown out of the cockpit!

Plus a boat is already a remarkably baby-proof environment when you consider it. There are rounded edges to things, drawers are already fitted with features that stop them flying out a sea, and there are no live electrics or other dangers at toddler-height as they'd be a liability out on the water. In addition, there are convenient grabrails and handles, which I'm sure helps the beginner walker no end.

It's true that the reality of sailing with a baby has made us approach our cruising plans differently. As we don't wish always to sail with extra crew we'll probably have a year or two of coastal sailing. But as long as all three of us are enjoying it we can keep a happy balance of staying true to our carefree cruising couple past, while being full-time parents as well.



Brittany Meyers

▲ Above: baby netting along the guardrails is the signature of every yacht with children on board. ▶ Right: an infant PFD or lifejacket is a must. As Rocket is so young she needs one that supports her head too



◀ Left: a clamp-on highchair is perfect on a boat

▼ Below: we have a playpen which we use for Rocket on passage. Boat dads get to be full-time fathers on board



Jessica and James Lloyd-Mostyn left the UK in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42, intending to sail round the world in a couple of years. After crossing the Atlantic and enjoying several months in the Caribbean they reached Panama, where they decided to take longer over the trip and also to start a family. Their daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico and logged her first sea miles on their Pacific crossing in March 2014. They married in Fiji and are spending the next cyclone season in New Zealand. Now, over 17,000 miles and 31 countries since they set off, you can follow their progress at www.water-log.com