

# How to choose a crew you can sail with

**Taking on extra crew adds fun and spreads the load on passage, but it's not without its pitfalls, warns Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

**I**wake to the scent of fresh coffee and the familiar clatter of pans and plates as someone moves about making breakfast in the galley. But, to my surprise and delight James my husband is still fast asleep next to me. Welcome to one of the perks of taking on casual crew. It's a very different scene from the same galley, three weeks previously when we couldn't get our

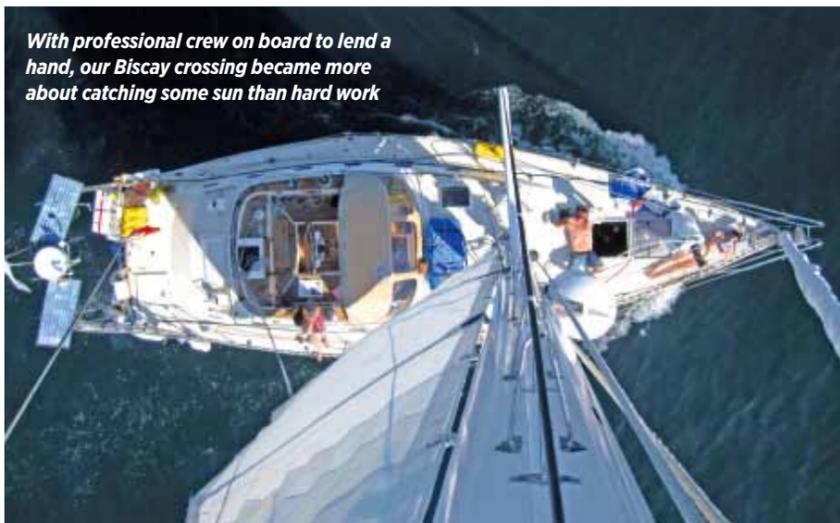
obstinate crewmate to put the kettle on for a drink, or cook a meal.

The vast majority of cruisers we've met are singlehanders or couples like us and, most of the time, all the sailing has been manageable. But certain challenges like ocean crossings, long passages or having children on board can make an extra set of hands a very welcome thing.

So what makes for a good temporary addition to your crew list? What are the questions that should be asked before you welcoming someone into your sailing



**Little things, like inflating the kayak, get done more quickly if there are extra hands on board**



**With professional crew on board to lend a hand, our Biscay crossing became more about catching some sun than hard work**

PHOTOS: JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

*'Good crew will appreciate the importance of camaraderie and teamwork'*

home? And what do you do if it doesn't work out? Various friends, family and professionals have signed on for stretches of our journey and we have now had some 21 different people on board and they've taught us a thing or two about what makes an ideal extra crew member.

The first option is to take on professional crew. We've been lucky enough to have two friends join us at certain stages who were sailing instructors and had far more experience than us. They taught us new skills and we could compare their ways



**The Panama Canal transit requires at least four crew on the boat to handle lines**

and styles with our own. Having an expert on board can help things run smoothly, particularly when tackling a tricky passage. A pro usually loves sailing, which means they enjoy improving techniques or debating the merits of one approach over another. The only downside is if they disagree with your chosen way of sailing. 'By-the-book' learning can clash with your experience or instinct, causing conflict. You may need to pay them too, plus whatever arrangement you come to over food costs.

Alternatively, take someone with a bit of sailing knowledge who has done a few trips or courses. They may lack experience or only know one method for coiling line or trimming sails, so a degree of tolerance for teaching them is important to start out on the right footing. Casual crew looking for their next ride can often strike the balance of knowing enough to understand instructions but are happy to have less responsibility for the boat overall. No money usually need change hands. Duties and costs can be shared out equally, which makes it easy for such crew to come and go as you need them, no strings attached.

The third option is taking a total novice who is keen to learn. You may well find them hanging around yacht clubs and marinas or they might be island-hopping backpackers. Although they're often young they tend to have great strength, energy and enthusiasm, which, with guidance and patience, can make them a real asset. You can ensure that your boat is sailed, managed and maintained in just the way



**Adamastor, Jess and James' Crossbow 40 has taken them from the UK to New Zealand**

you like it, assuming that you know the yacht well enough yourself. The downside is that it will not happen overnight and the skipper will need to keep a weather eye on the crew and what they do.

It is the little things, however, that are important. No matter what type of crew you have, it's the energy they add, their eagerness to lend a hand and muck in, the passion for cooking good food or simply their keenness to offer you a cup of tea can make all the difference in the world. If, on the other hand, you perceive a reluctance to do their fair share or obstinacy when given an instruction, it is time to sit down, air the grievances and reassess whether the arrangement is working. Good crew will appreciate the importance of camaraderie and teamwork. In the end, the magic ingredient to making it work is a simple personality dynamic.

### Heed the alarm bells

There can be certain alarm bells, even before you leave the dock, that are good indicators you may experience problems down the line. Are they already repeating the same stories? Do you have significantly different values that could cause friction? Are your instructions met with understanding or are you faced with contradiction and hostility? We once had the misfortune to have a know-it-all crew who would snap 'I've been doing this for 30 years', despite making unsafe blunders.

What about initiative? Needing to give instructions all the time is not fine. Are they considerate? Using every electrical socket to charge their devices or a strong interest in the alcohol cupboard are sure signs they'd be better on a different boat.

It's important to keep a sense of humour about it all, particularly if you're lumbered with nightmare crew. In all likelihood they probably feel the same way about you. And, if nothing else, you can comfort yourself with the thought that it's only temporary and will make a great story.

For us, the reality of sailing with a baby rapidly gaining mobility meant that casual crew for our longer South Pacific passages gave us more sleep, more energy and more time spent as a family. Although it wasn't originally part of our plans it certainly makes good sense, we've made new friends and our daughter gets more doting minions to wrap round her little finger. ▲



**Jess winches a crew-mate up the mast for rig checks in Morocco**



**Many hands make light work when it comes to hull cleaning in the tropics**