

What women want in



The author at the helm of her Dufour 35, which she sailed to Mexico, French Polynesia, and Australia with her husband, Robin.

We'd accepted an invitation for sundowners on a couple's boat when, amidst chips, dips, and pleasantries, I found myself caught in the dreaded man-talk triangle. Our host was describing a recent engine problem. I asked a question about it, but he launched into an explanation – directed exclusively at my husband, Robin. Knowing my interest in engines and wanting to include me, Robin smartly made eye contact only with me. All the while I glared at this man like a 6-year-old in a staring contest, determined to eyeball my way into the conversation. For five uncomfortable minutes, he talked to Robin, Robin talked to me, and I talked to the man.

He was a nice fellow and meant no offense, but my fellow boating women can relate. We're a minority in a male-dominated sport, so we sometimes get overlooked.



boating

They want role models, training, and inclusion, according to a cross section of fascinating women interviewed for this BoatU.S. Special Report

BY FIONA MCGLYNN

According to data collected by the market research firm Info-Link, men outnumber women when it comes to registered boat owners by 7 to 1, which probably comes as no surprise, but the data also reveals signs that an increasing number of women are buying boats. For example, the incidence of women first-time boat buyers is about one-third higher than the percentage of women in the general boat-owning population. “This means a higher percentage of woman are giving boat ownership a try,” said Jack Ellis, managing director at Info-Link.

Even more promising is the number of women using peer-to-peer (P2P) rental services, online platforms that allow users to rent boats directly from owners. At Boatsetter, a platform with 10,000 listed boats, 32 percent of renters are women. That’s more than 2.5 times female boat owners (12 percent). Bryan Petro, COO of another P2P service, GetMyBoat, told us that women are turning to his company’s service for “family vacations, bachelorette parties, birthday parties, family reunions,

[and] ... fun outings on the weekend.”

With all that in mind, the recreational boating industry – and the culture surrounding the lifestyle – could both benefit from greater female influence. *BoatU.S. Magazine* spoke with female boaters to understand what women, men, and the boating industry can do to foster equilibrium.

My love is an ocean

Water is the great unifier, regardless of gender. Mary Avery-Harrington, a 54-year-old offshore performance boater in Cape Cod, told us, “It’s the feeling you get, the release of all the pressures in life that you leave on shore.” Danielle Tindale, a 35-year-old with a SV43 Outerlimits powerboat, noted how boating brings people together. “The time you spend with your loved ones on the boat is something you can’t replace,” she said. Niki Lee, founder of Passion for Powerboats, a 61,000 member Facebook group told us the allure is simple: “I love just driving around, wind in my hair, and being on the water.”

But diving into the wonders of the boating lifestyle, one must take the good with the bad.

“I’d say the challenging aspects are docking and trailering,” said Lee, while Tindale sees the greatest challenges in boating as maintenance and upkeep. “There’s always something that needs to be done on offshore boats that most people are totally unaware of,” she said.

Most women don’t grow up being expected or encouraged to rebuild an engine or tow a trailer, so they don’t acquire valuable mechanical skills along the way. Needless to say, bridging the skills gap is daunting to boating newcomers. So, what can be done?

What women can do

Manage fear. From newbies to world-class athletes, every female boater we interviewed talked about dealing with fear on the water.

Meet Susie Goodall, a 28-year-old Brit who is the only woman entered in the 2018 Golden Globe Race, a 10-month solo round-the-world sail race without GPS, satellite phone, computer, weather routing or ... stopping. It’s unquestionably one of the most challenging and



dangerous races in the world. Yet, when we got on the topic of fear, Goodall, a sponsored athlete and professional sailing instructor, mentioned the discomfort she still feels when solo docking her heavy Rustler 36 sailing yacht.

"It might sound silly, but I actually get most nervous coming in and out of port on my own," she said. "When I have to leave port by myself, I put it off and it takes me almost an hour to leave every time. But it's one of those situations where you've got to just do it."

When a professional sailor, staring down the barrel of one of the most dangerous feats in sailing, tells you that she finds solo docking stressful, you can take comfort that the feeling is universal.

Goodall's strategy is to acknowledge her fear. "When I'm out on the ocean, fear is something I just deal with because I don't have a choice, because I'm in the situation," she said. "I think knowing that I don't like it, accepting that I don't like it, and acknowledging that it's really unpleasant is a big thing."

Talk it out. Berenike "Nike" Steiger, who recently completed a 4,000-mile sail, much of it solo, told us that she struggled with anxiety, sometimes doubting her abilities to deal with tricky situations. She said it's important to talk about these fears.

"Show others that it's OK to have doubt, anxiety, and worry, because that's

what most of us experience as part of boating," she said. "It doesn't mean you're weak. It's totally human, and often is even good because it keeps you on your toes for potentially dangerous situations that come along."

Gain proficiency. One way to reduce boating anxiety is to get experience. As Beth Mansfield, a sailor and cruising fleet captain at her local yacht club in Ohio, shared: "There's no substitute for experience, both good and bad. There have been many embarrassing moments, many with witnesses, but I just tell myself it's the cost of learning." Mansfield added she found it helpful to join a local chapter of a national organization that promotes the sport of racing among women.

Ask (lots of) questions. All boaters learn by asking for help, and as Steiger says, "It's OK to ask for help and ask questions about stuff you might not know. Get as much input as you can, then use your own knowledge and judgment to make decisions. You cannot know everything from the start. Have

confidence that you'll grow into it step by step. And don't be afraid to tackle topics that might be considered 'men's territory.'"

Tune it out. One risk of casting a wide net for learning is the potential to be overwhelmed with well-meaning advice. Mary Avery-Harrington's solution? "I always say to women, 'It's

Far Left: Beth Mansfield is a passionate sailor, proud boat owner, and active member of the Edgewater Yacht Club on Lake Erie. A few years ago, she started a cruising group and is now the Sailboat Cruising Fleet Captain.

Above: Mary Avery-Harrington runs her 37-foot Outerlimits locally in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and trailers all over, doing poker runs from Key West to Canada. She's "all about strong women" and got her daughter into running her own "go-fast" boat at age 16.

Left: Lori Garlough's hobby is buying and restoring old offshore boats. Lori's 13-year-old daughter has grown up helping her mom work on boats and already has a good grasp of basic mechanics. When not working on boats, Lori enjoys cruising the St. Lawrence and Rideau rivers.



Above: Berenike “Nike” Steiger has spent the last five years fixing up and solo sailing her 30-plus-foot aluminum boat, Karl, around the world. 52,000 people follow her adventure on her YouTube channel *White Spot Pirates*, and she recently released a documentary called “Untie the Lines.” **Left:** Niki Lee is the founder of *Passion for Powerboats*, a 61,000-member Facebook group, where members share their love of go-fast boats. In a recent shootout, Lee and her partner hit a blistering 87 mph.



easy, just roll your windows up, don't listen to all the advice, take your time, and you'll be perfect at it. If you need instruction, pick one person you have confidence in and ignore the rest," she said. "Being a woman, I sometimes get more advice from well-meaning men. I've learned it's OK to ask someone to help direct me on occasion, but to mostly believe in myself and smile with my windows up and do it my way."

Be a mentor.

With the advent of groups like Women Who Sail and The Magenta Project, female mentorship is now just a click away. The climate has changed dramatically in a relatively short period,



Go to BoatUS.com/Glass-Ceiling to learn how Gulf Coast women gained acceptance in the “greatest sport for gentlemen.”

but some obstacles remain. Think about this: In a recent study conducted by the retailer REI, some 63 percent of respondents said they could not think of an outdoor female role model.

“Women need to be more supportive of other women in boating by encouraging them to do more! Teach other women what you know, and share helpful tips for working on, driving, and trailering a boat,” is the advice of Carrie Sixkiller, the second female solo racer to be inducted into the Lake of the Ozarks Shootout Hall of Fame.

“Start with the kids,” said Lori Garlough, a single mother with a passion for fixing up mid-1980s Scarabs. She’s made a point of teaching her daughter mechanics and shop skills. “I’d love to see us get our kids more involved, giving them a good knowledge base when they’re young so they can decide later on if boating is for them,” she said.

What men can do

Be a mentor. Many women told us their greatest champions in boating have been men. As Mansfield said, “Women need good role models, male and female, and helpful mentors. I’ve been very fortunate to have wonderful mentors. But more importantly, I’ve had the backing of my husband, whose tolerance allowed me to make mistakes. Without his support, we would have sold the boat years ago.”

While mentorship can take the form of instruction and advice, it also means there’s a time to hand over the keys. “I’ve known women who want to drive the boat, but the husband won’t let them,” Sixkiller said. “Men should encourage women to work on the boat and be a part of the process. It makes boating much more fun when you do it together.”

Having control can also go a long way in dealing with anxiety. “After a few calamitous events involving differences of opinion, a mentor suggested that I let my



GEORGE DENNY



husband come to understand that I was the captain of the vessel and my orders were indisputable,” Mansfield recalled. “I was fortunate that he understood my need to feel in control, which increased my comfort level in difficult situations. I started managing more of the maintenance issues on the boat and did more of the repairs myself. He delights in that! And he’s quick to point out to others that it’s my boat.”

Share responsibility. This goes a long

way in promoting confidence. “It’s really not about needing to know it all. It’s about partnerships and sharing responsibilities and passions,” Avery-Harrington said. “My husband and I share every responsibility of boating, and by doing so I’ve gained so much confidence. I have people commenting all the time when I back the boat down the ramp or pull it out of the water that they wish they could do the same.”

Hit pause on protective instincts.

Top left: Carrie Sixkiller was voted into the LOTO Shootout Hall of Fame in 2017 after 10 years of running speed trials in her 1993 Baja 24-foot Outlaw, B-Nauti (which doubles as her lake boat). She also leads a project called SilverBras and has given away more than 5,000 bras to women and girls in need. **Top right:** Susie Goodall, 28, is the youngest and only female competitor in the 2018 Golden Globe Race, where she’ll sail solo and nonstop. **Left:** Danielle Tindale of Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin, grew up boating and now participates in offshore powerboating poker runs across the United States with her fiancé. **Above:** After saving for years, Alaina Moore and her husband Patrick Riley bought a 30-foot Cape Dory and went on a yearlong sail of the Eastern Seaboard. They wrote and recorded an album called “Cape Dory,” which propelled them into a chart-topping music career as the band Tennis.

BoatU.S. supports women boaters



BoatU.S. strives to support and foster education for women boaters to encourage enjoyment and grow boating as a whole. Here are a few of the ways we're involved:

Women Making Waves: This boat-handling class is offered at some of the BoatU.S. Foundation On-Water Training pilot programs held across the country. Women are taught basic boat-handling skills, often by female U.S. Coast Guard-licensed captains. The course offers experience and confidence at the helm. BoatUS.org/On-Water

Sailing Convention for Women: BoatU.S. is a proud sponsor of this annual gathering, located in Corona del Mar, California. This daylong ladies-only series of shore- and boat-based workshops offer beginners and experts alike a welcoming environment to learn more about all topics sailing. sailingconventionforwomen.com

Women's Sailing Conference: This annual event in Marblehead, Massachusetts, sponsored by BoatU.S., features hands-on land- and water-based workshops and seminars. It offers women a fantastic opportunity to learn or hone sailing skills, network with other women sailors, and gain the confidence necessary to become a valuable crew member or knowledgeable skipper. womensailing.org

Leadership in Women's Sailing Award: Co-sponsored by the National Women's Sailing Association and BoatU.S., this annual award recognizes an individual with a record of achievement in inspiring, educating, and enriching the lives of other women through sailing. womensailing.org

— STACEY NEDROW-WIGMORE

“I think there’s a pervasive tendency to protect wives and daughters, not just from danger, but unpleasantness in general,” said Alaina Moore, a sailor who owns a Panda 38. “This means they end up less skilled than their husbands, usually dangerously so. Men experience fear at sea, but women’s fears are intensified because they often lack the knowledge and experience to feel confident in a dangerous situation.”

Steiger suggested going a step further: “Empower women to dive into fields they might not feel comfortable with in the beginning by offering support, knowledge, and trust in their abilities.”

What the industry can do

While many marine organizations have made commendable efforts to encourage equal participation in boating, highlighting active boating women in their ads and creating seminars geared toward this demographic, there are still some in the marine industry who seem to have slipped on bronzing oil and remain stuck in the 1960s.

Moore put it more directly: “Boating needs a hard rebrand. It’s seen as the domain of wealthy white men. At this time in history that’s a huge strike against it,” she said. “Every business and political office is striving for diversity and gender equality. It’s time for boating and its institutions to catch up.”

Retire the stereotype. Almost every woman we interviewed called for a change in industry marketing, wanting to see women represented in positions of power: at the helm, navigating, and so on. “Nine times out of 10, any ad for boats or boating features a male driving the boat, not a female. Boating has always been a male-dominated industry because manufacturers imply it requires a certain skill set only meant for men,” Sixkiller said. Images of women suntanning in bikinis on deck while men drive is a not-so-subtle exclusion of women’s accomplishments in boating and watersports.

Design gear for women. Women want products designed around their specific needs, instead of, as one woman put it, “wimpy-pink” afterthoughts. In particular, women who struggle to find outerwear and even life jackets suitable for under 5-foot, 10-inch heights and for

curvy or plus-size body types, can turn to mountain, golf, and surf brands for their boating attire.

Offer courses and training. Women also want more options for product and boating education. “I’d love to see the marine industry offer women-only programs for women to feel more comfortable on the water by themselves,” Tindale told us. “In my experience, as soon as you offer these programs for both men and women, you see a decline in women wanting to participate.”

One positive example of this is Freedom Boat Club’s DIVAS Program, an association for Freedom Boat Club women members that offers training and social opportunities. To date, the club has held 22 classes in southwest Florida and trained more than 350 women.

Women in the workforce. In one sector of the marine industry (ferry, cruise, and cargo ships) the 2015 International Transport Workers Federation estimated that only 1 to 2 percent of the workforce is women. Encouraging more women to work in the boating business will help draw more women customers to consider boating.

Melanie Neale, a yacht broker and founding member of the new Facebook group Women Working in the Marine Industry, suggested that marine businesses could help by hiring more qualified women for male-dominated jobs, or by offering employees the same benefits as other industries, “such as flexible work hours and better policies on maternity leave.”

Women already in the marine industry can help mentor and hire more women, too. Supporting women entrepreneurs and employees in the marine industry helps boating and plays a critical role in increasing workforce diversity. In the long run, that will make boating more representative overall, and attract more women into this lifestyle that we love.

Fiona McGlynn recently sailed from Canada to Mexico to Australia in a 35-foot boat with her husband, Robin. She writes from her cabin in Atlin, British Columbia, on the Alaska border, and runs WaterborneMag.com, a sailing website for millennials.