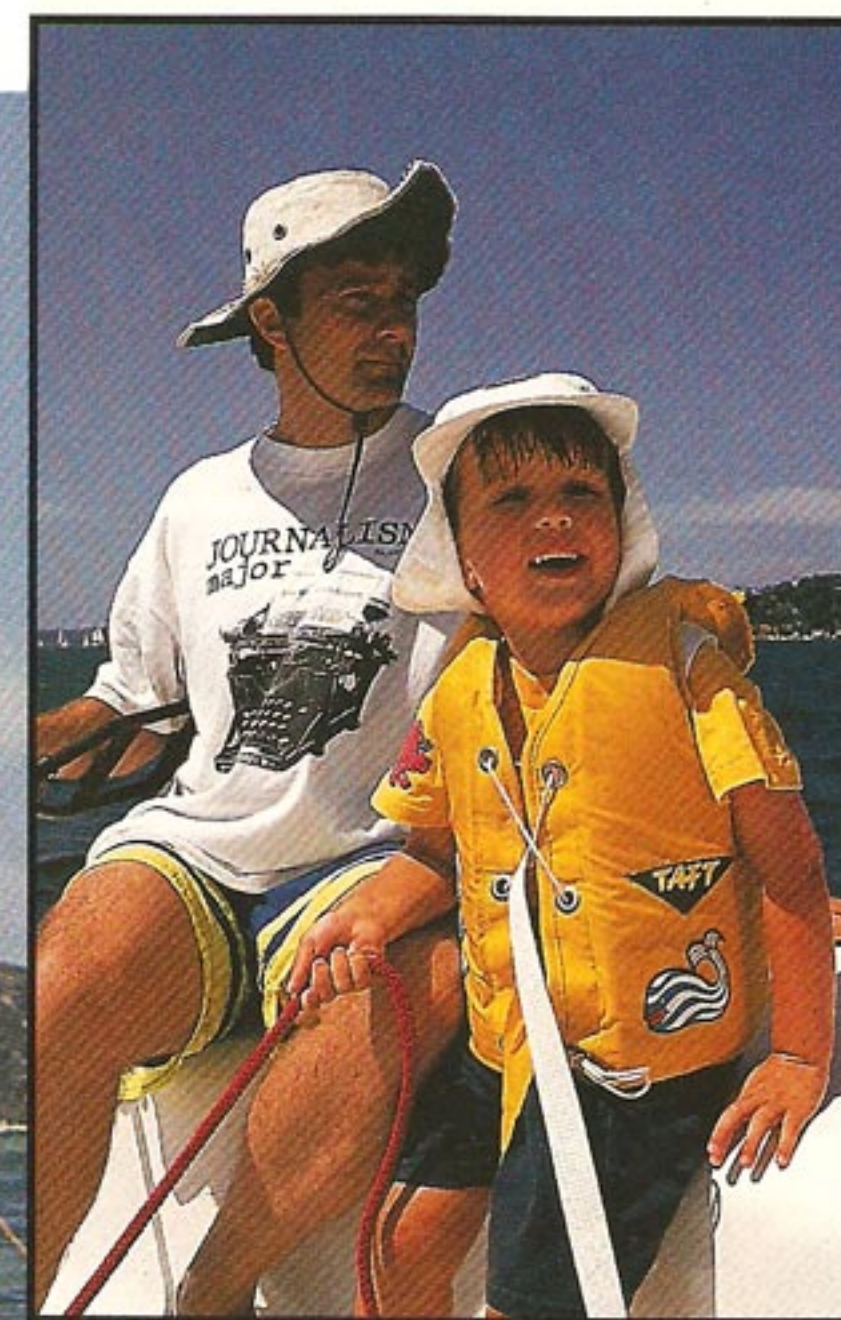




Cruisin' WITH KIDS

The Elliott 7 racer revealed its family values when Neil Patchett took his wife and two roddlers daysailing



“Our three-year-old loves sailing and he couldn’t resist grabbing the mainsheet as we broad-reached towards Careel Bay”

CRUISING with kids can be a wonderful affair, with parents and offspring forming everlasting bonds. Or it can be a total disaster. Of course, there is plenty of middle ground, but successful sailing with children on board really comes down to preparation and commonsense.

Many people make extended voyages with siblings, but it takes a special kind of person to bundle up the kids and take to the water. For some this type of experience is priceless. For others, the pressures of confinement aboard a cruising yacht for long periods can create a murderous atmosphere where fun and enjoyment become distant memories.

Fortunately, every parent can enjoy the thrill of sailing with their

LEFT: An Elliott 7, a secluded sandy beach plus oodles of bath-warm water — family trailer sailing doesn’t get much better!

ABOVE: Simon’s gorgeous, big round eyes soon picked-up the knack of trimming the main sheet.

offspring without the need for a lifestyle commitment to a keelboat. Keelboats tend to cost serious money to purchase and maintain; trailables however, are significantly less expensive.

Time is another major factor and a commodity which seems to become increasingly rare with the passing of the years. Most families have to structure recreation time around their work. That means activities such as sailing have to be fitted into weekends and limited holidays each year.

Some time ago — about 6 years before the kids — I owned a beautiful timber H28. I loved those sweeping lines and raked masts and it was a fabulous boat for meandering along the Queensland coast. But times have changed, and with marriage and the arrival of two small children my responsibilities have shifted. No longer is it possible to drop everything and just go off sailing.

The Herreshoff was sold because we were not using it and keelboats need constant care and use to

maintain them in good condition.

The sale of the H28 did not, however, signal the death of our passion for sailing.

We have since taken the kids bareboating in the Whitsunday Islands with great success. But more recently, Kerli Corlett, of the Sailing Scene at Mona Vale offered us a trailable for a day sail and we jumped at the chance. We all went sailing on Pittwater aboard an Elliott 7 and it was wonderful.

Before leaving home my wife, Liz, and I organised all the necessities: sun protection, food, drinks and basic safety gear. Both Simon, age three, and Margo, 18 months, have buoyancy vests. Because Simon is comfortable in the water and capable of swimming short distances he has a PFD 2 (personal flotation device), the type used by most recreational sailors. Margo has a Hutchwilco PFD 1, a more serious

model designed to float the wearer face up.

With Simon and Margo rigged with suitable flotation jackets we knew that if the racy Elliott fell over

the kids would be alright. But racy little Elliotts tend to lack lifelines, so we also took along children's safety harnesses. Burke Sails make a range of harnesses which, thankfully, come in a size to suit toddlers and young ankle-biters.

Sun protection was the next priority and we loaded up with a bottle of SPF 15+, good old white zinc for noses and lips, wide-brimmed hats all round, and sunglasses. Everyone dressed in loose fitting cotton clothes and off we went armed with food and cold drinks.

Fortunately for us, the Elliott was sitting on a mooring in Pittwater but before heading out to the boat we put the PFDs on the kids. There is no point taking chances and it is always advisable to put the PFDs on when transferring from boat to boat or wharf to boat.

Once aboard the yacht, we secured Simon and Margo with safety