

# Why choose the Optimist

It's hard to contain our passion here, but we will list a few bullets and then provide a few articles and if we are lucky some of the energy we feel for the class will come through.

- Your investment is protected. With multiple builders you can always get additional boats. There is also a very dynamic used market for Opti's as kids are constantly aging out and the class is growing.
- Opti's were designed specifically as a junior sailing boat. It is the only dinghy recognized by the ISAF\* *exclusively* for children under 16 years of age. (\*the world organizing body for sailing)
- With Opti's you get more than just a boat. You get great organizations (USODA and IODA) to help back you up every step of the way.
- Optinews! -The best class magazine in sailing -filled with great articles, tips from the best sailors in the sport, drawings and stories from the current Opti sailors, tons of photographs of Opti's sailing, racing, and having a fantastic time. More on this later.
- No limits on the sailing season. With about 400 regattas a year you can find friends to sail against any time you are up for the challenge. At some of the major regattas you can find lots of friends -about 300! Others are much smaller, so there is something for everyone.
- Your Optimist Dinghy can move with you. With 10,000 boats in the USA and 300,000 worldwide you can find Optimist fleets just about anywhere. More fleets are starting all the time.

## "Why the Opti? or 300,000 Youngsters Can't be Wrong!"

By Bill Douglas

Why have 300,000 young sailors and their parents, in 100 countries around the world, chosen the Optimist for both their sailing school programs and their youth racing programs? There's no shortage of reasons why this little boat has become the most popular youth sailing boat in the world.

### **The Opti As A Sailing School Boat:**

The Opti is safe and stable. Its simplicity makes it ideal as a sailing school boat. The stability of the boat comes from its hard chine design and small sail area. This gives the boat high initial stability. Being very resistant to capsize is a big plus, not just from a safety and liability perspective but from the skipper's viewpoint as well. Kids love the Opti because they feel that it won't tip over on them.

They can relax and enjoy themselves and mess about in the boat until, one day, they suddenly realize, "Hey, I know how to sail!" The stability of the design makes it much easier for the coach novice sailors to try it out. The boat is both kid friendly and coach-friendly.

The simplicity of the boat makes it an ideal sailing school boat. There are enough adjustments to be challenging (vang, outhaul, sprit halyard, and sail ties) but not so many that the boat becomes a kid's Flying Dutchman, a maze of lines incomprehensible to a child. The simplicity of the rig allows the skipper to concentrate on what's really important in learning to sail--wind direction, puffs, shifts, waves, etc.

A boat with a rounded bottom boat and a bigger sail area may have more sex appeal from an adult's viewpoint. Such a boat is faster, sleeker, and looks more like the boats, which adults sail. But it's a mistake to choose a boat for children based on adult tastes. If you adopt the kid's perspective, the appeal of the Opti becomes immediately apparent.

## **The Opti As A Racing Boat:**

For the above reasons--stability, safety, and simplicity--the Opti is an ideal sailing school boat. But it's also a great racing boat, offering multiple levels of competition for all ages, all the way up to the class maximum age of 15. There are over 400 Opti regattas in the U.S. each year. Dozens of clinics are held, including clinics for girls only and clinics for instructors.

The boat's popularity is growing dramatically. U.S. class membership has increased eight-fold in the six years since 1992. With so many Optimist sailors and so many Optimist events, there's virtually no limit to the number of events a skipper can participate in. Nor are these events limited to younger sailors. At the recent Optimist Nationals in Marblehead, Massachusetts, 257 Opti sailors competed on the Championship course. Another 42 competed on the novice (green fleet) course. Of the 257 skippers on the championship course, 40% were 13,14, or 15 years old. Smart skippers know that the Optimist continues to provide them with excellent racing opportunities, all the way to age 15.

But the older skippers don't take home all the silver. The Optimist class age groups divide the fleet into novice sailors, sailors 10 and under; sailors 11-12; and sailors 13-15. Awards are made in each of these categories, ensuring that the trophies are spread throughout the fleet.

As skippers improve, they can advance from local regattas to national events, like the Nationals, the Midwinters, the Valentine's Day Regatta, and other national level competitions. Top skippers can then earn the opportunity to compete in international events. The Optimist World, European, and South American championships draw sailors from around the globe. Participation on these international teams is a level playing field, by regatta selection, and is not only a prestigious honor but a wonderfully enriching life experience.

## **Opti Grads are Future Champs:**

How effective is the Optimist as a breeding ground for future champions? Look at the results from the last two Olympics. In Barcelona and Savannah, former Opti sailors took home medals in every single class (except for boardsailing).

One can also look at champions like Seoul gold medallist (women's 470) Allison Jolly, and Ed Baird, a recent Rolex Yachtsman of the Year, six times world champion (including Lasers and J-24s), and winner of the last America's Cup. Optinews even published a picture of Allison and Ed, at the ages of about ten, holding trophies that they had won at an Optimist regatta.

Everywhere you turn you'll find Opti-grads at the helm at the top of the fleet. From sailing school to high level racing, the Optimist is the boat of choice for smart skippers and their parents. The boat is spectacularly well suited for young sailors at all levels and the class organization is full time, professional, and very helpful (as is the international class organization). The class magazine, Optinews, is published eight times per year and holds over 100 pages of photos, parents' tips, racing advice, and results.

I would add the personal comment that my son's five years in Optis were the single most enriching experience he ever had. The self-reliance, courage, and determination he learned will last a lifetime. He sailed allover the U.S. and in Canada, Denmark, Uruguay, Italy, and Germany. The boat provides wonderful opportunities, not found in any other class.

Why the Opti? Remember, 300,000 Opti sailors around the world can't be wrong!

## **The Optimist-a 25 Year Perspective Safe Design Breeds Success**

by Steve Sherman

In 1970, I was living in Muncie, Indiana. My three sons were reaching the age when I wanted them to share the joy that sailing had brought me. I talked our sailing club into starting a junior sailing program. We bought ten Optimists from Paul Hemker at Dynamic Plastics (they cost just \$200 each, complete with sails.)

The first day, seven-year-old David sailed from shore enthusiastically, motivating four-year-old Mike to try it too. We rigged a second boat for Mike and out he went. Even having never skippered before, he made it out and back in the eight-knot breeze- although with a lot of instruction. In hindsight, it was probably unwise to send Mike out, but the experience was a positive one for him, a fact that is almost entirely due to the excellent design of the Optimist.

Over these many years, as I have built Optimists and observed thousands of young skippers, I've come to understand why this design is so great and what it really offers our children.

The hull is not heavy. At only 77lbs, it sails well in light air. The sail is small, allowing even a 65 lb. skipper to tackle big seas and high winds.

For learn to sail programs, the Optimist is perfect. It can safely accommodate two beginners. Pair them up in one boat, put them in the bottom of the cockpit and send them out on their own. They'll not wander far from the instructor, simply because the boat doesn't move very fast. The speed of the Optimist enhances its safety as a learn-to-sail boat. It keeps the instructor in control and the program safe. Try this with Sunfish and, in five minutes, your beginners will be spread over a mile wide circle-a definite safety problem.

In an Optimist, beginners don't feel in danger of capsizing because the flat bottom gives high initial stability. Also, since they're sitting on the floor, which is below the waterline, their combined weight ably resists the sail's tipping forces.

(This secure feeling is, incidentally, lacking in Opti clones, which have the problem that the floor raises the skipper so high that the boat feels like it's on roller skates. The high floor also leaves little room under the boom to tack and gybe.)

Overall, the safe design of the Optimist just about guarantee that a beginner's Optimist sailing experience will be a positive one.

This gives another big payoff: The attrition rate due to fearfulness is significantly reduced. No other boat used in learn to sail programs achieves this as well as the Optimist. In my sailing career, I have taken hundreds of adults out in larger boats, for their first sail. About 20% never get in a sailboat again. Why? Because the wind, waves, and heel terrify them. Children are even more susceptible to these concerns. The Optimist, by contrast, feels "safe and stable, encouraging a higher percentage of children to finish the program, then go on to fully enjoy the benefits of recreational an competitive sailing.

There are other significant benefits to a child under 10 independently rigging and launching their own ship and returning it safely to port. The self-confidence, self- esteem, and self-discipline learned will serve the sailor throughout life. As a young dad I took a course called "Parent Effectiveness Training." It taught that the overriding objective of parenting is to teach your children to utilize all the creativity and potential with which they were born. The Optimist sailing experience is perhaps the best way I have ever seen to attain that goal.

## ***Sailing Magazine and the Optimist***

Bill Schanen, Sailing magazine's editor and publisher, had lots to say about the Optimist~ in an editorial in the March 1999 issue of Sailing. (The May 1999 issue continues the trend, with several great photos of Optis.) Schanen has been inspired by the experience of his niece and nephew, who are new to the Optimist and loving it all.

The Optimist, Schanen explained, "is not just a trainer but a challenging racing sailboat in its own right. It is something else too-it's a phenomenon. You could say that the International Optimist Dinghy is the most important sailboat in the world. In terms (the number of people it introduces to sailing, no other boat comes close to matching the Optimist's impact on the sport.)

In its overall length, the Optimist is the smallest boat in the Hall of Fame. By another measure, it is the largest: No boat has brought more new sailors into the world than th Optimist Dinghy.

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