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The wind-in-the-hair sailing bit is only the icing on the cake of this experience we call yachting. First, you've got to get down and dirty

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any years ago, a woman friend of mine joined us on *Pelagic* for a cruise down the coast of Argentina. Full of unbridled enthusiasm, she was keen, as she described it, on 'learning how to sail'. We were still in the middle of our annual refit, high and dry in a filthy shipyard in Buenos Aires. I thought it appropriate to turn her upside-down head first (figuratively) into the starboard fuel tank – to muck out the sludge.

This did not put her off and, after several days of testing her resolve with a list of unpleasant jobs in the bowels of the vessel, most of which resulted in painting herself in black epoxy tar, she hung in there cheerfully and eventually enjoyed the post-refit liberation due to her.

I can picture her now on the first day offshore, staring out to sea over a clear horizon, her hair blowing in the wind and without words it was clear she was revelling in utter contentment. The image was like those we frequently see in magazine adverts that use sailing as a metaphor.

What had she learned though? Well, the complete layout of the bilge, including the position and function of every seacock and valve, which is not an insignificant piece of knowledge. Course 001 in Sailing 101, *Pelagic* Syllabus was complete.

The point is, folks, 'sailing' is often the easy part of the equation (and it is a complex one) of 'going sailing'. The art and science of navigation, helming and working the deck – in essence making the boat go from Port A to Port B – are the enjoyable parts.

This icing on the cake of a successful voyage is only possible when underpinned by a sound vessel, which requires a whole host of manual skills in order to keep

it running smoothly – tradesman-type stuff – enabling it to sail from Port A to Port B. The short list? Diesel mechanics, plumbing, basic electrical, sail repair, rigging, glassfibre repairs, scuba diving for under the water repairs, simple fabricating (out of whatever is available) and the ability to install same, not to mention a strong stomach to deal with things like diesel leaks and – frankly – raw sewage. And you've got to enjoy it – if not the latter two, then certainly all the former.

I remember the story years ago of the fast-track RYA students who were having a practical exam afloat and the engine suddenly quit going out of Portsmouth Harbour. It was reported in this magazine that they did not have a clue about what to do next to get it back running. It was a prime example of how fast-track methods fail by their own definition.

Of course, if you are going for a career in super-yachting, working up through the ranks from deck officer to captain, fine, as professionally trained engineers who keep all things running on these yachts, which are really ships in disguise, are a given. Sailing your own small yacht away from marina services, though, requires the Full Monty of knowhow. To cruise successfully is an exercise in endless problem-solving.

Well, if we are all not New Zealanders, who seem to have these trades up their sleeves as part of their over-all education, it bears thinking about before we go to sea. Are all the bases covered to some extent?

Therein lies the conundrum. How do we train up for all these trades, with time at a premium, especially the younger generation who will never benefit from having fiddled with repairing their own cars (now quite impossible) or making their own skateboards, go-karts or building their own Optimist dinghy (how the class started).

Sadly, there are now too many things laid on, bought off the shelf or too sophisticated to replicate in some fashion or another in DIY.

All I can suggest is to arm yourself with the 'how to' books, make sure you have plenty of spares, parts, materials and tools, put to sea and get on with it.

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