

The Lindisfarne FIREBUG STORY

*The Stig –
sailing sweetly.*

by DES CLARK

I have been associated with the Lindisfarne Sailing Club in Hobart for a number of years. It is primarily a junior sailing club aimed at attracting young people and families into the pleasures of sailing and yacht racing. The club has produced a large number of champion sailors over the years.

Lindisfarne has been the home of the Heron Class Sailing Dinghy but the club also sails NS14's, a good fleet of Sabres and very recently an 'instant fleet' of FireBugs, all built at the club and with more underway.

I had noticed that even though the club conducts children's learn to sail programs each season, starting out with about 30 students, they don't stay interested and the club is lucky to retain even one sailor! This happens each year and it's the same story at other clubs. Mum and Dad drop off their kids at the club and head off to get a cup of coffee.

Later they pick up their child and shove off – there is no interaction with club members or activities.

Then I read an article that captured my interest about FireBug building at sailing clubs and with help from my son and family, talked to the club who picked up the project with a very positive attitude.

The commodore, vice commodore and several members enthusiastically formulated a plan to build these 'Bugs. We wanted the cost to be very low and we wanted to build at least 12 boats.

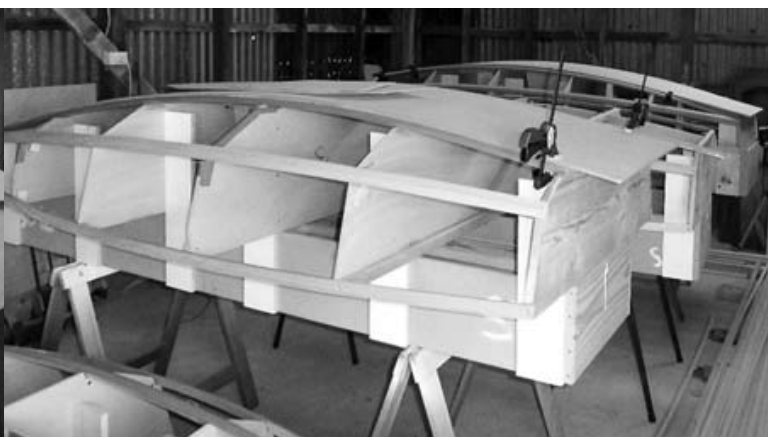
The club offer was that if families spent \$1500 we would help them build a FireBug to a sail-away stage, provide a free lifejacket and free boat storage at the club for one season. Plus we would give these kids free sail training lessons.



The Lindistarne Sailing Club boatbuilding room.



The whole family helping.



FireBug production line.

Several members campaigned the Build-a-Bug scheme at schools and shopping centres and we quickly got together a list of keen families. We also tried to get some level of funding but sadly no government department seemed interested and that was hard to believe!

But fortunately others could see the light:

- The Bellerive Yacht Club donated the lifejackets
- Denman Marine gave us a good deal on Gaboon plywood, imported from France (which is the best quality plywood that I have ever used)
- Storm Bay Sails were very community minded and very patient, letting the kids design their own colours and shapes and looked after us with a special price
- Peter Johnson Ship Chandlers were very supportive and gave us good discounts.

Construction took just three months. This was quite an achievement and would not have happened without the huge amount of help from club members,

the commodore and vice commodore who put in many hours outside of the building program, machining timber and ordering tube for masts and booms and the associated fittings. The clever design and detailing of John Spencer and Peter Tait also played a large part in the success of the program – the FireBug design is optimised for amateur construction.

We built five jigs and made steel patterns for all the cut-outs. We started building inside the club building on wet days. It was great fun and turned into a regular social occasion – if someone had a birthday we put on a birthday cake! It was certainly a fun atmosphere.

The kids proved to be quick learners at handling tools and one mum and grandmother team cut the plywood for the bottom and sides and glued them onto the frame in one session!

Excitement built as launch day approached. Everyone was working at their best and doing extra hours if they could. Some of the children were beside



LINDISFARNE LAUNCH DAY



Learning sailing.

themselves with anticipation, especially the younger ones. There were life changing experiences going on.

Launch day was a biggie – one by one the boats were launched and sailed off by rather nervous first-time-skippers and it was a day to remember! The photos tell the story.

The FireBug group have proved to be exactly what was needed for our club. The kids are enjoying the learn to sail program and are doing very well. They mainly sail in the sheltered bay at present but we did tow them out of the bay and down river to the Bellerive Yacht Club's Crown Series where our FireBugs entertained the crowd with their enthusiasm for their self-made boats and beautifully coloured sails. The boats just looked magnificent!

On the day the light breeze built up to around 25kts but our kids took it all in their stride. A few capsized and a bit of damage was done to the boats. When we finally towed them back to Lindisfarne the kids were saturated, some of the parents too, but they had a great adventure and haven't stopped talking about it.



First sail – mayhem on the water!

These children have now adopted the club like a second home, a place to have fun, whether it be sailing, swimming or jumping off the jetties. They have all become really good mates and are having a ball. After sailing they don't want to leave!

The club in general and all the new members are very happy. The kids have real ownership of their boats and are really proud of them. They bring their friends to the club to show them off and we are teaching them how to look after them as well, hosing down and folding sails etc. They have their own storage shed.

For me it has been a heart warming experience and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to take part and with the way it has worked out so far. I would like to thank all those who provided so much support. And we would like to thank Peter Tait from FireBug Yachts for assisting us so much with this building program.

Happy sailing ...