



Kids switched boats on the fly



The test team



Don't try this at home



Close-quarters action

What's Next?

By Gretchen Curtis

JUNIOR SAILORS OF ALL AGES TEST SIX NEW KID-FRIENDLY BOATS

Teaching sailing can be a tricky business. A class of 13-year-olds in 420s may seem harmless, but factor in the token rambunctious kid who loves to capsize, a somewhat complicated boat, and a curveball or two from Mother Nature and you have a recipe for potential disaster.

Last summer I taught junior sailing (10- to-17-year-olds, from total beginners to experienced racers) at Sandy Bay Yacht Club in Rockport, Massachusetts. Like many junior sailors, our kids start out in Optimist dinghies and move into 420s as they get older, bigger, and more experienced. The transition can be challenging, if not completely overwhelming. All of a sudden there's a jib, another person, lines running everywhere, and a spinnaker to deal with (the thought of which can be daunting to a beginner). What if there was a new boat (or boats) that could make the transition from Optimist to 420s easier and more fun?

Turns out several designers and builders

have asked themselves the same question. The answer: several new boats designed to ease the transition by being more stable, more durable, faster, and cooler than other training boats available over the past 30 years. My kids were ecstatic about test-sailing six new boats—the Open Bic, Pixel, Pico, Walker Bay, Feva, and Precision 15. We spent two days cruising around Sandy Bay in various wind conditions. The first day was sunny and warm with 10 to 12 knots of breeze; day two was hotter with little wind. There were (surprise!) numerous capsizes, though most were unintentional. Here's what the kids thought.

PIXEL

Bruce Kirby designed the Pixel specifically to ease the transition from the Opti to a larger, more powerful boat with a jib and spinnaker. Its stability was evident in the heat of the light-air day. Despite great efforts to flip all six of the boats, the Pixel remained defiantly upright. "It's really hard to capsize," exclaimed Matt Rostowski, frustrated that the stability of the Pixel was ruining his swimming plans. (Foam flotation is

sewn into the head of the mainsail to prevent the Pixel from turtling if it does capsize.) On the windy day, the more-experienced crews were able to point well and get good speed on the runs (the boat has an optional spinnaker that was not tested), and the less-experienced crews made good progress without capsizing.

The large cockpit and bench seating earned the Pixel high marks for comfort. The boat could be sailed by two and handled (this is not recommended) the weight of six sailors.

The Pixel's open stern was another popular feature. When they did succeed in capsizing the

boat, the soggy sailors found the open stern made it much easier for them to haul themselves back aboard. And much to their delight, it also eliminated the need for bailing. "It has no back, so you can put your head in the water and stuff," said Nick Scatterday, who appreciated the open stern for other reasons. Another observant young sailor, Becca Weinstein, liked how the jib-sheet fairleads lead over the camcleat (on a 420 the fairlead is in front of the cleat). "There's a little bridge over the cleat so the jibsheet can't fly out," she reported. Although the Pixel is a relatively new design, there is already an active racing fleet on Long Island Sound and plans exist for further growth across the country.



Aedan McCarthy, Marabah Akers, and Camilla States sail the Pixel



MATT ROSTKOWSKI

420 BEGINNER CLASS

“It’s really hard to capsize”

PICO

The Pico is a simple boat that can easily be sailed by a crew of two or three. There are no halyards; the main slips on over the mast, much like the Open Bic, and the head of the jib clips into an opening in the sleeve of the main on the front of the mast. The hull is rotomolded plastic, and the rails are rounded. Some kids found the textured surface on the hull a bit abrasive. Two or three Opti sailors together could easily carry the boat and rig it by themselves. The open hull is self-bailing, which takes some of the struggle out of recovering from a capsize. After a few unintentional capsizes on the windy day, Allie Stride conceded, "At least it's easy to climb back in." The boat was quick and maneuverable, but as with most dinghies, good coordination between the helm and the mainsheet trimmer was needed to keep it flat and fast.

One feature that all the 420 sailors had

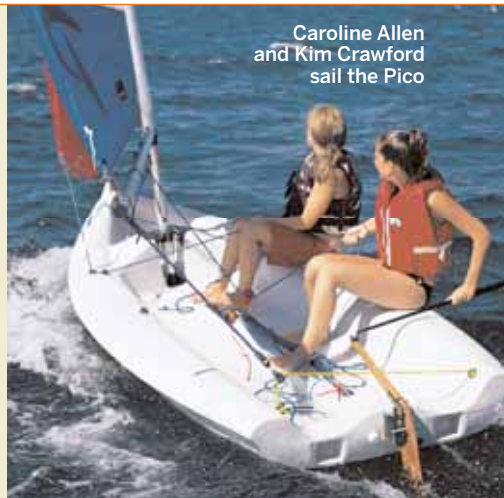


ALLIE STRIDE

CRUISING CLASS

“At least it’s easy to climb back in”

trouble getting used to during the rigging process was the spring-loaded rudder bracket. It was difficult for the young sailors to fit in place, but once it was rigged correctly, the rudder stayed attached to the boat. Also, the rudder was easier to take off at the end of the day, compared to a 420 rudder. Derigging was quick and painless. The jib is unclipped from the mast by tipping the boat in the water to-



Caroline Allen and Kim Crawford sail the Pico

ward the dock and is then rolled up and placed in the boat. One sailor can spin the base of the mast in the maststep while another holds the clew, and that's it. At the end of the day, Rachel Levin was surprised by how quickly she could put her boat away. She hesitantly asked, "We're done?" as she looked around at her classmates still busily derigging some of the other boats.

OPEN BIC

The Open BIC is meant to be a one-person boat, but it can accommodate two young sailors with a combined weight under 200 pounds, the maximum recommended capacity. The competitive weight, though, is under 140 pounds.

The Bic was a huge success with every class. Everyone found rigging and derigging the boat to be easy. The single Mylar sail has full battens and stays on the boom. A luff sleeve slips over the mast, similar to a Laser sail. The cunningham and boomvang are led to one cleat and are adjusted simultaneously with a single line. This



Chris Huber sails the Open Bic

JUSTUS DUNTON

RACE TEAM



“Can we buy some of these boats for next summer?”

line hooks onto an eye just aft of the mast-step and also keeps the mast from falling out in the event of a capsize. This feature was tested countless times and passed with flying colors.

The boat is small and light; two or three junior sailors can easily carry it, and it's small enough to travel in the back of a car or to be cartopped. All our juniors had a great time sailing the Bic. “The sail is see-through!” shouted Nick Scatterday, and his buddies agreed that this was a major selling point. In a sailing class, where collisions tend to be an issue, the increased visibility seemed to minimize contact between boats.

The one drawback was that the Bic was difficult to sail upwind; all the kids com-

mented that they had trouble pointing.

The beginners liked that it was comfortable to sit in and went fast. “It is relaxing,” Becca Weinstein proclaimed after lounging on the Bic all morning in the light air. Justus Dunton and Braely Jaelmberg demonstrated how easy it is to capsize and right, and even the smallest sailors had no problem flipping the Bic back over after a wipeout. “Can we buy some of these boats for next summer?” asked Justus, following an afternoon of antics on the water. Because of the August heat, getting completely soaked while sailing the boat was a plus. But less-experienced and lighter-weight junior sailors perhaps should be a little wary, because the boat is very tippy and wet.

MODEL	PRICE	LOA	BEAM	DRAFT BOARD	WEIGHT	SAIL AREA	MAST HEIGHT	CONTACT
OPEN BIC	\$2,799 (MSRP) (Complete, FOB Wareham, MA)	9'	3'9"	up/down 3"/2'9"	Hull and rig 104 lbs	48 sq ft	12'8"	Bic Sport North America, www.bicsportna.com
PIXEL	\$6,350 (Complete FOB Royaton, CT)	13'9"	5'6"	up/down 5"/3'6"	Hull weight 190 lbs	94 sq ft (main and jib)	18'	Nearwater Boats, www.sailpixel.com
PICO	\$2,915 (MSRP)	11'6"	4'8"	up/down 5'/1'11"	Hull weight 135 lbs	76 sq ft (main and jib)	16'	Vanguard Sailboats, www.teamvanguard.com
RS FEVA	\$4,995 (MSRP)	12'	4'8"	up/down 5'/2'6"	Hull weight 139	79 sq ft (main and jib)	18'	Vanguard Sailboats, www.teamvanguard.com
PRECISION 15	\$5,995 (Base, FOB Palmetto, FL)	15'	7'	up/down 6"/3'8"	Total weight including rig 390 lbs	130 sq ft (main and jib)	25'4"	Precision Boatworks, www.precisionboatworks.com
WALKER BAY RID	\$1,999.99 (MSRP, complete with sail kit and inflatable tubes)	10' 2"	6'	up/down 8"/2'9"	Hull weight 149 lbs	50 sq ft	14'7"	Walker Bay Boats, www.walkerbay.com

RS FEVA

The Feva is light enough to be carried by two or three junior sailors, and the mast breaks down into two pieces. Rigging and derigging is pretty similar to a 420, except for one quirk—the main halyard. The halyard's jam cleat is up at the top of the mast, and the tail of the halyard has a

brummel hook that hooks onto the deck to keep it tight against the mast. Aside from this, rigging was reasonably straightforward.

The boat handled well, and all the kids found it easy to sail under main and jib. Two or three junior sailors can fit comfortably in the open cockpit. Lines run from bow

“The lines make it a lot easier to flip the boat back over”



ALLIE DEMAGGIO

CRUISING CLASS



Sarah Keenan, Audrey Bank, and Brooks Barrett sail the RS Feva

to stern underneath the rail on both sides of the hull to aid in righting after a capsize. “The lines make it a lot easier to flip the boat back over,” said Allie Demaggio after testing them out a few times in the breeze, “and the open stern makes it a lot easier to climb back in.”

The Feva can also be raced. Its spinnaker sets on a retractable pole, and a takedown line brings it into a sleeve in the bow. Some of the racing team flew the spinnaker on the windy afternoon and had a blast. Check www.teamvanguard.com for a regatta schedule.

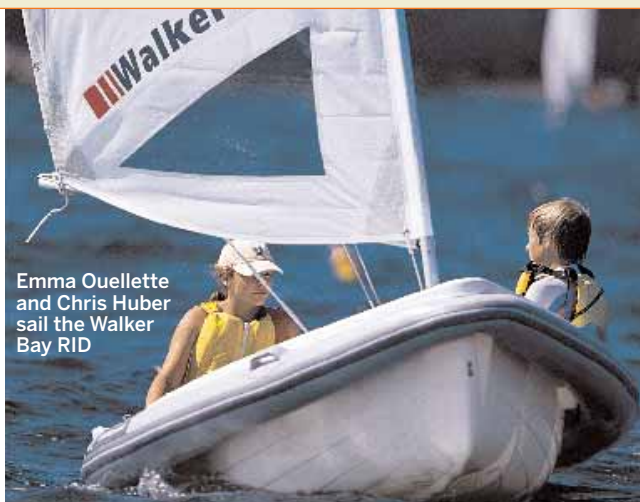
WALKER BAY RID

The 10-foot Walker Bay Rigid Inflatable Dinghy was pretty popular with the younger 420 sailors. It is lightweight and can be cartopped. An inflatable tube runs around the gunwale, providing flotation and stability. While most of the boats flipped in the windy condi-

tions, the Walker Bay managed to stay upright all day. Reed Farrel, who tested the Walker Bay on the breezy day, said, “I believe that only a hurricane could succeed in capsizing it.”

Yet the boat didn't seem to like the big breeze as much as the light air. The kids found it difficult to point upwind. The boat tended to slip sideways when on the breeze.

Rigging was simple. The rig is lightweight enough that even a young 420 sailor could step and unstep the mast singlehanded. Although the two boats are similar in size, the Walker Bay's cockpit is much more open than an Opti's. There are two bench seats, which could easily accommodate two to three small sailors or a small



Emma Ouellette and Chris Huber sail the Walker Bay RID

sailor with an adult. Emma Ouellette reports, “It's nice, because it's really simple. I could sail it by myself, or I could sail with someone else and we could split up the work.”

This boat would work well for a family with young children who are just beginning to sail. It is offered as a dinghy with a sailing kit, so it can be used as either a rowboat or a sailing dinghy. It seems like a great boat for a parent to teach a beginner the basics of sailing.



REED FAREL

420 BEGINNER CLASS

“I believe that only a hurricane could succeed in capsizing it”

PRECISION 15

The Precision 15 was our largest test boat. It can comfortably accommodate six sailors on its wide seats. Because of its size, it has to be trailered rather than cartopped, and it's probably too heavy to pull up onto a dock. We left it in the water during our test. There is a large storage hatch in the bow where the rudder and the sails can be stored when the boat is not in use. "You could stow people away in here," Anthony Santos commented.

Rigging is easy, similar to that of a 420. One difference is that the jib has twist clips in addition to a halyard, but even the 420 beginners figured this out without help. The Precision's size easily enables a parent or an



Jarid Pasik, Hannah Hoerner, and Joanna Clark sail the Precision 15

instructor to fit in the boat with beginner sailors. Lauren Dupuis, in the cruising class, enjoyed her time in the Precision. "There are so many people in here—this is like the party boat," she said. Those who sailed it were pleased that they stayed dry, in contrast to the other boats. This is another very stable design; despite noble efforts, not a single class was able to capsize the Precision 15. It is possible, however, and a mast-head float is available to prevent turtling.

In the breezier conditions of the first testing day, some of the kids had trouble handling the Precision. Alex Levin pointed out that "it slides once it heels slightly. Plus it has no hiking straps and the deck is slick, so hiking out didn't work well." Those who sailed the Precision in light air seemed to fare much better and found their time in this daysailer very enjoyable.

CONCLUSIONS

If you're in the market for a junior sailing dinghy, there are more options than just Opti's and 420's. The new wave of junior sailing boats we tested represents a welcome evolution of small boat design, and as an instructor, it's good to see boat builders haven't totally forgotten about the next generation of sailors. Each of the boats we tested succeeds in making sailing more easier, more accessible, and more fun for kids, and some designs could be fun for parents to take out for an afternoon as well. 🌊

Many thanks to everyone at Precision Boatworks, Walker Bay Boats, Bic, Bruce Kirby Marine, Nearwater Boats, Vanguard Sailboats, and, of course, all the Sandy Bay sailors for so eagerly participating in our test.

ALEX LEVIN

RACE TEAM



“ It slides once it heels slightly. Plus it has no hiking straps and the deck is slick, so hiking out didn't work well ”

ADDITIONAL BOATS

Unfortunately, not all the new small-boat designs could make it to our test. Make sure to check out these boats as well.

H-10

Garry Hoyt designed this dinghy to ease the transition between the Opti and bigger boats. Newport R&D, 401-683-9450

HOBIE BRAVO

A rotomolded dinghy/catamaran that's both durable and easy to sail. www.hobiecat.com

HUNTER 146

An easy-to-sail daysailer with a large cockpit and thermoformed hull. www.huntermarine.com

BIG FISH

A daysailer that's similar to a Sunfish. www.bigfish.com

TRANSIT 380

Another recently designed transition boat. www.transit380.com

