

My son (12 yrs) and I have just completed RYA 1/2 and are looking to buy a boat. Still not sure whether to do 1*2man/2+1man but if we go the 1*2man route one suggestion was a Fireball. Looking through your website they seem like lovely boats and the trapeze/kite is something we could aspire to. Our combined weight is around 21st which is (I believe) OK for the boat. There are a couple at our club (Farmoor) so we would not be completely devoid of support.

However, I am wondering if they are really suitable for novices? There seems to be an awful lot of string in the boat and they look pretty nippy. I'm sure we could manage in light winds but with autumn/winter approaching might they be too much of a handful (I guess we can always reef/stay ashore if the wind gets up)?

A couple of other questions:

(a) how tippy are Fireballs?

(b) how easy are they to sail single-handed?

(c) if the wind gets up and I have to go out on the wire are the sheet loads something that a moderately beefy 12 year old could cope with?

Thanks for your help

I would say it depends on how adventurous you are. And whether or not you might be put off by the occasional capsize. With new skills like trapezing and spinnaker handling to master, capsizing will be inevitable. You will in return have much more fun and achieve a far steeper learning curve than if you chose a more sedate boat. Add to this the fact that the Fireball fleet is one of the friendliest and most helpful I have come across.

My daughter learnt all her sailing in a Fireball and now wouldn't have any other boat.

Initially just worry about using the trapeze, your lad will love it, then you can develop kite skills, we have a lad of 9 who crewed for me a number of times, he loved it so much he saved up £75 to buy his own Fireball (ok his dad added a few ropes and bits) but it is a lovely boat to sail in any weather and great for intermediates - to be at the front of the world you may need to be a bit special - but hey - you can always practice!!

Coming in as one of the 'guys at the back' of the fleet I would reiterate the old saying of "a fireball is easy to sail, but hard to sail well". They are a very forgiving craft and you don't need to use all that extra string in the boat all the time either!!

Single handed you should be able to manage up to a F2-3 (F4 if you can manage the trapeze as well!) with no real problems, especially on inland waters (gets a little livelier at sea)

You can increase the amount of purchase on the main by adding extra blocks - more rope to play with but much easier for the younger helm.

The other advantage would also be costs, you could buy a classic initially to test the water with for around £5 - 600 and trade up if you find its the boat for you.

Kind regards

Ian 😊

I have had a great deal of fun with my own classic without worrying too greatly about many bells and whistles (sound advice above) but sadly the acquisition of a sailing cruiser may foreshorten the fun? I really bought my Fireball as a project as I love rescuing elderly boats but because she had been redecked, before being dry stored, I only had to screw bits back on and sort pulleys and halyards oh yeah and the hoary old chestnuts that you seemingly have to fix every time, tillers and extensions, a week later and she's back on the water!. The parents of a 14 year old thanked me again for helping their son and mate get confidence in his own Fireball he bought himself, so i think an adult with experience is a strict necessity when starting out-they now race the darn thing and all power to the lads elbow for going for it! Alternatively I spent a good 20 minutes on my mobile after ringing an enquirer back & trying to convince this lady that no, my Fireball would not be suitable for her 12 year old. Well he always has supervision at Alton Water I was further informed but when i said my happiness would be severely restricted if it was sold to her/him-which it was not about to be anyway she then pressed me for 10 minutes further advice on what they should get, but then she was on about the Fireball again (think it was a name thing maybe)and would ask her old man-mercifully that was the last heard on that score-no more, 4 sure

Having sailed a Ball with a 12 year old I can assure you that you will have fun and lots of help...

If he is helming it will be even better.

Ref all the string, park most things in neutral or middle positions and sail the thing at basic level.... ease when you heel and keep the sheets out of the jammers... the biggest thing to get used to is your position in the boat, and the boats position in the water.

Keep your weight together so helm should sit as forward as possible, even with a leg over the thwart if poss, and crew be a close to the helm as possible, cheek 2 cheek when both sitting out , and when you do the trapeze thang get you weight in line....

Whilst you are trapezing it is vital that the helm and crew communicate, so that you know how to react to gusts.... if he doesn't know you are only half out when a gust hits and he eases the main he will ease you into the water just as you stretch out over the side to counteract the gust! similarly if you don't know he is block to block you wont have the confidence to go full stretch... it does take practice but if you talk to each other a lot you will soon get the hang of it...

Keep the boat flat... I know it is exhilarating to feel the thing tipping up and it does feel fast, but believe me it isn't, you will go faster bleeding power off and keeping the boat flat, than you ever will at full stretch and the boat on its ear.

Do attend as many training sessions as you can get to, they truly are aimed at all levels, when you can go for a sail, and stay dry, and can tack/gybe the boat with confidence, and without stopping it dead, start to worry what the other strings are for, they will be still be there for you, and when you can sail with confidence at level one you can start refining the skills you are building.

Check out the draycote website (<http://www.draycotewater.co.uk/fleets/fireball/>) for boat buying tips and lots of other advice.... and preferably talk to other people who already sail the boat, they will understand what you need to look out for.

I am not sure where Farmore is... but if you are in the midlands area do come to Staunton Harold SC (<http://www.shsc.org.uk/>)for a chat, you will be made very welcome

Farmoor is near Oxford so maybe a bit far for a day trip to Staunton Harold but thanks for the invite - we may take you up one day!

Thanks also to the others who were kind enough to reply. We're both fairly adventurous and don't mind getting wet so this could be the way to go .. all we need to do is find a boat! I have various URLs from other topics and am scouring them with interest.

Day Trip? s'only an hour and a half ... at the most!

Oxford, then you want to come to Draycote. Biggest fleet of fireballs in the known universe and 700 acres of wet stuff to play on.

Have been sailing a classic fireball rebuilt from hull (glass) up, for 3 or 4 years now. Was in similar position as didn't know boat - just felt sorry for it lying under hedge and thought, 'that could look nice', so went for it. Now wouldn't be without it. Upset at weekend if I can't get out on the wire due to lack of gusty stuff but was originally really unsure about standing on edge of boat so simply used wire to hang out as far as I could - you soon progress to full trapezing and boy, what a rush. When re-rigging the boat we took a lot of advice from Pete Bond (ex champion Fireballer and builder of Fireballs) and kept it simple. Two jib sheets, one centre main sheet and (eventually) spinnaker sheets. I have seen Fireballs with masses of control sheets, lines and widgets and tweakers that do amazing stuff, but unless you are intending to take on the pro's or race in the nationals then simple suffices. Helm controls main sheet - crew controls jib sheet (or safety string as we refer to it) and spinnaker. The spinny takes the most practice as having to use a spinnaker pole means gybing and tacking will require the helm to wear a safety hat and cricket box at the very least. Draycote training weekends look good for this.

Fireballs do lean in the wind - a lot - but come back from the dead with good grace - best kept upright or with minimum (under 10*) list for best boat speeds. They right easily (in a lake anyway) although the crew must be aware that they are wearing a harness when clambering up the side after a capsize - ease the shoulder strap for minimum pain in the nether regions - We have had the boom fairly well central and dragging on the water with the crew on the wire being almost vertical and with a little easing of main and jib brought her back - this is also useful for man overboard drill as crew will tend to give up and go for a swim or become a drag anchor at this point.

Fireballs are great to sail single handed - in up to about force light breeze - anything beyond this and you are either very good or have a liking for righting boats. Can be extremely entertaining if the light breeze has an occasional gust in it - especially for those watching you with awe from on shore...

If you buy an older (cheaper) 'ball it probably won't have all the controls of the newer variety - but it will still be a quick boat, exciting to sail and will give hours of enjoyment. Trouble is, where do you go from a Fireball?? 49er?? Cat?? everything else seems too tame..

although I did see a racing canoe the other day that looked fun.....

Spot on, my ol gal is free of all that nonsense and even so she kept ahead of a fast charging RS 200, with one of if arguably the best in our club racers that admittedly was the other Sunday after the official racing period, which no doubt had one used the 'ball 'for would have *ocked up.

Have an invite to go on a Hoby cat but then found out from guys parents it had pitchpoled on its last outing and his dad landed on the wire, similarly friends returned from a boat holiday in Greece with quite bad bruising from a Hoby experience. So will maybe bottle out thereby. I still find my Streaker exhilarating after nigh on 4 years and it seems to be going like the clappers oft times as opposed to but still challenging, the Fireball fun machine which just picks up her skirts and goes in a more relaxed manner-if I did find time to do the halyard and apply a kite quite frankly there would hardly be time to breathe before reaching the other sides on our reservoir (asymmetrics were banned, but that seems to have gone by the board) but as my FB is one of only two regularly sailed, there is a third-almost static exhibit- resident kids and grown ups always seem to think it a bit of an event to see us go out, so u can cut a dash with an old antique; yours truly inclusive... Maybe I could add that I have been lucky enough to sail a lot of other's boats which have included Toppers, Byte, Pico, Lasers, Ents, Scorpions, GPs , Wayfarers a Solo {which is a very popular class in our club but quite frankly I did not like} my own Adventurer, which got me back into sailing after 30 years, a Tempo which was pretty darn quick very stable but weighed a ton getting out of the water, both now sold, a couple of cruisers and my own one of those now* and should say have found most of the listed great fun for usually differing reasons but the Fireball was always gonna b the ultimate sailing experience even if the Streak really is my fave-no offence but she was the Holt boat show exhibit, was on the point of being abandoned when I became her custodian, have rung 4 years racing more out of the boat with hopefully a good few years to go-so there will be a bargain Fireball on Boats and Outboards very shortly. A solid woodie with the hard work done... 😊

Hi, I've just read your topic and all of the very nice replies. I thought I might add my experience. I have done a very little bit of sailing in my teens in a mirror and have wanted to get back into sailing for years. I finally decided to go for it and came across the fireball. I liked how it looked and the fact that it was a fast boat, I'm a bit of an adrenaline junkie!! I found a GRP/wood deck boat on eBay for a bargain and got it straight away. On collection I looked inside it and couldn't believe how many ropes there were! Everybody else who looked at it also commented at how mad I was and did I know what everything did, of course I didn't! I waited a long time for the weather to be just right as I wasn't sure how it was going to react and in this time I was very put off at other sailors developing a tone when I told them I had a fireball and giving me that look as if it was the worst idea. When I finally got out on the water with my girlfriend (Southampton water and she's never sailed before) I tucked away every bit of rope I didn't need and the trapeze shrouds and we had a great time. It is very forgiving, like another reply said, if you want to win then they are tricky to sail but just to potter it's great. I have now worked out what all of the ropes do and it seems quite simple. We haven't used the trapeze yet but I was going to start with that then the spinnaker - just because the latter will involve lots of sail in the boat (no chute!)

Hope my experience helps to calm any nerves you have. Now I've sailed my boat a couple of times, I'm going to start and try to up the speed!

Also, when sailing single handed, is it possible/wise/relatively easy to use the trapeze harness and helm?

It is possible to use the trapeze when sailing singlehanded - once you get good at it, using the spinnaker at the same time as well is perfectly possible. 😊

If you've never used a trapeze before, it's probably a good idea to get a bit of experience as a crew first, as learning to trapeze and helm from the trapeze at the same time could be a bit tricky.

Having said that, the Fireball is an ideal platform to learn to helm from the trapeze from because it's so stable, the only better boat really being a catamaran of some sort.

Thanks guys (and gals?) for all your help. Particularly helpful 'cos there had been a certain amount of teeth sucking and eyebrow-raising in some quarters when we mentioned the subject. May have found an unloved 'Ball at our club so fingers crossed!