

Now revised and updated!  
Your step-by-step guide to navigating the sport of sailing

# Sailing

FOR

# DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>

2nd Edition

**JJ Isler**

*Two-time Olympic sailing medalist and  
four-time Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year*

**Peter Isler**

*Two-time America's Cup winner and  
Sailing World magazine Editor-at-Large*

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# ***Sailing For Dummies<sup>®</sup>, 2nd Edition***

**by JJ and Peter Isler**



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# About the Authors

**JJ and Peter Isler** have been sailing for most of their lives. JJ grew up around boats in San Diego, California, learning to sail in a little 7-foot dinghy called a Sabot. Peter started out loving powerboats and fishing (boys can be so strange!), but took up sailing after his family moved to Connecticut when he was 13 years old.

The Islers are well known throughout the world of sailing as top competitors and teachers. They both have taught sailing to people of all ages and experiences. Peter played an important, early role in developing US Sailing's educational program. He also coached at the Olympic level and helped found the American Sailing Association, which accredits sailing schools and certifies sailors and instructors.

Peter has twice won the America's Cup, serving as navigator aboard *Stars & Stripes* with Dennis Conner in 1987 and 1988. An accomplished small-boat sailor, Peter was Intercollegiate Sailor of the Year while at Yale University. He was the top-ranked U.S. sailor on the professional match-racing circuit for five years and has won many of the world's major ocean races, including the Bermuda Race and the Transpac (where he navigated *Morning Glory* to an elapsed time record in 2005).

Peter has also been very active in the media. In the 1990s, he shifted his America's Cup energies to

television, where he was a featured analyst in ESPN's Emmy Award-winning Cup coverage in 1992 and 1995. More recently, he covered sailing for the Outdoor Life Network (OLN), including its coverage of the 2003 America's Cup. He is the author of several books on the sport and is presently Editor at Large of *Sailing World* magazine. In his spare time, Peter enjoys playing guitar and keyboard with his band, The Water Brothers.

JJ is the only American female (so far) to have won two Olympic medals in sailing, and she is the first female inductee in the *Sailing World* Hall of Fame. With crew member Pamela Healy, JJ won the Bronze Medal in the Women's 470 class in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. In the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, she and crew member Pease Glaser won the Silver. JJ is a four-time Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year (in 1986, 1991, 1997, and 2000) and has won three World Championships and numerous national titles. She was the first female to compete in a number of events on the international match-racing circuit. And in 1995 she was the tactician and starting helmsman for the *America*<sup>3</sup> Women's America's Cup team. She graduated from Yale University where she was captain of the sailing team and a collegiate All-American.

The Islers reside in San Diego with their two daughters, Marly and Megan, their two cats, two chickens, five fish, eight boats, numerous sailboards, and a lot of miscellaneous sailboat parts that Peter plans on using someday.



# **Dedication**

To our daughters, Marly and Megan.

# Authors'

## Acknowledgments

We first want to thank our two daughters who were so patient (and helpful) through this revision — and thanks to the wonderful Francis Parker School that is teaching them to enjoying learning about so many things. Our friend (and famous author of several *For Dummies* titles and lead guitarist in Peter's band) Peter Economy encouraged us to do this second edition revision and provided plenty of advice along the way. Josh Adams and John Burnham helped us find our great illustrator, Michael Boardman. Mike Dorgan provided his experience and insight in the process of buying a boat (see Chapter 20). And Urban Miyares shared his expertise on sailing with disabilities. Harry Munns stepped up to provide his services as technical editor. Harry has the qualifications to write any book about sailing, so we're really lucky to have his help here. And our friends at IMG Literary have remained consistently professional and ever helpful since day one, when we wrote the proposal for the first edition.

We are very proud of the first edition of *Sailing For Dummies* and the success it achieved, but we want to thank Tracy Boggier, Joyce Pepple, our project editor Chad Sievers, and the rest of the Wiley's *For Dummies* team that worked so hard on helping us produce this new-and-improved second edition.



One of the things we're most pleased of in this second edition is the new artwork and photographs. And we definitely needed a little help from our friends to get the photos that we wanted. So in no particular order, our heartfelt thanks go to Mike Boardman of Boardman Designs (for the updated illustrations); Andy Burdick and the team at Melges Performance Boats; Tim Wilkes, Keith and Nigel Musto, and their team at Musto Performance Clothing; Glenn Bourke and his team running the Volvo Ocean Race; Tom Carruthers and Whit Batchelor of J World San Diego; Lew Newlands and Offshore Challenges; Craig Leweck of *Scuttlebutt* (for loaning his camera to Peter when the perfect shot appeared one day while they were out sailing); Christine DeSimone and Sunsail; Nick White and his Expedition Software; and last but not least, up-and-coming sailing star, Emily Bohl. And finally, this book (and especially the first edition) never would have happened (at least not anywhere close to deadline) without the carpool and childcare support from JJ's parents and our next-door neighbors, Jane and Tom Fetter.

We still appreciate the efforts of many people whose help with the first edition still shines through in this edition, including Brad Dellenbaugh; Sally Samins, who shot the photos (and helped us find the ones we couldn't shoot); and Jeff Johnson, who helped immensely, as did our neighbor Aine McLean (a great capsizing-photo model). Other people and organizations who helped with the first edition are Pat Healy, Doug Ament at H&S Yacht Sales, Geri Conser (for that great aerial photo of JJ and Pam), Billy Black, Kristen Lawton, Doug Skidmore, and Matt Miller — the folks at Hobie Cat, Jason Campbell, Tom Leweck, Cam Lewis, Skip Novak, Mark Reiter, Marty Ehrlich, Rich Roberts, Katie Poe, Dennis Conner, the San Diego Yacht Club, and the American Sailing Association.

People who have played a key role in Peter's education as a sailor and a teacher include his mother, Marilyn Isler Brunger; Ted Jones, who bent some rules at Norwalk (Connecticut) Yacht Club so Peter could join the junior sailing program; Kendrick Wilson; Tyler Keys; Tom Whidden; Richard Hokin; Stan Honey; Steve Benjamin; Dave Perry; Lenny Shabes; Robert Hopkins; Gary Jobson; and John Rousmaniere.

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Finally, we would like to thank you for your interest in “our” sport. May the wind always be at your back, and if it must come from ahead, may your sails be well shaped and trimmed in tight!

Peter and JJ Isler

La Jolla, California

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# Introduction

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*There is nothing — absolutely nothing  
— half so much worth doing as simply  
messing about in boats.*

—Water Rat to Mole, Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*

What gives sailing such enchanting prospects? Water Rat certainly had a piece of the puzzle. Messing about in a boat — any kind of boat — is great fun. You escape the cares and stresses of everyday life, conveyed on a craft powered solely by the forces of nature. The spell that the wind casts onto the sails of a boat is bewitching to behold.

Maybe the best part of sailing is the part that your imagination can latch onto, conveying your mind to places you've never been, promising experiences yet untold. And no matter how experienced you become or how much water passes beneath your keel, sailing still has more to offer. The sport is so vast that no one can experience all of sailing's facets in a single lifetime.

But enough generalizing. After all, you wouldn't have picked up this book if you weren't already at least intrigued by the allure of sailing.

## About This Book

In this book, you can find all the information you need to go sailing. This book is a textbook, user's manual, and reference book all in one. We start with basic sailing skills and move on to cover more advanced topics for when you widen your horizons to activities such as chartering a boat and going cruising. You get to practice tying knots, and we talk about what to wear on a boat. (You can skip the blue blazer and captain's hat, but soft-soled shoes are a must.) You find out how to sail such diverse crafts as a sailboard and a catamaran, how to forecast the weather, and how to find a boat that's right for you. You even discover the basics of sailboat racing. We cover all you need to know to be safe on the water, and we make the whole process easy and fun!

## **Conventions Used in This Book**

Have you ever listened in on the conversation of two sailors? Sailing has so many specific words that sailors can sound like they're speaking a foreign language. But don't let the jargon turn you off. The language of sailing has an old and rich tradition, and as you become more comfortable in a sailboat, you gradually pick up more and more of the language and become a part of the sailing tradition yourself.

In this book, we try to avoid sailing jargon as much as possible, but we can't get around it completely because

some of the terms are very important for safety. When the skipper plans a maneuver that requires a coordinated crew effort, using and understanding the exact sailing term allows everyone on the boat to know what's happening and what to do.

We use the following conventions to help you understand everything that we're discussing and to stay consistent:

- ✓ We *italicize* boat names and new terms and follow them with an easy-to-understand definition. We also list most of the italicized terms in the glossary so you can brush up on sailing terminology.
- ✓ We **bold** important keywords in bulleted lists as well as the action parts of numbered lists.
- ✓ We use monofont for all Web addresses.

Finally, in this book we simply refer to *boats* or *sailboats*. We sometimes further differentiate between bigger sailboats with keels (*keelboats*) and smaller sailboats with centerboards (*dinghies*) as needed for the subject we're covering. (In the United States, a yacht is the snobby cousin of the boat, but in New Zealand and much of the current and former British Empire, the word *yacht* has no snob connotations. You can use *yacht* safely, without giving away anything about yourself, in place of *boat* or *sailboat*.)

## What You're Not to Read

We love telling sea stories — and we include our favorites in this book. But if you're looking for just the purely instructional information, you can skip the places where you see the Peter Says or JJ Says icons (see "Icons Used in This Book," later in this Introduction, for other icons used).

*Sidebars* are the shaded boxes that appear occasionally. We use the sidebars to go off on a *tack* (a basic sailing maneuver where you turn your boat and sail in a different direction) and go into more depth on a topic or give you a bit of interesting information that isn't strictly essential. So you can skip sidebars, although we hope you come back to them someday.

## Foolish Assumptions

The most foolish assumption we made when we wrote the first edition of this book was that only our parents and a few close friends would ever read it. We've been overwhelmed by the positive responses to the first edition, and we hope you enjoy all the new information we've crammed into this book. We assume one or more of the following about you, our reader:

- ✓ You've been given this book as a gift by a friend who wants to take you sailing.
- ✓ You get dragged out on the water by your sailing-loving family, and you don't really know what to do.
- ✓ You've always been intrigued by the sea.

- ✓ You may have had a bad experience on the water, but now you want to give sailing another try.
- ✓ Your child has been bitten by the sailboat-racing bug, and you want to figure out what you're watching.
- ✓ You love the water and enjoy powerboats, but now with the world's oil reserves dwindling, a sailboat seems better for the environment (and cheaper).
- ✓ You're staying at a friend's beach cottage, and you picked up this book because you just finished your trashy romance novel.
- ✓ You discovered the basics of sailing at summer camp and you haven't sailed since then, but now you want to charter a boat in the Caribbean.
- ✓ You already enjoy sailing and want a good, complete reference book and ideas to explore some new directions in the sport.

We wrote this book to lure you into the sport that we love — no matter how you came to turn that first page.