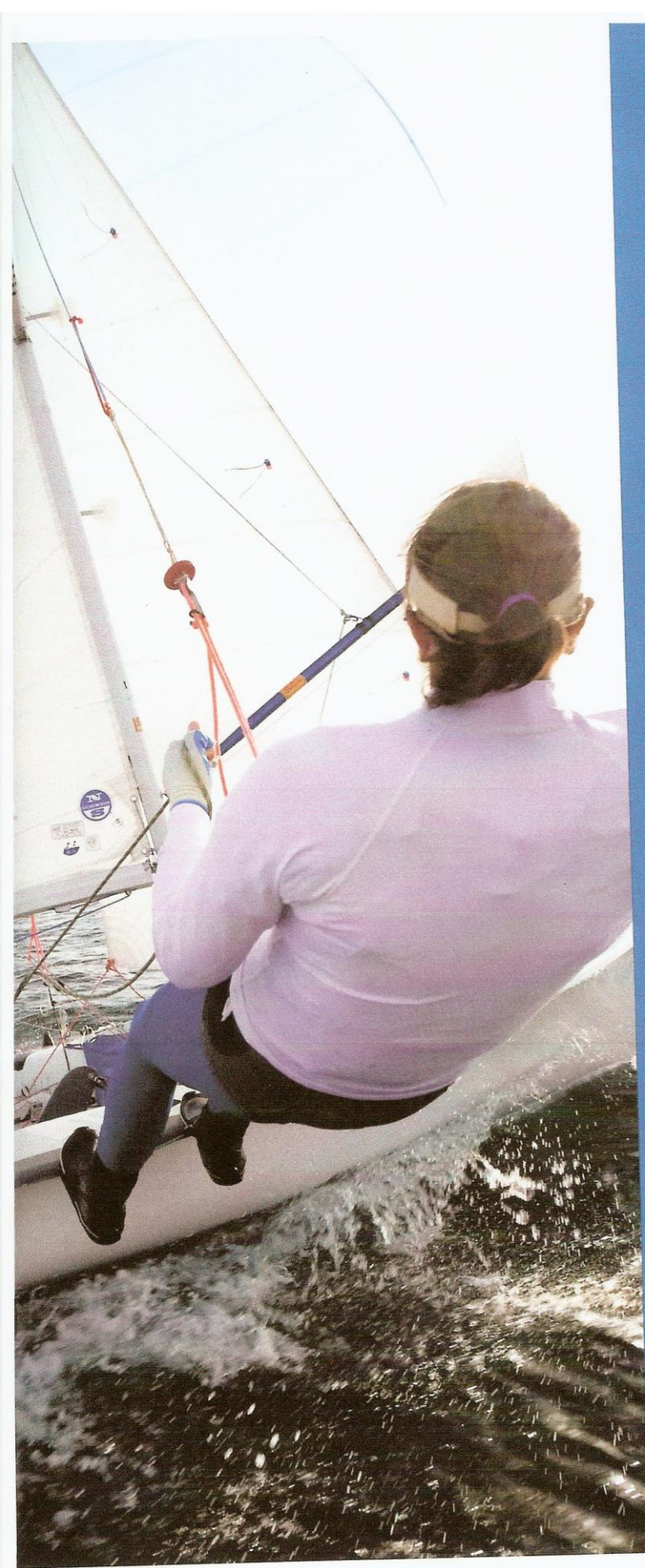


The thrills
and challenges
of living the
seafaring life

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BY DAVID LENNAM

Don't know a yawl from a ketch? How to tie a reef knot? No captain's hat or deck shoes? Doesn't matter. You can learn to sail whether you are seeking thrills or dreaming of a nautical lifestyle.

◀ Jen Braem and Erin Flanagan train in Haro Strait off Cadboro Bay for the 2012 Olympics in London. Photo by Bob Hewitt.

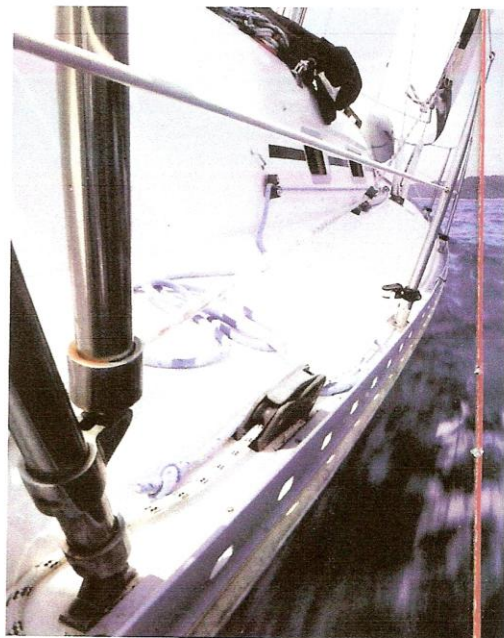
to call Roger Nelson a racing fanatic, rather than a sailing enthusiast, might best describe this self-professed competition junky. The 57-year-old used to test his mettle racing motorcycles and throwing himself from ledges in a hang glider until he discovered the swift elegance of wind and water.

To his wife, Donna, he's "Mr. Adrenaline." "Sailing is nice, but it's not racing," deadpans Nelson.

After relocating to Victoria five years ago, by way of landlocked Calgary and Kelowna, Nelson first unfurled his jib racing dinghies

— as many beginners do — out of Gyro Park with the Cadboro Bay Sailing Association. He upped the ante when he bought an ultralight, 24-foot fiberglass Martin 242 and began taking on all comers at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club. Nelson raced an astonishing 105 times last year and was proclaimed RVYC Skipper of the Year.

His slim vessel, bobbing on a finger of the RVYC along with almost all Vancouver-built Martin 242s, isn't something you'd want to overnight on. The spartan cabin is like a little cave, absent of any comforts, stripped down to keep her light and fast. A colourful pattern of labelled sheets (the ropes used to



operate the sails) runs across the deck: main halyard, pole lift, downhaul.

"There's lots of strings," he says, catching himself with a laugh, "uh, I mean sheets."

For Donna, the intensity with which her husband conducts his passion isn't for her. She's more of a cruiser.

"I like to go out on a nice day when the wind is just a nice breeze and the sun is shining. That's my idea of sailing. It's very calming and that's what I like about it."

CRUISING NEAR AND FAR

Sailors will tell you the best waters in the world for exploring are those lapping up against our shores. The Gulf Islands, the San Juans, the Inside Passage — rich with natural beauty, seals, birds, whales, enticing coves, alluring bays.

For five years in the early '90s, Graham and Linda Darby lived and sailed the South Pacific aboard a 38-foot sloop. The Victoria couple, now in their 60s, still cruise for a few weeks every summer but haven't embarked on such an ambitious journey lately, keeping their jaunts closer to home.

"You're never wanting for a safe anchorage around here," says Graham, who works at sea with the Canadian Forces Auxiliary Fleet.

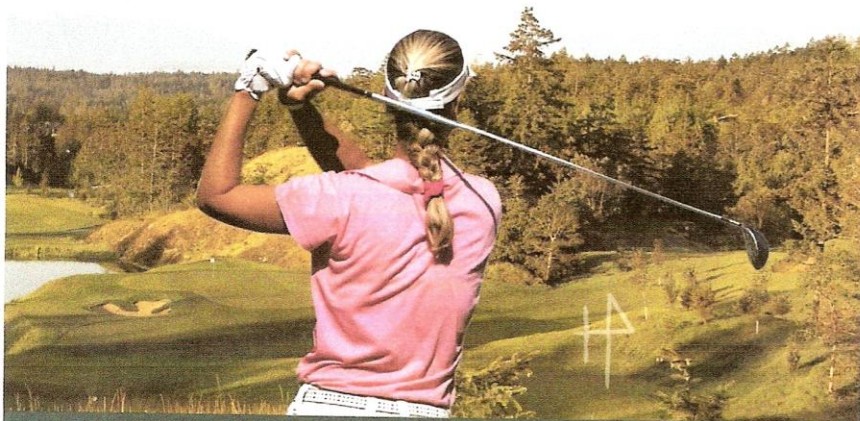
And despite spending so much time afloat, he says it's something he'll never tire of. "I'm always amazed — I'm almost instantly happy the moment I leave the dock."

Adds Linda: "It opens your eyes to appreciate the stars, your whole environment, your appreciation of life. And you become much more self-reliant."

Steve McBride, sailing program coordinator with the RVYC, feels the same way.

"Once you get out there, the feel of the quiet and the synchronicity you have with

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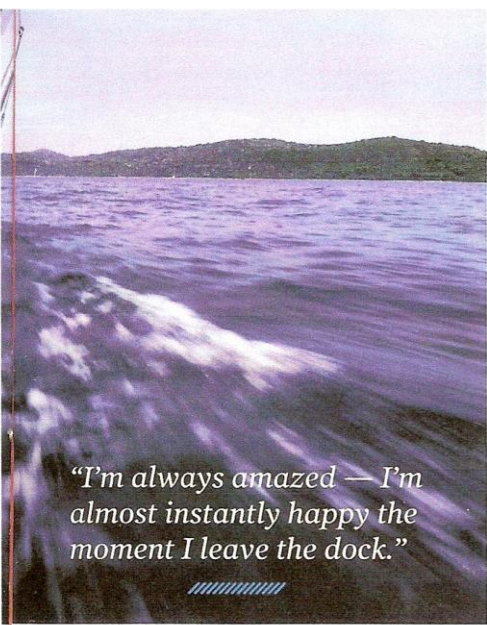
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"I'm always amazed — I'm almost instantly happy the moment I leave the dock."

the environment is amazing. The sailboat and you are the fulcrum between the sky and the water."

Just ensure that fulcrum is balanced. Much of the West Coast is like a black diamond ski run: rocks, reefs, shifting currents, and remoteness unlike any other place to negotiate. It's been said that if you stay alert, you're in paradise. If you don't, you won't be around much.

"You have to be super aware all the time," says Graham.

OLYMPIC PROPORTIONS

If she has her way, Jen Braem will be draped in the Maple Leaf at the 2012 London Olympics. The 27-year-old, who has spent as much of her life rigging theatre lighting as she has adjusting the rigging on a boat, was recently named to the national sailing team. Her selection means funding, coaching, and a regimen of high-performance training.

"We're doing half-marathon training, rowing, yoga, and weights," she says, pointing out that sailing at the international level requires athletic prowess.

"Regular sailors will just cleat the mainsail and have a sandwich. With us, it's like you're running a marathon. You're always moving."

And thinking. Racing a sailboat is chess on water, where the competition is not only other skippers but also waves, wind, and weather.

"The playing field doesn't stay the same day to day," says Nelson. "A two-day regatta and everybody's tired. A five-day regatta and you're exhausted, sore, tired, and bruised."

A fixture on the local theatre scene, Braem has stage managed with the Belfry and Pacific Opera Victoria while completing her MBA at UVic and juggling work as both yacht broker with Carmanah Yacht Sales and as teacher/coach at the RVYC. She says sailing in Canada is treated as recreation rather than sport, in

the back row of Olympic events. She wants to kick it up a notch and draw attention to young athletes taking to the water in a new generation of boats designed to be rocket fast like big windsurfers.

"In other countries, like Australia and New Zealand, sailing is on the five o'clock news."

Though she started her Olympic dream as a 12-year-old racing sailboats in Kelowna, the chase begins in earnest this summer with a series of World Cup races that take Braem from Germany to Holland, from London to Istanbul, where she and partner Erin Flanagan will race a 16-foot boat Braem describes as "250 pounds of pure, ferocious speed."

WATERFRONT PROPERTY

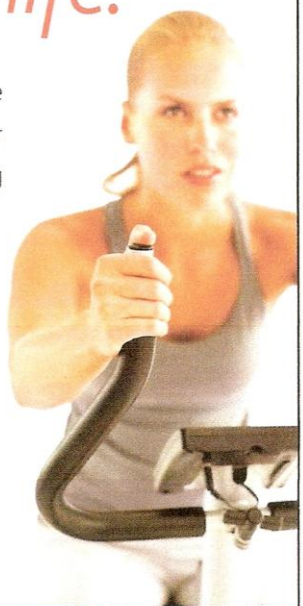
Rod Glanville (cover image) never wanted to live in an apartment. Instead, the 49-year-old actor wakes up every morning close enough to dip his toe into the Pacific. His 38-foot sloop, *Hoya*, is home, office, and recreation.

"The boat allows me flexibility and mobility and I find it very romantic," says Glanville.

No wonder. The view from his slip at quiet Sailor's Cove in Esquimalt is worth a million dollars but at a fraction of the cost of an oceanfront condo. Moorage, including use of facilities like showers, laundry, storage, and parking, runs about \$569 a month — not bad for downtown waterfront accommodation.

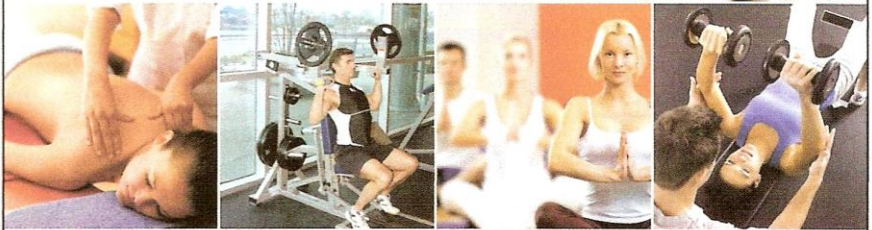
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The *Hoya* is crafted in rich woods, and, below deck, though cramped, there is room for a kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, and living room/office, complete with cable TV, computer with Internet, and a diesel stove for heat and cooking. But the comforts of home have kept him tied to the dock. Owning *Hoya* has meant less time cruising and more time working.

"I had to get jobs to pay for the loan for this boat. It slowly became more of my home than my sport."

Ah, but there were days when Glanville pressed the bow of his boat into Poseidon's belly and tasted the salty lash of his wrath.

"I shouldn't be here. I died a couple of times," he says with a smile.

But it's no joke. He talks about an epic solo trip from Campbell River, foolishly taking on a massive southeaster, that left him with two cracked ribs and suffering hallucinations from sleep deprivation. "I was terrified, but I knew I had to overcome it."

Those who live on the water find a tight-knit community amongst their neighbours. In Glanville's case, it's an eclectic mix of doctors, retired military personnel, writers, composers, and other actors.

"They all chose to live on the water because the lifestyle's so beautiful. You're more in touch with your environment and you feel it."

From the relentless call of seabirds to the rhythmic "halyard symphony," when the winds slap the riggings of every boat against their masts, it's a life not without a certain idyll.

GETTING STARTED

The best option, says McBride, head coach at the RVYC, is to find someone who has a boat and sail with them. The sailing community is known for its sense of belonging. And the perceived elitism of stuffy yacht clubs is dashed when you step inside the Crew Circle — a small, painted square down by the RVYC boathouse, and the first stop for wharf rats to be picked up to crew for boat owners.

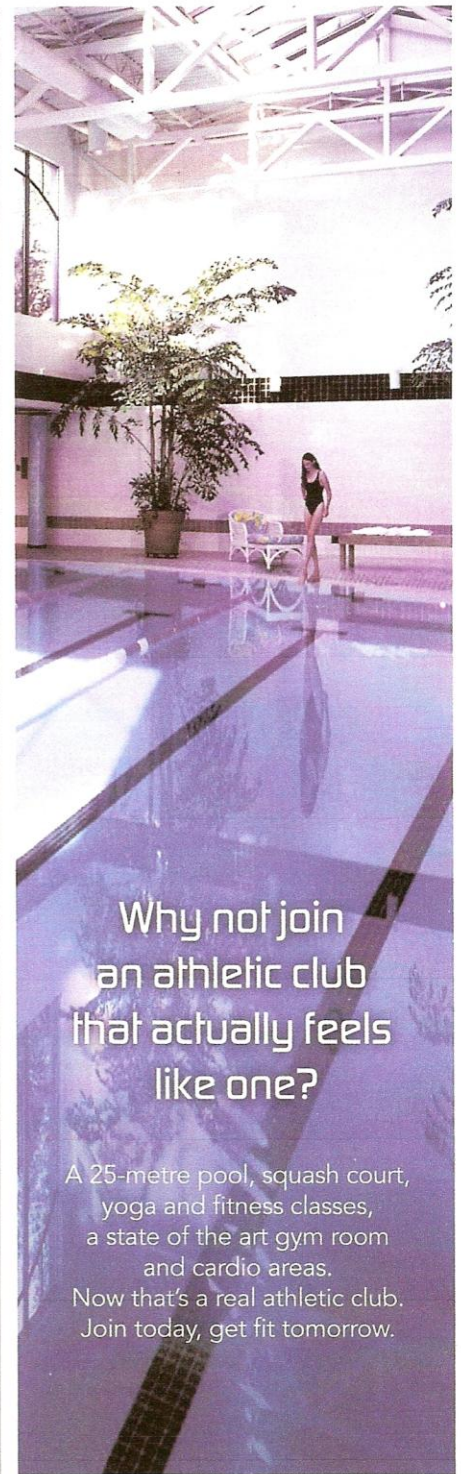
"The best boat is somebody else's boat. It's way cheaper," says McBride. "We have races every Sunday through the winter and evenings all summer, and there are always people who own boats looking for crew."

The 36-year-old has been teaching for 22 years and says anyone can do it and become addicted to it. Last year, the club put 1,600 people through lessons.

McBride's advice for the novice is to start out in a dinghy, an unballasted sailboat without a keel, where "you use your body weight for balance as opposed to letting a big chunk of lead do it for you."

And it really is a sport for everybody.

"I've taught people who are four years old and 80 years old, who are hydrophobic, who can't swim a lick, and who have physical and mental disabilities."



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But before bookmarking Craigslist or eyeballing everyone else's boat at the marina, consider the time and cost

involved. There's a reason boats have been tagged as "A hole in the water where your money goes" or, as Steve

McBride likes to say, "Standing in a cold shower tearing up \$100 bills."

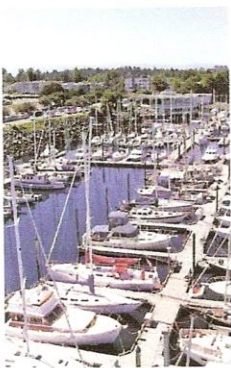
Maintenance includes scraping, painting, patching, washing, waxing, oiling, and repairing.

Finding moorage may be more onerous than the caretaking. Wait lists are common for the limited berths at local marinas. Blame it on the bigger is better. Marinas constructed even 20 years ago weren't designed for the extra length of today's boats, which are too long for many slips.

"If you built a marina today, you'd be full tomorrow," suggests Nelson.

Tying up at the Oak Bay Marina will run you \$9.40 per foot per month. Expect to pay \$10.50 per foot at Fisherman's Wharf and up to \$13.75 per foot at Ship Point in the Inner Harbour.

Fortunately, you don't have to be Thurston Howell III to take out yacht club membership. Annual dues are less than \$1,000 at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club — and that includes moorage. At the Cadboro Bay Sailing Association, use of one of their Lasers and access to races every summer weekend is a pauper's \$80 a year. ::



At the Oak Bay Marina, expect to pay \$9.40 per foot for berth space.

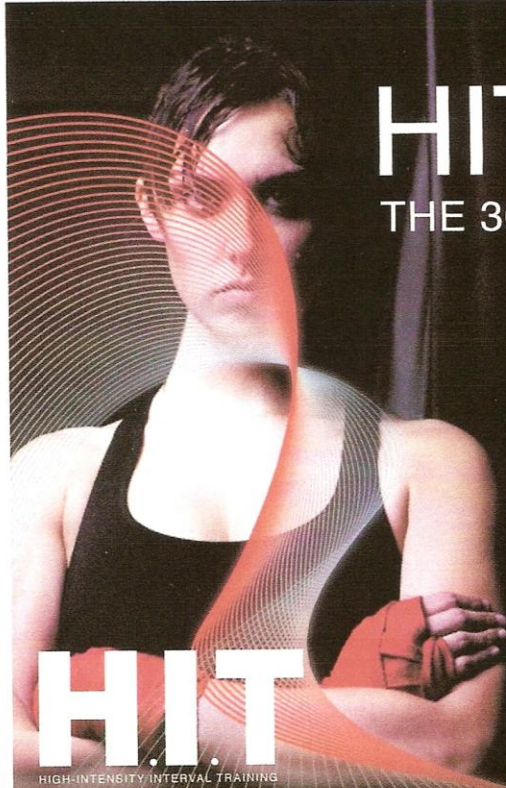
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