

819 words
30th July 2010.

By Marty Still

Well, well, here we go again with Laura Dekker.

Jessica Watson set out and hit a bulk carrier on her first night out. It sort of took the edge off the photo we had recently seen of her wearing a T shirt with “Girl Power” on it. Who paid for the damage to the boat and rig – sponsors, I guess. I bet it wasn’t Jessica.

Then we had Abby Sunderland, another teenage would be around the world sailor. She lost her rig in the Southern Ocean. Did she set up a jury rig and get herself out of trouble? No way. She let off two EPIRB’s, put Australia to a lot of expense, stopped a fishing vessel from working and put them to a lot of inconvenience and then asked for the world community to pay for her to go get the boat so she can have another shot. Is this tenacity or stupidity?

What gets me is that these people expect others to pay for their blunders. I bet that if Abby or Jessica had worked for 10 years to raise the money for the boat, if they had spent countless hours in a grimy boat shed fibre glassing, sanding, fitting engines, rigs, winches etc, they would be a lot more careful and would not be so keen to go bumping into ships or to abandon the boat in mid ocean. But, no, they haven’t done anything more than marketing to raise the money for their misadventures.

And now Laura Dekker is doing the same. The only thing I can conclude out of all this is that all these girls have been brought up to be selfish brats who believe the world owes them something for being born.

On her site she says *But you all know you first have to invest before you can start sailing and have pleasure.* What would she know about investing, she’s 13, these are someone else’s words.

When I offered to help Jessica with her equipment, I thought she was just a young girl with a dream, I didn’t realize, in my naivety, that her venture was nothing more than a marketing exercise. Abby Sunderland was the same but she was pretty much doomed from the start with her choice of boat. At least Jessica got the boat right. I don’t even think she had to buy the boat.

I seriously wonder if all these girls think of this as a computer game, one where they can just press “Esc” and go home – Abby Sunderland certainly did just that.

At the end of the day, I am the first person to say that no-one should be restricted by legislation as to their ability to undertake adventures, I do believe this is a fundamental freedom. What I do not agree with, as I have stated before, is that they gather the eyes of the world and put themselves in the spotlight before they do it. I believe that if you want to take risks, go for it, but do it quietly and at your own expense.

I also wonder about the responsibility of the parents of all these girls, do they feel a responsibility to care for them or do they feel that catering to their selfish whims and assisting them to get a “free ride” passes for parental responsibility?

As I have said before, it seems to me that there have now been so many people who have sailed around the world single handed that it has come to be seen as – routine – easy – if they can do it I can do it. However, it isn't quite like that, it isn't a computer game, the ten story buildings that can come marching down on you in the Southern Ocean are very real.

If Abby was so experienced and so capable, as we were led to believe, (as we were with Jessica Watson), why on earth did she let off not one but two EPIRB's instead of setting up a jury rig and getting herself somewhere to repair? More drama and more headlines by abandoning a perfectly good boat? Perhaps.

If Jessica Watson was so experienced and so capable, as we were led to believe, why, after only a few hours sailing, did she not stay awake in the middle of a shipping lane?

As far as Laura Dekker goes, at 13, just how experienced could she be? She's 13. Winning a court case doesn't qualify as ocean sailing experience and a single handed trip across the English Channel, come on, it's a few miles never out of site of land.

When Jessica smashed into a bulk carrier, someone else picked up the tab.

When Abby abandoned a perfectly good boat in the Southern Ocean, someone else picked up the tab.

If Laura Dekker comes unstuck, who will pick up her tab?

Am I really on my own here in thinking that there is something seriously wrong with all this?