

# THE NEED FOR SPEED

Think jetskiing, and you might not conjure up the most attractive of images. Ever since Kawasaki began mass production of 400cc two-stroke jetskis in 1976, the popular conception of jetskiing has been of a noisy, in-your-face pursuit, one short on environmental friendliness and that's all too capable of ruining an idyllic day at the beach.

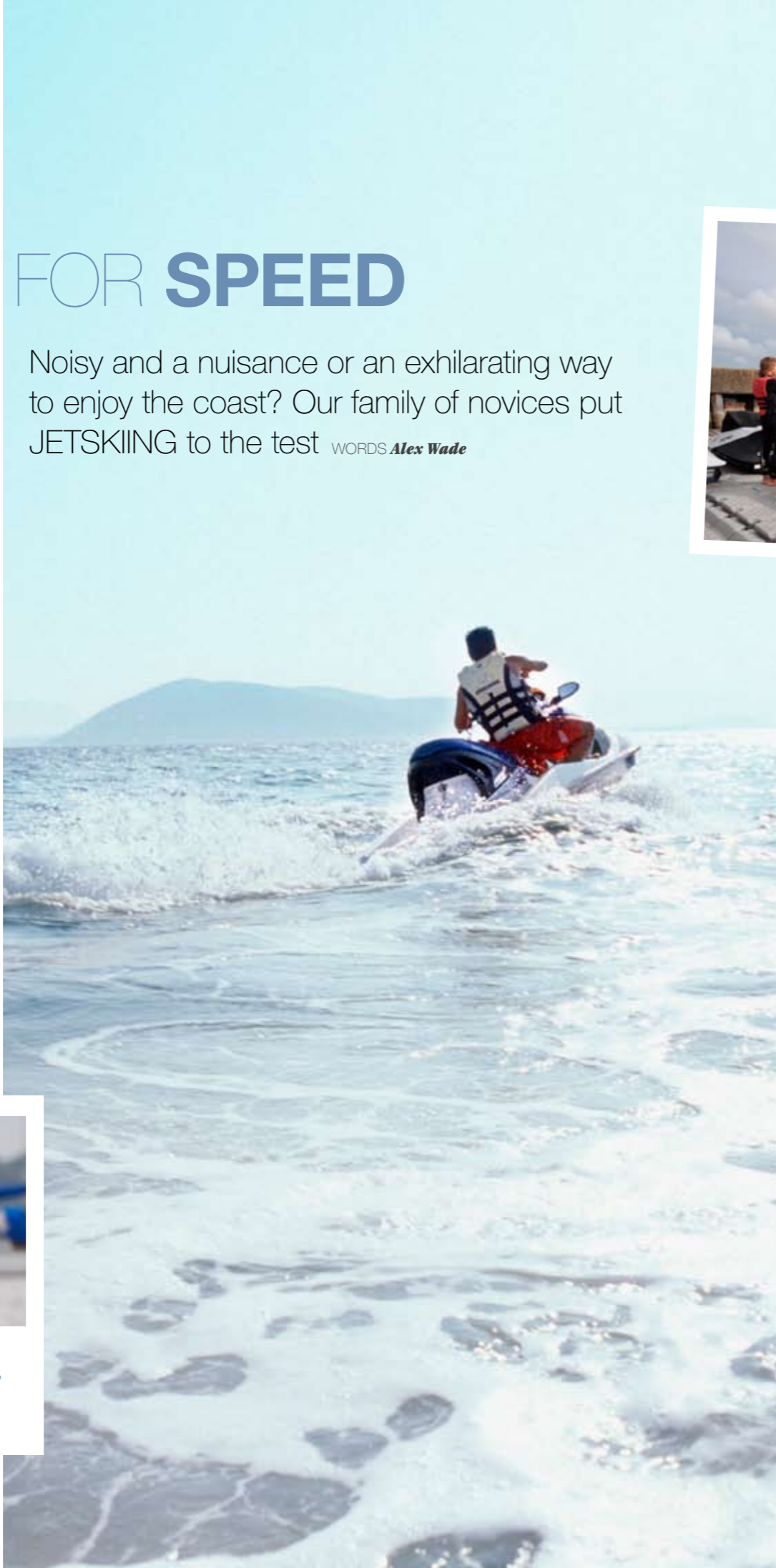
But, in recent years, jetskiing has been getting a makeover. In Britain, a well-respected championship series is run under the auspices of the Jet Sport Racing Association of Great Britain, whose events are held in accordance with Royal Yachting Association rules. The JSRA can cite an impeccable safety record, not to mention a healthy membership. Jetskis are also used by RNLI lifeguards, and, with the advent of tow-in surfing – where surfers are towed into outside waves by ropes attached to a jetski – jetskiing is riding a cooler wave than ever before.

Better yet, anyone can experience the thrill of riding a jetski. You don't need to be super-fit, and older children can find out what it's all about, too. Whether you'll one day be performing aerial moves, like the 'superman' (holding on only by the handlebars, with your legs in the air), depends on how far you want to take it.

Noisy and a nuisance or an exhilarating way to enjoy the coast? Our family of novices put JETSKIING to the test WORDS Alex Wade



**HAVING A GO**  
Jetski novices Alex Wade and sons Harry, 14, and Elliot, 11, sampled an afternoon session with Jetski Safaris at Salterns Marina, near Sandbanks in Dorset.



THIS PAGE, FROM FAR LEFT Ross gives the essential safety briefing; the group in Poole Harbour, heading for the designated jetski area; Harry, with dad Alex behind him, tries a few tricks

Poole Harbour's expansive, sheltered waters make for a *great place* to try riding a jetski

### 5.30PM THE VENUE

Poole Harbour is the second largest natural harbour in the world and its expansive, sheltered waters make for a great place to try riding a jetski. I arrive with my sons, Harry and Elliot, having booked a two-hour jetski session with Ross Ceaton, who runs Jetski Safaris. It's a sunny late afternoon and we're joined by sisters Phoebe and Madeleine Taylor, and Phoebe's boyfriend Jamal. It's Phoebe's 18th and her father Martin has booked the safari as her birthday present. He's a convert: 'You'll love it,' he says, beaming. Harry isn't so sure, but Elliot can barely contain his excitement.

### 5.45PM THE KIT

Jetskis fall within the generic category of Personal Water Craft (PWC). Ross prides himself on using one of the best, state-of-the-art PWCs around – the Sea Doo GTI 4-Tec SE. It certainly looks impressive. The boys and I have brought our own wetsuits and Ross hands out helmets and spray vests. Harry, who has been doing an impression of Harry Enfield's Kevin the Teenager for the day, is looking upbeat. 'How fast do jetskis go?' he asks. Ross smiles and, by now, Elliot is positively glowing with anticipation.



### 5.55PM SAFETY FIRST

Before we can climb aboard, Ross gives us a safety briefing. The jetski is simple to use but Ross emphasises the need to keep the safety cord attached at all times. This is tied onto the belt of our spray vests and inserted into the jetski's housing. Without this, there's no power. It'll come out if there's a fall, meaning that the engine cuts out immediately. To accelerate, a trigger is squeezed on the right-hand handlebar. Ross explains the rules of the sea – keep right at all times when other craft are approaching and, if you're about to cross paths with another boat or jetski, the craft on the right side has the right of way. He insists that we travel at no more than 12mph until we reach a designated jetski area.

### 6PM INTO THE HARBOUR

I climb onto my Sea Doo. Harry skips from the marina to join me on the craft and I press the 'start' button. We feel a surge of power – soon we're travelling slowly out of Salterns Marina into Poole Harbour. Once

### \* WATCH THE PROS



Ben Granata, 30, a K38 PWC rescue trainer from Newquay, is the man at the vanguard of professional jetski use in Britain.

'I'm experienced in using PWCs for extreme situations, including professional lifeguarding, law enforcement, military and fire department use as well as for sports, such as tow-in surfing and wakeboarding. I train HM Coastguard in swift water rescue and have taken my PWC out in 20-foot waves. I love the freedom to explore places that other watercraft can't go, and, more importantly, the fact that they're a huge asset in water safety.'  
For info, see [k38uk.com](http://k38uk.com).

there, Ross instructs us to follow a course around some buoys, again at no more than 12mph, to get the hang of things. Harry clasps my shoulders as we power up to speed. 'This is going to be cool,' he says.

### 6.30PM A BIT MORE SPEED

We're in Poole Harbour's jetski area now. Taking care that stray sailing boats or other craft aren't in the way, Ross lets us put the skis through their paces. Whizzing over the sea at 30mph, sea spray and the wind in our hair, is exhilarating. At 14, Harry is insured to drive the PWC, too, so long as an adult is also on the ski. Soon he's doing slalom turns. But his excitement is eclipsed by Elliot's once they swap places. Elliot is too young to drive but he clings to my back as we speed up and down the course. 'Dad, this is awesome! Faster!' he says.

### 7PM TO OLD HARRY'S ROCKS

'Now for the safari,' Ross says. 'It's pretty calm, so once we're in a safe spot we can get some speed up and go and see Old Harry's Rocks.' We follow his boat in a diamond formation out of Poole Harbour and into the sea. Old Harry's Rocks are chalk stacks to the east of Studland, which were once connected to the Needles, one of the Isle of Wight's key landmarks. But if 30mph on the water isn't real speed, what is?

### 7.30PM FASTER, FASTER

Real speed on the water is 50mph. I'm soon hurtling along at this pace, while Elliot whoops with delight behind me. On bits of chop, we get 'air' (or airborne) and Elliot is in seventh heaven. Old Harry's Rocks loom, but we



don't go anywhere near the Dorset coastline, for Ross insists we're as sensitive to the environment as other water users. Harry takes over and does his level best to turn so hard that I'm almost thrown off. By 8pm, we're back in Salterns Marina. The boys chorus: 'That was brilliant!', a sentiment shared by Phoebe, Madeleine and Jamal. And later, as we're driving to our hotel, Harry and Elliot ask one thing insistently: 'Dad, can we get a jetski?'

*Alex Wade and his sons rode jetskis thanks to a package by Jetski Safaris Ltd in Poole, Dorset. Prices on weekdays start at £75 per jetski for one person and £55 per jetski for two people (07803 620650, jetskisafaris.co.uk).*

**For more to do around the UK coast, see [allaboutyou.com/country](http://allaboutyou.com/country)**

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PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY IMAGES

## NEED TO KNOW

### HOW TO START

A number of places in the UK cater for jetskis, from inland lakes to coastal resorts. Try Lagoona Park, near Reading, which offers RYA training for beginners (courses start at £130 per person; 0118 988 5959, lagoona park.com), or the Jersey Sea Sport Centre, at La Haule Slip, St Aubin (07797 738180, jerseyseasport.com).

### WHAT IT COSTS

Jetskis are expensive to buy (around £8,500), so it's best to hire one through organisations such as Jetski Safaris Ltd or use one through a dedicated club, such as the Mumbles Jetski Club in Wales (07830 090045, mumblesjetskiclub.co.uk) – around £40 per session. All you need is a wetsuit. Good ones from Rip Curl and O'Neill start at £150.

### WHERE TO STAY

**The Sandbanks Hotel, Sandbanks, Poole, Dorset (01202 707377, fjbhotels.co.uk).**

Affordable, family-friendly and on a Blue Flag beach, The Sandbanks Hotel has a swimming pool and its own Watersports Academy, through which you can book a session with Jetski Safaris. B&B from £100 per person.

FROM TOP Fellow beginner Jamal is kitted out in a wetsuit, helmet and spray vest; Harry takes to jetskiing like a duck to water; the sea safari passes Old Harry's Rocks; as Alex takes to the helm, Elliot wants him to go faster

