



LAND, HO!
Bright sails, blue skies
and very little risk
of drowning.

LANDSAILING **BONAIRE**

The Race Is On

Who says you need water to set sail?

It's easy if you have previous sailing experience," says David Slotema, an instructor at Land-sailing Bonaire, as he straps two young towheaded girls into "blookarts" — as in "blow-carts" — hybrids between go-carts and sailboats.

I keep this in mind as I watch the owner's daughters Lotta and Maxine, ages 7 and 11, start whipping around a dirt track. The location seems ideal: The loop sits a reassuring distance

from the rocky cliffs of Bonaire's eastern, windward side. Divi trees and stovepipe cactuses, known on the island as *kadushi*, enliven the serene landscape.

I think I know what I'm up against, I tell David — I've helmed a few Sunfish in my time — so he sits me down to explain more. He pulls out a visual aid: a diagram with a giant, red arrow indicating the wind's constant direction, blowing perpendicular to

the track's straightaways. That, plus the track's fixed position — unlike a shifting sea — removes much of the guesswork inherent in sailing. It seems simple enough, but the thought of wiping out and eating dirt (rather than swallowing salt water) intimidates until David talks me through the cart's design. Like a dune buggy, a blookart has roll bars and a seatbelt to prevent serious breaks or scrapes in the event of a wipeout. Unlike dune buggies, these three-wheeled speed machines have no brakes. To slow down, you ease up on the line; if gusts overwhelm, let go of the line. And if I tip over, David valiantly promises, he'll rush to my rescue. His surfer-boy good looks assure me that this is a win-win scenario.

Helmet on, I climb aboard and strap in tight. David pushes me out to the track, dispensing one last bit of advice: "The dangerous points are when you're coming out of the turns, so sheet out."

With that, I ease out the sail, patiently waiting all of two seconds before I take off, leaving tiny clouds of red dust in my wake. *Woo-hoo!* I'm sailing! Freed from the drag of water, I'm reaching speeds never dreamed of in a Sunfish.

I struggle with the first bend, probably because I'm over-thinking it. I have to push the wheels to get out of the turn, but once I'm on the straightaway, I find speed quickly and sail on through the next curve. As I slowly gain confidence, I dare myself to sheet in — pull the rope in tighter — to see just how fast this contraption can go.

I suspect I hear the pings of flinging pebbles, and sure enough, Maxine and Lotta are gaining on me. These girls are young — too young, perhaps, to know the narrow margin that often separates winning and losing, and too young to discern my manipulative strategy. At every curve, I claim the inside track, edging them out to maintain my lead.

Soon, either I grow cocky or Maxine grows bolder. She's relentless in her pursuit, forcing me to elevate my game. I shift strategy, careening through curves without letting up on my speed — compromising my balance and sending me soaring on

two wheels. This is the thrill I've been waiting for all day. With each lift, I tense up as I try to tip further, wedging more air between cart and track, struggling to coax just enough length from the line to stay planed on two wheels.

Just as I feel like I'm putting the finishing touches on a thesis about balancing this thing — *thwack!* — I tip over, and the cart skids across the dirt before coming to rest with its

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Northeast Coast
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One hour of landsailing costs \$50 per person.

wheels spinning in mid-air. The girls blur by, their dust making me cough. I hang like a rag doll, unscathed save for a nickel-sized patch of epidermis that's been freed from my palm. As adver-

tised, the seatbelt and roll bars have saved me, and David dashes right over.

I'll treasure my miniscule battle scar — a souvenir that I faced a new challenge head-on. Next time, I'll bring gloves. And, knowing that Landsailing Bonaire maintains 12 blokarts, I will bring challengers closer to my own age, and we will become our own mini-armada racing to the death. Or until lunch time. — *Brooke Morton*

EAR TO THE GROUND

“It’s good to be a Jamaican.”

Lillian Bolt, after her nephew, 22-year-old Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, won three Olympic gold medals and set new world records in the 100- and 200-meter dashes; Jamaica ran away with a total of 11 medals at the Beijing Games.



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