

WITNESS  
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# Is 13 too young for girl to sail the globe solo?

UTRECHT — A 13-year-old Dutch girl who hoped to become the youngest person to sail solo around the world was put under state care for two months yesterday while psychologists assess her capacity to undertake the risky voyage. The ruling came the day after a 17-year-old



PHOTO: AP

Thirteen-year-old Laura Dekker poses on her eight-metre yacht Guppy.

British boy claimed the record.

Dutch judges said Laura Dekker would face both mental and physical risks if she were allowed to go ahead with her planned two-year trip.

The court said she can continue living with her father, but will become the responsibility of Dutch child care officials while a child psychologist evaluates her case.

The girl was out sailing yesterday and did not attend the district court hearing, but her father, Dick Dekker, listened to the decision from the three judges. He made no immediate comment.

The court did not remove Laura from her father's home, nor did it

rule out the possibility of her eventually going on the worldwide trip. For those reasons, the family's lawyer, Peter de Lange, said the judges' decision supported the notion that "you are not a bad parent if you try to help your child fulfill her dream".

The court will issue a second ruling on October 26 on whether to extend the council's responsibility for the teenager. By that time she will have turned 14.

De Lange said Laura's friends told her of the court's decision and "she accepted it very positively".

Dekker, who raised his daughter on a yacht for the first four years of her life, has supported her plan to begin the voyage next month.

But Dutch social workers argued that Laura Dekker is too young to weigh up the dangers of the trip, and psychologists said the isolation would be damaging at an important time for a young teenager's development.

Presiding Judge M. Oostendorp said the voyage is clearly risky for a girl Laura's age. "She would be confronted with difficult situations that will challenge her mentally and physically," she said. — Sapa-AP.