

COMPOSITE GRP

- and the DIY Revolution!

Not since the 1960's have the suburbs of Australia resonated to the sounds of so many - hundreds - of busy families beavering away in their garage, carport, lean-to or workshop, building their own boat. In their own time, at their own pace, as cash flow permits - and with much joy, laughter and personal satisfaction. In this special supplement, Editor PW, an acknowledged DIY 'tragic' explains how this new age revolution came about - and where it is headed in the future.

It's doubtful if there's ever been a boat owner who has not thought about building his own boat at some point in his life. There is an intrinsic appeal in the concept of building exactly what you'd like, with your own hands, and then having the enormous satisfaction of launching and using the boat in the years ahead.

DIY, or Do-It-Yourself boat building has been a feature of the Australian boating landscape since the 1950s. Indeed, it's widely acknowledged that between Richard Hartley, Jim Young, Ces Bowden, Len Hedges and later, Bruce Roberts, the Australian

boating industry was born in the 1960s as measured by the popularity of boating for the average working Aussie family bloke.

Home boat building in the 1960s moved up into the iconic zone with Holdens, Hills Hoists, Victa Mowers and drive-in theatres. This was largely because there was no real production boat building in the early 1960s until International Marine's Archie Spooner got things underway in Scoresby, Victoria with his early range of Caribbean and Bertram fibreglass boats. Within a few years, half a dozen other manufacturers who were then building plywood trailerboats of all

types and sizes, saw the writing on the wall, and started building their first production fibreglass boats. Whittley, Stylecraft, Swiftcraft, Bell Boy and Cruise Craft, are some of the better known examples.

But long before the production of fibreglass boats matured into reasonably competent craft, there was a mini-industry commercially building 'bondwood' or plywood boats sheathed or painted, for the latter part of the 1950s and into the mid 1960s. It's also true to say that many of the most popular fibreglass models of the 1960s were themselves built originally from plywood to many and varied plans.

Through it all however, the concept of building your own boat in plywood remained extremely popular, and it wasn't until the 1970s and the advent of the ubiquitous "tinny" from the De Havilland, Quintrex and Brooker factories, that the idea of

building your own boat started to wane, as it became faster and cheaper to buy a new tinny from one of the hundreds of dealers springing up to sell small trailerboats and outboard motors around Australia.

Whilst it's never really stopped, DIY was certainly pushed into the background through the 1980s and 1990s, and it wasn't until the late 1990s that the concept of DIY suddenly sprung back into life, as the plate aluminium boat fraternity discovered architect designed plate aluminium boats could be cut out from what became known as 'cut' files (think of 'pattern' or lofting files) created by the naval architects (Phil Curren, Jon Kemp, and Marcel Maujean especially) behind the scenes.

Almost overnight, it became practical for professional fabricators to start building quite sophisticated plate aluminium boats, usually from 4.5m to 7.0m LOA.

Thanks in part to the activities of Plate Alloy Boats of Australia in Melbourne, supported by magazines such as F&B and the Plate Alloy Boats of Australia book series, people took to this concept in quite a big way, and made it one of the most dynamic boat building sectors in Australia in the latter part of the 1990s, through to the early part of this century.

During this period, composite GRP boats were available if you knew where to look. Internationally, the Gougeon Brothers' famous West Epoxy Resin system was used to build hundreds of craft with core western red cedar strip planking overlaid with various techniques of resin and glass. This was particularly

Below: One of the key elements that has made Bowdidge's work stand out from the crowd, is that he has taken very traditional boat building concepts such as composite core plywood or strip planking, but he's created very modern, sophisticated craft of the kind today's fishermen can usually only dream about - except that in this situation, the dream can become a reality. It just takes time, and yes, a lot of hard work, especially if you're going to build something like this spectacular Pro Tournament 24. Bowdidge's powerboat designs are clearly influenced by his years working in a top American design office in Florida, 'rubbing shoulders' with many of the best boat yards and factories in the world.



Left and left below: The simplicity and accuracy of modern 'lofting' is encouraging. The full size plans are supplied on Mylar (a sort of clear plastic) and by the simple means of putting carbon paper underneath the Mylar against the plywood being cut out, a dressmakers wheel is used to run around the shapes of the frames, cut outs, etc. leaving a clear, sharp and dead accurate outline of the cutting line.

Below: Mark and Debbie Bowdidge with their grandsons, Matty (5) and Lachie (3) in Brisbane last month. This is familiar territory for them - they went cruising (for eleven years, 1992 -2003) with their two daughters Cheree and Tarsha when the girls were just 5 and 6. Family is still a big part of their lives.

