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As production boat sales languish at the lowest levels they've been in decades, DIY boat sales are soaring. But there is one very obvious drawback for most people: having the time - and the place - to do it. In this special two-part report, PW considers a radical alternative for boating consumers, that solves both of these problems and saves thousands of dollars in the process . . . when he asks

Isn't It Time . . . To Re-think The Way We Are Buying Boats?

In the course of any given business week, the writer will speak to as many as 30-40 readers from all over Australia.

It's a fascinating job in the sense that it's extremely interesting talking to readers everywhere; from their comments, complaints, concerns and fears, the writer is able to draw a pretty accurate picture on how boatowners are fairing in the Year 2014. More to the point, it enables the writer to draw a bead on what people are thinking about insofar as boats, outboard motors, fishing gear and equipment is concerned.

Over the last two years or so, there has been a very

marked shift in attitudes by all and sundry, reflecting a growing sense of disbelief and concern about the future as it is now reflected in the price of many boats and marine products on sale throughout Australia.

This year's round of Boat Shows only managed to scare away literally hundreds of would be buyers as they felt they'd been kicked in the guts by the prices being displayed by many of Australia's leading boat manufacturers, outboard companies and purveyors of all things with the word "marine" attached to them.

Most readers I've spoken to left the Boat Shows convinced that it was not for them, many moving on to list their boats for sale with a view to getting out of the world of boating altogether.

This in itself has also proved to be extremely frustrating, as it has become very apparent that the bottom has fallen out of the secondhand boat market, and prices today are approaching a dangerously low state of play.

What to do? How can a buyer move forward if the amount he's going to get for his trade-in, is half, or perhaps a third less than what he/she/they otherwise would have expected?

How can a buyer cope with new boat prices that seem to have gone through the roof? What's gone so badly wrong?

It's partly because the cost of boat manufacturing in Australia has increased so much, the sales figures, the volume of business the manufacturers used to achieve, has collapsed. You don't need a Macquarie degree in Economics to work this out; with the volume collapsing, manufacturing costs will increase exponentially, and sales will most likely drop to an even lower plateau.

Some would call it a classic Catch-22 situation.

Do It Yourself Pro Building

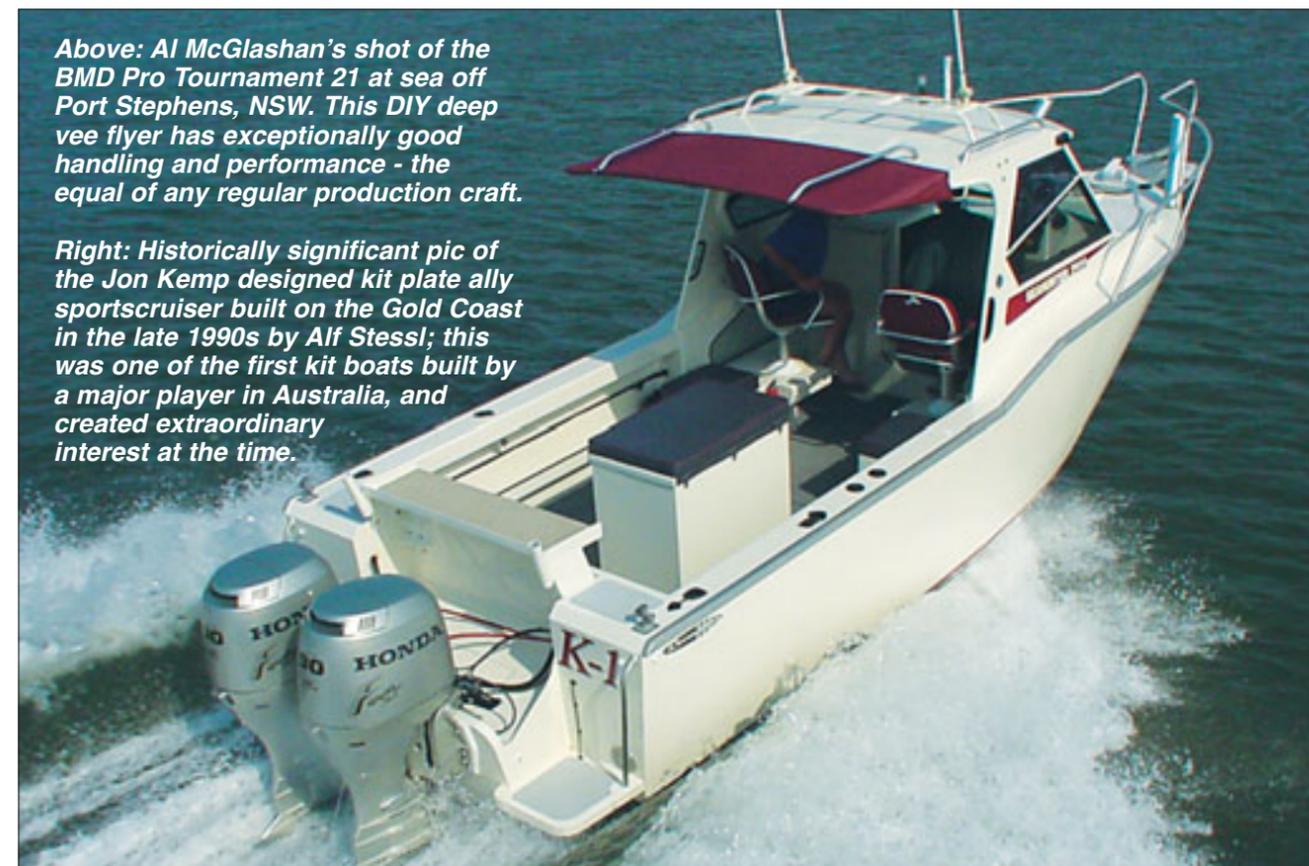
The writer was engaged recently in a long and interesting discussion with a Victorian reader the writer knows on an almost personal basis. It's a situation that arises frequently with many readers who have had conversations with the writer over the years to the extent that we've all got to know each other quite well, although in most cases, we've never actually had the opportunity of sitting down and having a yarn, face to face.

No matter, the process is still engaging, interesting and invariably fruitful – more so for me, I suspect, because I learn so much about boating activities around Australia in the process, that I would otherwise have no idea about.

In this case, the reader is a very keen SBT (southern bluefin tuna) fisho who frequents Portland, Warrnambool and the south western coast of Victoria in pursuit of these magnificent fish, after many years of effort (and success, I might add) with the yellowfin



Above: Al McGlashan's shot of the BMD Pro Tournament 21 at sea off Port Stephens, NSW. This DIY deep vee flyer has exceptionally good handling and performance - the equal of any regular production craft.



Right: Historically significant pic of the Jon Kemp designed kit plate ally sports cruiser built on the Gold Coast in the late 1990s by Alf Stessl; this was one of the first kit boats built by a major player in Australia, and created extraordinary interest at the time.

fishery over in Bermagui, NSW. In fact, this is where we did actually meet on several occasions, so I was interested to learn where he was up to with his boat plans for 2014 going into 2015.

That was the core of the conversation. He was flummoxed by the cost of the boats on display in this year's Melbourne Boat Show, but he was almost as frustrated by the way consumers are being force-fed big outboard motors that were all too often way over the top as far as actual power requirements were concerned.

"There would have been a dozen boats in the

Melbourne Show," he told me, "that were overpowered by at least 30% to 40% - 250hp engines being installed where 150hp should have been more than adequate . . . 150's where 115hp would have been more than sufficient."

He continued: "But what can you do? The boats were there on the floor and there was no way the dealers or the boat manufacturers were going to change those boats one jot – what you saw was what you got, regardless of whether it was well balanced, or whether it needed so much power for optimum performance and economy. In almost every case, the