

'CUPPA T' CAMPER UNDERWAY

– The Billy is On!

In what promises to be a fascinating, step-by-step process, Di Ross and John Batty are going to have their new 6.1m Vindicator constructed in Adelaide, SA before our very eyes - and we'll be there, every step of the way, watching their progress.

It is over 12 months since we penned our dilemma on finding a circa 6.0-6.5m boat to upgrade our 550C Signature, and provide the wherewithal for a "Cuppa Tea and a Lie Down" (F&B#125) on our journeys across this fabulous Land of Oz. The response from readers, boat owners and DIY builders, many of which PW included in F&B, was appreciated, and convinced us that we were not alone in what we are trying to achieve.

In the interim, we went along to both the Hindmarsh Island Boat Show and the On Water Expo at Port Adelaide, where we had a chance to drive a number of boats in the 6.0m range - some fibreglass, some plate aluminium. As our experience has only ever been with fibreglass craft, we did a thorough assessment on all the usual "breeds" before investigating the 6.0m production plate boats on the market - hardly a chore, but we needed to do so, to convince ourselves this was the way to go.

We came to realize that the cost of new boats over the last few years had increased significantly, and what we'd paid for the Signature 550 some time back, was no longer a measure of today's values. Prices being asked for (say) the big Streaker, the 6.0m (+) Signatures, Cruise Craft and Seafarers became our guideline, as did a range of plate boats like the Stacer and Razerline. No doubt each have their virtues.

Our test run in the Oceantech

designed Vindicator 610 demo boat (F&B #130) in quite rough conditions was very impressive, and certainly convinced us that the semi wheelhouse hardtop configuration was the way to go. With the addition of a refrigerator, sink, cook top, chemical toilet and limited covers, our basic camping needs for overnights along the highway and on water locations like the Gippsland Lakes, should be adequately addressed. It is undoubtedly an extremely capable offshore boat and will allow us to operate both further within the SA Gulfs and provide us with added confidence to venture wider at other locations we have not previously visited.

Importantly, it was at this point we realised we were committing to not just a new, bigger and much more expensive craft - we were also committing to having it made it plate aluminium.

Rationale To The Big Decision

Clearly there is no template for the overall process in buying a plate boat. Some will buy on availability (off the showroom floor, like F&B's new project boat, the Quintrex 670 Offshore diesel) and be entirely satisfied as they go boating within days.

Others will buy a professionally designed and marketed kit, and using their skills and resource levels, produce a very good boat. A number will select a kit, take delivery of the hull fully welded and undertake all further tasks themselves.

Many will opt to contract for a completed BMT package, as we have decided. The plate boat "build to order" selection option, of course, does provide the opportunity to incorporate your own individual needs - and for us, this was an important factor.

Going down the path of a dedicated build for us is a very significant commitment, and early on, we had to come to terms with what (if any) aspects we were capable of undertaking.

In earlier days, we achieved some skills in the home garage which would arguably place us in a reasonable position to tackle a kit build, given the right advice and guidance and perhaps some assistance. We have experience with gas and MIG welding (not aluminium), some fabrication, automotive electrical wiring, making the odd fibreglass panels, spray painting and the like.

In contrast, during our working years, we were both civilians with the Defence Department and spent most of the time on commercial ship building sites. Our roles, however, were related to logistics and outfitting tasks, and as such, we did not gain trade skills which would have been of immense value now.

Regardless of our skill levels though, we simply do not have the space to build at home.

We are also mindful that during the build phase, a six metre boat gradually becomes a significant lump of metal and accidents can happen particularly



Idling back to harbour, she even looks nice at low speed.



Calibre Boats custom drive on/off C-Section aluminium skid trailer fitted with Duratorque IRS axles and disc bakes with an electric hydraulic brake control system. This trailer is rated at 2500kg.