



Neil Dunstan: Back To The Future

Way back in the early seventies I was employed at the alumina refinery at Gove in the Northern Territory. We shifted there hoping to get ahead financially as the pay rates were significantly better than where I was previously working.

In those days it was a very isolated place with no TV or radio except Radio Australia's Indonesian service which was not very good for checking up on the football scores, so we had to make our own entertainment.

Luckily for me being a boating and fishing tragic, the area around Gove was an unspoilt paradise for these pastimes. I spent many adventurous times with my great fishing mate John Bell fishing out of his early model 16 foot Quintrex. This boat was seriously hard riding and had a habit of ducking under a following sea and trying to run along the wave with frightening possibilities. After I had earned a bit of money I decided to invest in a bigger, better and safer boat with



which we could range farther afield and explore new places and fishing. To this end I purchased a Dehavilland Trojan, a 6.4 metre plate aluminium half cab, which was the biggest alloy boat available apart from specially built one-off units which were prohibitively expensive.

As a matter of interest the boat was shipped from Gladstone where I knew the local marine dealer quite well and the price landed in Gove with a trailer was \$2,900. John and I began fishing the area and we were just getting the boat set up when I changed jobs and was planning on shifting to the north west of western Australia. The result was that John and I sailed the boat for six hundred miles across the top end to Darwin experiencing many hair raising adventures (this epic was recorded in an early F&B). My wife and kids came across from Gove to Darwin by plane, and waited until we arrived, and the trailer and car came by barge.

From there we loaded the boat and all our worldly

possessions onto the pack rack on the old HR Holden and into the boat, and set off for Wickham in the Pilbara. I must explain that we did not know that the rest of our possessions were in a container in Darwin harbour when cyclone Tracy went through and we lost everything in that holocaust, hence the statement, "all our worldly possessions".

The epic trip of a couple of thousand kilometres to Wickham then on to Ingham in north Queensland via Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Townsville, a total of thirteen thousand kilometres in a wheezing old Holden with almost no brakes, no heater, no radio, no aircon and a very patient wife, was written as a story some time ago.

All this preamble is to establish why I still have a very soft spot for the Trojans and what has transpired recently.

Ever since I sold my Barcrusher half cab some time ago, I have really missed my trips out to some of my favourite spots where I camped in the boat for

days at a time, especially Cape Palmerstone. I sold my Barcrusher because even though it was excellent at what it was designed for, namely a fast day fishing boat with a super smooth ride, it achieved this by using a very narrow deep vee hull and as such there was limited internal space for my long duration camping trips.

After discussing my longing for camping trips again with my wife and trying to accomplish this in my 4.5 metre Quintrex open boat I decided that when you are in your seventies this hurts too much, so it was decided that I would keep my eyes out for a second hand alloy half cab about 5.8 metres or better and fit it out to suit what I wanted. I have been banging on of late about maybe giving away all this tearing around in boats and slow down to a more leisurely place, so with this in mind I was looking for a suitable hull to set up.

After quite a few months I found that there are very few such hulls around and all that was available were

glass hulls, and while glass is quite okay, I wanted alloy for the rough time we give them. The only suitable boats I found were very much over priced and not worth the money so I started to check out what was available on e-bay.

It soon became obvious that the same problem existed on e-bay as any alloy hulls seemed to command a premium price, until one day I stumbled on a Dehavilland Trojan. Most of these hulls are now between thirty and thirty five years old and the majority of punters have never heard of them, but I knew that they were really good sea boats and as tough as old boots. So I started to bid on a couple but they all went for more than I was prepared to pay until one old girl appeared that looked like it had potential.

So I put in a couple of bids with my final offer for the boat and trailer being accepted as the highest bidder, I got quite a shock when I realised that I may end up with a Trojan. The seller, who lived on the northern outskirts of Brisbane contacted me to tell me that the bid was well below the reserve, so after a bit of haggling he accepted a price a little higher and I found myself the owner of a 1970 something twenty one foot boat.

It had no motor and was



pretty bare inside which is exactly what I wanted, as I was going to refurbish it to suit extended camping trips with a full size single bed, a proper galley and a full length hard top for sun protection.

I arranged to travel to Brisbane and tow the boat home, so the owner, Graham Johns, organised to remove the wheels, pack the bearings and fit a pair of galvanised wheels and good tyres to replace the ten inch wheels fitted, ('cherry picker' wheels as the editor calls them).

Off I went on the one thousand kilometre trip to Brisbane on the probably vain hope that I could get it home without any trouble. The rain bucketed down all the way down and all the way back.

The thirty year old trailer

ran like a beauty and got home without a minute's trouble. I managed to get it home at a cost of under four hundred dollars compared to the near two thousand dollars it was going to cost to be trucked up north..

I have since started working on the old girl, and have found that everything is in remarkably good shape, although the plywood floor is bugged and will be replaced. Under the floor there is no sign of corrosion or cracking, with the only crack in the alloy being on the top corner of the cabin which will be easily repaired and the only corrosion being where some fittings have been mounted on the transom with inadequate care. Again, easily repaired.

The trailer is having the rear cross member replaced

as it is quite rusty, but I am fabricating a new one in the shed and it will be fitted in the next couple of days, I was also amazed that the original disc brakes were in perfect working order and will not need to be replaced when I take it in to get a roadworthy certificate after Xmas.

Well that is current state of my latest project which I am all excited about and if the editor is interested I will write a few more articles documenting the progress and the eventual launching of the good ship Trojan. This will be used initially as a displacement boat, until I can afford to fit a 115 h.p. four stroke for the final completed plan.

Neil Dunstan.

Sarina Beach.

F&B