



**Neil Dunstan:**

*Ebb &  
Flow...*

## Buying A 12V Deck Winch

**S**ince I have mostly completed the renovation of my 1973 Dehavilland Trojan 6.4 metre alloy half cab I have been using it for mostly multi-day trips with overnight camping on board.

It has been quite successful in this mode and because it is set up as a displacement boat with a small four stroke outboard, it is very economical to run, albeit a bit slow for some people.

One of the functions that I have had a bit of bother with is setting and retrieving the anchor. As the boat is fairly old fashioned in design it was originally set up to work the



anchor through a reasonable sized hatch in the foredeck which was accessed from the cabin.

The original cabin fit out was just a couple of small bench seats which allowed enough room for a reasonably agile person to pass between them and up through the hatch. I have since installed a couple of full sized bunks in the cabin as well as a galley and additional stowage space, so the access to the hatch is not practical as there is not enough room to squeeze past.

The alternative is to clamber around the side decks to the foredeck and operate the anchor from there – however, the side decks are only about 100mm wide due to the stepped deck arrangement on the Trojan. This makes it quite difficult for a person my age to accomplish access forward easily and safely, so for some time I was taking quite a risk when doing this when on my own.

One day I was out fishing with my mate J.T. and we decided to try to anchor in a spot we knew

would fish well, but was very rough due to the fact that it was about half a kilometre out from an island on the weather side and the waves were bouncing back off the cliff face of the island. I clambered around the side deck hanging on for dear life and on reaching the fore deck I had to lie down on the deck and jam my feet against the rails to

**“... I clambered around the side deck hanging on for dear life and on reaching the fore deck I had to lie down on the deck and jam my feet against the rails to stop from going over the side. . . .”**

stop from going over the side.

As this area was fairly deep I deployed the anchor and there was not enough rope to reach the bottom

so I had to drag the whole lot back up and add another length of rope and then re-deploy the anchor. All the while I was being thrown around all over the place and it was just luck that I did not go over the side - so if I had been on my own (as I usually am) then this would have been bordering on madness.

After clambering back around the cabin sides I decided there and then that I would fit an electric anchor winch of some kind, even though I had tried to do without one due to the cost which is significant for a pensioner.

When I owned a Barcrusher half-cabin boat a couple of years ago, I had a twelve volt Woolfinch electric drum winch fitted in the Barcrusher factory, and I was very pleased with that set-up, as it was controlled from the helmsman's position, and I could observe exactly what was happening, and where the anchor was, without leaving my seat.

It was so successful that J.T. said that he would not come out with me if the



Fortunately for Neil, the '74 Trojan used a very traditional 'king plank' or strong back system down the centre of the deck, making it relatively easy to locate and secure the winch.

on to the warp. Considering these facts, even though they are generally cheaper than drum winches, I decided to stick to the drum winch.

The next decision to make was whether to purchase a winch with a free fall function or to use a power down, power up type.

I decided to use the type which I am most familiar with, namely the power down, power up type for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, some of the free fall types use a ratchet and pall mechanism which disengages the drive from the drum to allow it to free fall to the bottom and these systems sometimes have problems when the pall and ratchet get worn. Secondly,

winch was not working as HE would then have to get out through the forward hatch in the cabin to set the anchor and he is almost as old as me – and this was with the Barcrusher!

A determined savings effort was then embarked upon and just before my birthday I had accumulated nearly enough capital – and my patient, but somewhat worried wife Dorothy, said it was time to take the plunge and arrange the purchase.

I then began to start gathering info, and approached some Australian makers for prices and specifications. At the same time I began to keep a look out on eBay to see what was available, and maybe even come up with a secondhand unit, but after quite a while I did not find any second hand units so I started listing what was available in the way of new units.

I had decided at the beginning that the Woolfinch which I had on the Barcrusher was very successful and after nearly three years of operation it had never given any trouble, had been plenty powerful enough and all the controls were easy to use, so it was the first on my wish list.

A couple of phone calls to Jeff Woolf in South Australia established what price I would have to pay, but at nearly \$3,000 I was beginning to think that it was out of my price range. The Woolf winch I'd had, used a 1400 watt motor and gear box which was imported from Italy, so I

decided that a 1400 watt motor would be desirable as with the size of my ground gear anything less than 1000 watts would be marginal.

I'd already decided that I wanted a drum type winch, as this system stores all the chain and warp on the drum out of the way and I don't have to tie off the anchor line because the holding power of the drum with its large reduction gearbox will hold about 1800 kilograms of pull on the rope.

I have had a fair bit of experience with the standard type winch that is normally used which uses a gearbox driving a horizontal shaft on which is mounted a gypsy wheel and a friction driven rope drum.

These types have a set of teeth in the gypsy wheel which grip the rope and when rotated, pull the rope and chain into the boat. These rely on there being enough fall below the winch into the chain locker to use gravity to keep the rope feeding down into the locker. However, in my experience, most small boats below seven metres don't have a big enough chain locker to have the fall required.

Also, they often have trouble gripping the warp when it changes over from rope to chain, they require special low profile shackles, plus the fact that the warp still has to be made off to the cross bollard as the gypsy wheel cannot be relied to hold

unless they have an automatic sensor that tells the winch when the anchor reaches the bottom, it will continue to feed out the warp until the operator stops it and this allows the chain etc to pile up on the anchor, often tangling the lot and preventing the anchor from setting properly.

Generally, I try to stick to the less complicated devices, which are usually less expensive anyway.

So I decided to purchase a drum type winch with at least a 1000 watt motor and preferably a 1400 watt motor, a power up, power down type which would accommodate about 100 metres of 8 mm warp and ten metres of chain on the drum. I was also looking for something with a good warranty, backed up by an Australian company and preferably made in Australia, which was supplied with all the extras required such as an up/down switch, circuit breaker, mounting bolts, base plate and roller with mount if installed in the anchor well, which mine was not going to be.

I was also looking at some of the Chinese made units available on eBay but was only interested in those supplied from an Australian site, and not direct from China. The following was a short list that I finished up with:

#### **Australian Assembled:**

- **Stressfree Midi.** 1400 watt

motor. Price \$2,500 plus GST and freight.

● **Muir.** 1000 watt motor, \$2,813 plus GST and freight. (600 watt motor \$2,249)

● **Savvinch.** 1000 watt motor \$2,350 plus GST and freight.

● **Woolfinch.** 1400 watt motor approx \$3,000 plus freight.

**Chinese made** units supplied from an Australian site on eBay:

● **Lone Star.** 1000 watt motor \$1,400 plus freight. (600 watt motor \$1,100)

● **Black Marlin.** 600 watt motor \$1,190 plus freight.

● **Noname.** 800 watt motor \$1,200. Plus freight.

There were plenty of units offered with small motors such as 450 watt and 500 watt but these were too small for what I wanted, even though some were as cheap as \$800. Most of these units, including the (notionally) Australian made (or assembled) ones, offered a two year warranty with spares available locally.

I had a unique opportunity to see first hand what the Chinese made units looked like as my nephew from Melbourne arrived up at my place for his annual fishing holiday with us, and he had a



Chinese made no-name winch fitted to his boat which he bought on eBay for \$1100.

We have been out fishing a couple of times so far, and I had a good look at his winch in operation. It appears to have a 600 watt motor and the gear box is much the same as the rest while the drum and mounting frame is almost identical to most of the winches available being fabricated from stainless steel, except the Woolfinch which is manufactured using a cast aluminium drum and mounting frame.

My observations of this winch (pictured above) in

operation seem to suggest that it is quite reliable being a power down/ power up type and after three years is still going okay. It has no free fall facility but with its fairly small motor it seems that the maker has opted for a much higher gear box ratio to give it more grunt. But this means that it is quite slow retrieving the anchor and when deploying, the slowness makes it more difficult to anchor accurately over a deep mark, however at only \$1,100 dollars, I reckon it was a damn good buy.

I had pretty much decided that the Woolfinch was more than I could afford, so I looked at

the next best unit which I reckoned would be a Stressfree unit. When I rang them in South Australia for a price I discovered that they use the same Italian made 'Quick' 1400 watt motor and gearbox used on the Woolfinch, so I thought that the main components were very good judging by my excellent experience with the Woolfinch.

Then, just as an experiment, I contacted our local supplier of Stressfree winches in Mackay (Reef Marine) for a price and they offered me a price which was slightly cheaper than the direct factory price and included GST and freight, for a total of \$2,250 - all in all, a significant saving on the factory price, so I ordered a Stressfree Midi unit from Reef Marine.

Next month I will describe how I installed the winch on my Trojan and how I saved quite a bit of money using stuff I had in the shed and other bits and pieces which I made, having to buy only a very small amount of things to finish the job.

- Neil Dunstan, Sarina Qld.

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