

After a building and fitting out program that took every bit of 2 years, we were very keen to put *Far-Away* to work in the role it was intended, as distinct from being a “clothes horse” for a vast array of photograph and stories reflected in the publication of our sister title, “*Plate Alloy Boats Of Australia – Book 3*”.

As most readers are aware, this Salty 27 features extensively through that publication as it represents the very peak of plate aluminium boat building in Australia. But this is no show pony – it’s a working commercial craft with a job to do, and last month we were finally in a position to undertake an all too brief shakedown cruise to Far North Queensland.



Shakedown For *Far-Away*

Typically, it was rapidly becoming one of “those” trips where it seemed that the combination of bad luck, bad management and circumstances beyond our control were combining to close the 21 day window we had planned for the trip north. Twenty one days was fast coming back to 12, and maybe less. . . .

Where we were supposed to leave the Gold Coast on Monday or Tuesday morning at the latest, this date was soon pushed back to Wednesday or Thursday. And finally on Thursday, when we were loading the dory on the roof of the F250, we broke the nylon ropes on the Rhino Roof Rack mid-way through

the pick-up procedure. At this point, I must confess, we just about ‘through in the towel’ and cancelled the whole thing.

It was entirely out fault too. We’d been going to replace the 5 year old black poly ropes used on the Rhino’s system, as we knew they had deteriorated badly over the years. However, we had repeatedly put off making the trip to Brisbane where Brisbane Roof Racks, a good bunch of blokes headed by manager Michael Bolger, were waiting to replace the ropes for us – a job that would only have taken a couple of hours, but we gambled that the ropes would last one more trip, as they had served us so well, for so long.

Wrong. On the day before we headed north, we went down to Paradise Point launchramp to load the dory onto the roof of the big Ford, when no sooner had the weight come on to the ropes of the dory as it swung up onto the roof, when the first rope snapped and (fortunately) it all dropped back down into the water.

Kersplash! And with that sound we knew we’d lost another couple of days because we then didn’t have a choice. We had to go up to Brisbane and have the ropes replaced. Murphy was alive and well, that’s for sure – but typically, only because we had pushed the envelope too far. (Continued on Page 42)



Above: One of the best aspects of working 'in the field' is the chance to catch up with readers along the way, and *Far-Away* attracts readers (and non-readers) from all walks of life. Here, Editor PW is engaged in an interesting dialogue about the Honda 150s with a long term reader - a truckie in fact, en route to Darwin.

Below: Pulling into the Caltex roadhouse on the outskirts of Bowen, the team has made good time on Day Two, making up for some of the lost ground due to tyre problems on Day One.



Nevertheless, we were on the verge of cancelling the whole trip because it meant we were then only going to have a maximum of 12 days in the field.

Given that it takes 2 days (at least) to drive up to Hinchinbrook from the Gold Coast, and 2 days back, the window of opportunity was rapidly closing.

Unfortunately, the writer had to be back on the Gold Coast for a vitally important date with the hospital's MRI scanner on September 30th, so it was a 'no choice' situation – we had to be back on the Gold Coast on that date, or go back in the four month queue.

That night we did a bit of soul searching, but decided that we'd just about got everything else organised, F&B #123 was delivered to the printer and although we were both exhausted and Ruth still quite ill from a bout of whooping cough, we decided to hell with it, we needed the break, and although we still had a zillion things to sort out on the boat we were confident all the 'big picture' stuff was sorted and working.

One of the obvious issues was to stay home and work from the Gold Coast in the Broadwater and Moreton

Bay region, but this didn't really test the rig in many areas that we needed it to be tested.

The most obvious of these was the need to prove up the big alloy trailer that we'd re-built to suit *Far-Away*.

Given that this whole project is targeting going to the Kimberley in WA in early 2007, we are on a countdown to get everything absolutely spot on before we undertake such a massive trip. And crucial to that program was to establish that we had the trailer well and truly sorted before we left home base. If we stayed home to do the shakedown around Moreton Bay this simply wouldn't happen.

We're also very sceptical about local trips for shakedowns because it's just too easy to go back to base to pick up a shifter, or to call up the local support team when things break or don't work.

We wanted to put *Far-Away* 'to the sword' and the only way to do that was to get out on the highway and take on a proper cruise.

Finally Underway

On Sunday morning we duly pulled away from Runaway Bay and headed out on the Bruce Highway before the

Main Spread: As we arrived at Port Hinchinbrook, the weight bias on the front axle is evident. Despite this, the weight on the drawbar is only about 100kgs - and that's what threw us off the scent.

We now believe that because the alloy trailer chassis is so long, probably 90% of the weight IS carried by the tri-axles, plus a fair bit is 'buried' in the trailer frame ahead of the axles (check how much the chassis has bent on the run up to the towbar coupling). We probably saved even further dramas by having really powerful tie-downs midway along the chasis (see tie point under the portlight) to 'lock' the chasis to the boat itself - thus restricting how much the forward sections of the trailer 'worked' as the 'weight' moved back and forth.

Remedies will include locating the boat's true centre of gravity right over the middle axle; extending the bearers under the boat aft by at least 450mm, and raising the height of the towbar coupling at least 100mm.





Above & Left: Taking the wheels off the 2.5 tonne AL-KO axle requires two (bottle) jacks and a slab of 4" x 2" for simplicity and speed. The first jacks up the trailer chassis, which allows the axle arm to drop - and the second (then) jacks up the wheel hub and axle arm. Despite shredding the tyre, there was not a mark on the rim, as the load was easily picked up and carried by axles #2 and #3.



traffic got too busy. The Ford F-250 handled the rig easily, a fact that was to become increasingly verified over the following weeks. The massive torque of the long stroke 7.4 V-8 diesel is so evident on big hills it's quite weird; just as you think it surely must change down a cog, you can feel the torque coming on through the engine and it just lugs itself up over hill and dale, rarely changing down to a lower cog on all but the very steepest hills. Indeed, between the Gold Coast and Cardwell there are only three hills or mountain ranges where the F-250 even bothers to change down.

As the first couple of hours wore on, we finally started to relax when the first of our trailer dramas occurred, and we blew out the front left wheel of the trailer. This was a bit of a shock because it happened at fairly high speed on the freeway near Nambour and I was immediately concerned about

- How we'd pull the rig off the freeway safely,
- Where I could "land" that would enable me to change the wheel safely, and
- How quickly I could stop before I damaged the rim itself on the bugged tyre.

With all these matters negotiated reasonably quickly, we set about changing the big tyre, a process that didn't take us all that long, because we are fairly well equipped for that job and we've done it several times before on many other boat trailers.

Of particular interest I was delighted to see that the AL-KO independent suspension had worked a treat, and although the front axle was clearly carrying too much weight, axles #2 and #3 picked up the load as easily as they were supposed to, and carried the rig - allowing axle #1 to protect the rim of the wheel itself.

This was good news for me, because the first thing you worry about in these big rigs is that if you blow out a tyre, the next thing to protect is the wheel itself, let alone the hub.

With this AL-KO independent system, by having three 2.5 tonne axles, with each tyre rated to 1250kg on each corner, it meant that even if we lost both wheels on the front axle, the remaining four were still well within their normal rated capacity to handle the 4.5 tonne load.

However, after about a delay of perhaps 15-20 minutes, we replaced the bugged tyre with the spare wheel, and aware now that there was a

Right, Top: Hinchinbrook's summer weather is nothing if not variable, going from baking hot sunshine to this in half an hour - to reasonable clear skies again (lower pic) just as quickly. Importantly, the double lane ramp is excellent, the new floating jetty structure alongside the ramp a 100% improvement - but a big 'barber's pole' at the top of the ramp would definitely help big and small rigs more clearly identify the 'corners' of the top of the ramp - as the actual runway entrance is a bit blind from the carpark. PS: Check out Mick Edwards' Blackwatch 40 - pro charter gamefishing is finally getting sorted at Hinchinbrook.

Right, Below: Having a berth for 40-50 footers at the Port Hinchinbrook Marina (\$30 overnight) meant we could keep the dory safely tied in behind *Far-Away*. Because we were only planning to go down to Gayundah Creek (about 8 miles south of the Marina) we decided to tow it down - thus enabling us to have it set-up and ready to 'rock 'n roll' when we arrived at our first anchorage.

Below: Changing tyres at Gin Gin's Tyre Power centre on a Sunday arvo! After some discussion, we purchased four new Kelly 10-ply tyres, as our front four were clearly doing 90% of the work the way we had the trailer set-up. Note mid-point tie downs from the hull to the trailer.



problem with the weight bias of the boat on the trailer chassis, we took off again down the freeway very carefully, with my eye glued to the front right hand wheel on the trailer because I knew that this would be the next wheel to go.

Pulling the speed back to around 80-90km (to keep the heat out of the front tyres) we kept going, but knew that we were in trouble with this weight bias. Apart from that though, there was the other issue that was starting to nag at me - how come such a good looking, 'as new' tyre had blown out? Was it just the weight bias and if it was, how come there wasn't more weight on the towbar?

This was all a bit intriguing, because we weren't carrying very much weight on the towbar, although the weight bias was clearly evident when we felt the heat in the front, middle and back tyres. They were obviously hot, warm and finally cold. It was not subtle.

It was all a bit of mystery, but just outside of Gin Gin, a couple of hundred km north of Brisbane, the inevitable happened (I was watching it



when it happened) the right hand front tyre on the trailer let go, too. This time however, I was ready for it, so not a lot happened and again, the load transferred back to the remaining 2 axles quite happily and let us limp into Gin Gin at about 20kph, with the now deflated tyre on the front right just going round but not damaging the rim.

But it was not a good look, and we knew we had a problem – especially as we were in Gin Gin, a small country town on Sunday afternoon with a serious tyre problem!

But as luck would have it, not only was the local Tyre Power shop open, it's proprietor, Kelvin Jensen and his wife Marilyn, were both working in and around the garage and their house (he was mowing the lawn, actually!) so when we limped into their forecourt on Sunday afternoon, they came across immediately and offered to help. Amazingly, they had four of the right size tyres in stock, whilst their son Quinton drove in specially to help Dad

change the front four of *Far-Away's* trailer wheels and tyres.

Time Out: Yes, we'd like to express out gratitude to the Jensen family for the work they did on Sunday afternoon, and recommend them highly to anybody else who has a problem in the Gin Gin area. What they did for us was way beyond and above the call of duty for a Sunday afternoon and greatly appreciated.

Over the next couple of hours, we studied the issue fairly carefully, and talked about what had gone wrong. We had replaced the front four operating tyres with new Kelly steel-belted light truck tyres, because it became apparent that the Dunlop Adventurers that we've had on that trailer for nearly 6 years, were quite badly perished, and that was largely the cause of our problem.

Although the tyres *looked* like they were in perfect shape, held their

pressure perfectly, and did not have any blisters, scars, lumps or marks on them, when they went out on the freeway or the Bruce Highway and started working, it became very apparent that the tyres' rubber had aged badly and in simple terms, had perished beyond the limits required for operational safety.

Needless to say we were a bit shocked about that, and took a lot of photographs and made many notes, because it's something I've never encountered before in all my years of boat-trailing. We all just assumed, I guess, that tyres last forever – but clearly, they don't.

In this case, the problem was exacerbated because although the Dunlop Adventurer tyres have a 1250kg rating, obviously with the bias of the boat's weight on the trailer set up so (now) apparently poorly, the front wheels were probably carrying as much as (say) 1500-1800kg and thus were operating well in excess of their

Below: Leaving the township of Cardwell and the Port Hinchinbrook Marina behind, we crossed over the increasingly shallow entrance passage into the Marina (less than 600mm deep, in parts, at LWS) swung south and headed down the Hinchinbrook Channel. The deep vee Oceancraft 3.4m dory towed really well, although we'll have to make-up a proper towing bridle for towing any sort of distance.



rated capacity. On top of this, they were old, and somewhat “perished”.

The fix on the highway (short term) involved moving the boat back 150mm on the trailer, keeping the speed for the rest of the trip down to 90kph (not easy in the Ford!) running on the 4 brand new tyres - and keeping the temperatures in those tyres low by keeping the speed down.

Thanks to the help of the Jensen family in Gin Gin, we were on our way again by 4.30 and continued through to Miriam Vale where we stopped for a good night’s sleep before getting away at sparrows, heading north, targeting Townsville, just over 1,000 km away. Obviously, we were pretty circumspect about the trailer and its tyres at this point, but we needn’t have worried.

In fact we drove non-stop through to Townsville, arriving on Monday night. This was a good call because it meant that we were confident we would then make it through to Port Hinchinbrook Marina, only another 220km to the north, fairly easily by lunchtime the following day – and that’s ideal.

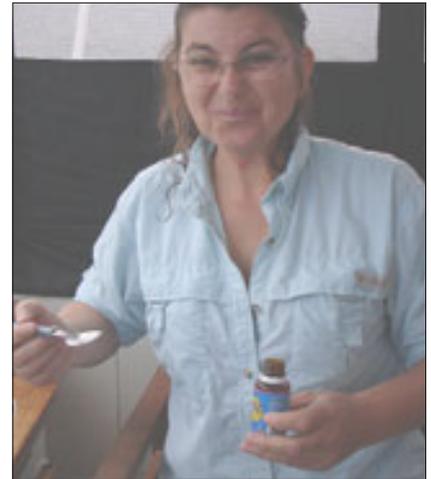
Trailer Summary: More work is required on the balance and set up of the trailer, but we’re very confident

now we’ll get it spot on, by repositioning the boat even further back on the trailer - but we’ll have to replace the side bearers to do it, a job which we’ll do here on the Gold Coast in October.

However, the AL-KO axle system really proved its worth and the rig was a joy to trail, especially given the massive power of the Ford F-250. We’re confident it will easily handle the trip across to the Kimberley in February/March next year.

The First Days

By the time we arrived at Cardwell’s Port Hinchinbrook Marina our relief was palpable – it had been a long trip made more complex and worrisome by the tyre problems, but we were really pleased to be there in the car park with our beautiful boat. The fact that it was pouring with rain scarcely dampened our spirits, because we sat in the back of the boat and had a well deserved cup of coffee as we watched the rain squall bucket down in the car park. Knowing Hinchinbrook reasonably well, we knew the squall would pass, which it did about 20 minutes later, so it was all hands to the pump as we



Above: Yuk! Ruth’s expression says it all as she downs the day’s 2.5mm dose of a Vitamin B based medicine we have used - very *reluctantly* - but with great success in minimising the effects of midge and mozzie bites up north. **Below:** Heading south to Gayundah Creek in picture postcard surroundings. Note tiny white speck in the right hand corner - that’s a cruising cat leaving Gayundah - our destination for a couple of days.





stood up the targa and started unpacking the Ford.

Because we are right on the 4.5 tonne trailer limit with the boat, an awful lot of stuff is kept in the Ford, taking up about 70% of its 1 tonne capacity.

This principally concerns the dory – the 20hp Honda, Century deep cycle battery, Minn Kota outboard, all the fishing gear, safety equipment (etc) for the dory which actually lives in the Ford when we are on the highway.

So our first job was not to launch *Far-Away* but the dory.

This methodology in fact we're going to change because what we did was far too slow. We unhooked the big boat and went down to the launchramp to launch the little boat – a process that takes at least 10 times as long to launch (a 10' boat!) as it does to launch the 27 footer!

But it had to be done, and with our brand new nylon ropes from the Rhino people we knew that lowering the boat off the roof was going to be the easiest task – and so it proved.

We love doing that job off the Ford because it always attracts a crowd of

amazed onlookers as the dory comes off the roof so easily and just drops down onto the ground by turning the winch handle – a job that literally any kid or old person (like the writer!) could do quite easily. It's an impressive procedure and it worked beautifully here.

With the dory safely in the water and the ropes all tucked back on the roof, the next job was to get out the Honda 20, something that is bloody hard to do. The outboard weighs 52kg and it's hard to get the tilt lock to work properly when the outboard's standing on the ground. This is a seriously heavy outboard at 52kg, and it is one of the hardest and longest parts of the loading and unloading procedure.

After that came the battery for the Minn Kota, the Minn Kota itself, the safety equipment and so on – what a process. This is definitely a procedure we're going to change in the future because this took far too long. Worse, we were both absolutely knackered by the time we'd finished because we were working in unusually hot, humid conditions.

Well, unusual for us - I'm sure the

Above: The Oceancraft 3.4m dory we have extensively modified, is simply amazing. It goes like the clappers with the Honda 20hp 4-stroke, reaching 20 knots quite easily with just Ruth on board - but still running 15-16 knots with the writer, fishing and camera gear, live bait tank, solar panel, and all the Minn Kota's paraphernalia as well. As a two person roof topper, it is an unbeatable combination of safety, performance, stability and economy.

Above Right: Why we keep going back - the ever changing, rugged, brooding Mt Bowen-topped ranges produce a kaleidoscope of colours, moods and weather patterns that can - and often do - change every 15-20 minutes.

Below Right: We'll have a lot more of this in an upcoming F&B issue when we deal with Hinchinbrook itself; suffice to say here, when the pundits talk about 'cover' and 'structure' the Hinchinbrook region has it in spades. Check it out !





Above: How about this as a 'room with a view'? If nothing else, the Salty 27 project has demonstrated very powerfully, just how much more "live-ability" could be forthcoming from Australia's boat manufacturers - of all sizes - if they put their minds to it. *Every feature* of the Salty 27 could easily be incorporated in a 5.95 - 8.0m craft, and whether it is a hardtop over the cockpit, a separate 'room' for the loo, decent freezers and/or a combined fridge-freezer (how about something as simple as a water tank?) the fact remains unpalatably clear that fitting out standards in Australia are virtually as the were - and in some cases much worse - than they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the worst offenders are from the pressed tinnie brigade, where the boatbuilder's concept of "fitting out" for family boating consists of two pedestal seats and a windscreen.

locals thought it was actually quite a cool afternoon.

With the dory bobbing away at the new launch ramp jetty, the next job was to launch *Far-Away* and that was blissfully easy. We backed the big 'entry down the launchramp, Ruth fired up the Hondas, I undid the clips and after a bit of a jiggle (because the boat had settled on the trailer) it slid easily back into the water.

By 3 o'clock we were at Mick and Linda Edwards' Port O'Call jetty, getting our first load of fuel and water back in the boat (we emptied the water to keep the weight out of the trailer). By 4 o'clock, we were back over at the Marina with *Far-Away* securely tied alongside one of the marina's excellent berths, with the dory bobbing happily in behind.

At 5 o'clock Tuesday afternoon, we cracked our first tinny. We'd arrived. We were back at Hinchinbrook with our new boat.

The following morning, after unashamedly sleeping in way past sparrows, fresh coffee, a hot shower and breakfast encouraged us to leave the comfort of the marina and head out into the Hinchinbrook Channel.

On this particular trip because we had used up so much of the available time, we decided that we weren't going to do any serious filming at all, because we clearly couldn't get around to all the places that were on our shooting list and story boards for the documentary, and so decided that we'd focus on *Far-Away* and getting it tuned right up by using all of its amazing inventory equipment and putting it and the dory through their paces in their designed role.

For readers who may not be aware of it, the dory is in fact quite a sophisticated little fishing boat in its own right, being equipped with GPS, depth sounder, 406 EPIRB, all the requisite safety equipment and the capacity to fish either off the Barrier Reef or inshore creeks and rivers. But like any other fishing boat, it had never been used seriously in this role - and flicking lures up and down the Gold Coast canals doesn't qualify as a fair dinkum trial.

So we were very anxious to try both boats in their intended role and knew that it was going to take us a couple of days to get them both sorted, let alone get our heads around fishing Hinchinbrook, and stop wanting to fall



sleep on those very comfortable berths!

I'm sure other readers have experienced this, but for a couple of exhausted little veggies from the Gold Coast who'd just completed the first ever **Power Cats Of Australia Directory**, plus a monthly national magazine, just staying awake on the boat for the first couple of days, gently rocking in beautiful, idyllic surroundings, is seriously hard!

Ruth was probably more exhausted than the writer and was quite ill (still) for the first few days, staying in her berth on a couple of mornings because she felt so tired and off colour.

The writer wasn't much better, so for the first couple of days we basically underwent some badly needed R&R to recharge our own batteries before gently working 'up to speed' on the boats and their respective equipment.

Over these pages, we are publishing an extensive pictorial of the shakedown cruise so I won't reiterate what's in the captions of all the different aspects of the cruise, so much as to summarise some of the significant highlights that

do have a bearing on other boat builders' and designers' work in Australia.

Hot Water System

There's no doubt the LP gas Bosch hot water system was one of the highlights of our first shakedown cruise – it worked perfectly for the trip. Was simple and safe to use, and because it's equipped with a proper flame failure system, it's literally designed for a marine application like this. Installing it on the back wall of the wheelhouse (outside) in the cockpit was ideal, but one has to pay tribute to the beautiful stainless steel chimney or flue that we had made for this purpose, because it worked so efficiently.

The whole set up in fact was first rate and a tribute to the Salty fitting out crew and licensed gas plumber Rob XXXX whose quality work on *Far-Away* has been greatly appreciated.

The LP gas hot water system works just like any other gas hot water system – as soon as you turn the hot water tap on, the gas is boosted to its hot water

Above: The significance of this shot is very simple - Ruth is relaxing in a comfy chair during another tropical downpour - she is 'dry as', protected from sand flies, mossies etc, and has to take just a couple of steps to put the kettle on, as she waits for the squall to pass. How many other trailerboats in Australia - how many other *cruisers* - offer these simple, basic parameters - all of which could easily be incorporated in a 6.0m GRP, pressed tinnie - let alone a platey. Also note the fold-up dining table - an idea we pinched from Noah's Ark

setting, and within seconds, there's hot water of whatever degree of temperature you want, running through the system.

To get scalding hot water you turn the volume of water back down; to get lukewarm water, the water flow is increased so more cold water joins the mix. It is incredibly simple, extremely effective and the only criticism we



Left: The boat ‘whips’ worked really well, keeping the dory off *Far-Away* during the toughest squalls and tide over wind changes. The dory is easy to clean and maintain. Because it has a false floor in it, we were able to put a bilge pump and float switch under the floor at the transom - a good technique as it was able to keep the boat nice and empty - despite some serious rain at different times of the day and night. At first we thought storage might be an issue, but in fact we have several shelves we don’t even use in the centre ‘island’ work unit. This houses the big live bait tank, the battery compartment, the aft-facing electronics, and the storage shelves. It is the best fishing platform we have yet developed.

settled in beautifully, taking perhaps 3-4 BBQ’s for the plate to stopping *hissin’ and spittin’* – and become the easily controlled BBQ it now is.

We were delighted by the installation – and the almost complete lack of radiated heat from the BBQ on the surrounding ‘walls’, curtains and bench top.

could make at all is that the basin or hot water taps furthest from the system had more cold water “lost” in the line until the hot water came through from the heater.

But we learned to quickly capture that little bit of ‘lost’ or cold water either in the billy or in a basin for washing purposes, so that ceased to be an issue too.

All in all, simple, safe, effective, reliable – we’re impressed.

The LP Gas Oven & Barbeque

As you’ll read on the following pages, *Far-Away’s* LP gas cooking systems worked better than we dared hope, too.

The Maxco Tudorcraft LP gas oven and griller worked very well indeed, and although we couldn’t seem to adjust the oven to heat up to more than 150-160 degrees Celsius, it certainly baked a wide variety of dishes very efficiently. In the end, we decided that maybe the temperature gauge system was at fault more than the oven, as a check thermometer that we had produced different temperature readings – so the jury is out on just what the oven temperatures were, but it didn’t make a lot of difference, as by week’s end, Ruth had got a good feel for the oven, and adjusted the cooking times to suit.

The Southern Stainless BBQ has also

Although we’d had Craft Covers make up a side curtain of ‘fire blanket’ material (see pic) to protect the side curtain and clear ‘window’ which we thought could have been vulnerable to radiated heat (and become a possible fire hazard) in reality, the fire “curtain” remained quite cold, so we probably over-reacted to the risk potential.

What did work brilliantly (and probably contributed to the lack of radiated heat) was siting the 500mm x 500mm Lewmar hatch over the BBQ, with the hatch opening from the rear to the front (opposite to how one normally positions a hatch) so the smoke and heat was drawn OUT of the BBQ by the vacuum created as the



They reckon an army runs on its stomach . . well, one has to observe that the Peter and Ruth show isn't much different!

These pics are very interesting for other boatbuilders . . **Left:** This is the Southern Stainless BBQ and oven we installed on the starboard side of the cockpit over our 'laundry cupboard and tool shed'. Worried about the possible effects of radiated heat, we had Craft Covers make up a special fire blanket curtain (that's it, white, on the right) but we scarcely needed to have bothered. There is no heat at all out the back of the BBQ, and hardly any heat under it, or on the sides - because we did allow 75mm of air space right around it. Equipped with 'flame failure', it is fast, efficient, easy to use - and importantly, easy to clean.

Below: *Bloody 'ell* - who would have believed it possible for RC to come up with a baked feed like this, on a trailerboat, in the middle of nowhere! But she did - and night after night, too, as she worked through some of her fav recipes. The decision to go with the Maxco LP gas oven is without doubt one of the best we've ever made. However, readers need to keep in mind that the oven is only as good as the freezer that supplies it . . .



breeze passed along the roof and over the hatch, as *Far-Away* naturally lay head to anchor.

This is a marvellous set-up – and we'd strongly recommend other boatowners replicate (and if necessary, retro-fit) their hatches in this fashion.

Incidentally, one fascinating gem of intelligence we couldn't find anywhere, we picked up in this trip. It concerned the significant question about how much LP gas would the Bosch HWS, the grill, the oven, the stove and the BBQ use in a typical week, allowing 2 x 20 litre hot showers a day.

The answer? Well, we used exactly 1 x 4.5 kg bottle of gas in 7 x 24 hour periods, for an average of 0.642 kg of LP gas per day.

In other words, if we said we used 0.7 grams a day, four weeks in the Kimberley will need 28 days @ 0.7 kg = 19.6kg of LP gas.

Now we know – and the figures are spot on.

Solar Power –The Freezer System

Wow, this Oze Freezer system has exceeded all our hopes and expectations.

Ruth shopped for the meat, veggies, groceries (etc) on the Saturday before

we left Runaway Bay, and stowed everything in the freezer which was already “down” to minus 18.6 in preparation for the trip, as well as the fridge which was sitting on its normal 1.7 degrees. Both were running on solar power here on the Gold Coast.

As we drove up the highway, the solar panels kept the freezer and fridge system running perfectly the whole time and thus when we arrived at the marina on Day 3, everything was the same as it was when we left the Gold Coast – the freezer was still on minus 18.6 and the fridge on 1.7 degrees. How good is that?

No gensets, no plugging into 240 volt – as we drove up the highway the sun charged the solar panels with more than sufficient power to run the freezer and fridge plus keep all of the ship's batteries fully charged in the process. And so it went on through the whole trip – only on one day did we have to kick in the Hondas to boost the solar power output, and that was on the third

day of rain and cloudy weather combined with a period when we, because it was rainy, had multiple showers, used the electric toilet more than normal, and maxed out the electrical system through computers and camera battery charging whilst the weather was so poor.

We didn't really have to put the Hondas on, but more out of curiosity than anything, with the AGM 255 amp battery down to 164 amps one morning, we decided to see what the Hondas could do. The fact that it was obviously going to be another wet, rainy, grey day meant that it was unlikely the AGM battery would go back up to more than about 180-190 amps.

So we fired up the Hondas – both of them – and within minutes, the twin alternators were pouring amperage back into the AGM battery. In the first hour the 2 Honda 150s, just ticking over at 1,200 rpm put a massive 44 amps into the AGM battery and in the third half hour, ran it up another 18

This is what makes it hard for southerners to figure - just in front of the dory is a bait school starting to panic as something bigger than them is coming at 'em from the mangroves beyond. This is all in about 600mm of water - requiring pin-sharp casting and stealth. To even have a chance, the lure has to be put right into the mangroves. . . .



amps before we shut the Hondas down. . . because the AGM battery was back up to 220 amps.

For Ruth, this was a personal triumph and a turning point on the trip.

She's put her heart and soul into achieving a 12v solar powered fridge and freezer system. It's been dogging her for the last 7 or 8 years – knowing that it was *theoretically* possible to achieve this level of freezing and refrigeration efficiency from solar power, but having it defy us for all that time on several boat projects.

This time, she's cracked the code. The combined output (345w) of the 3 solar panels in clear sunny weather, easily copes with all of the ship's electrical requirements. And if we do hit a patch of bad weather where the sun is shrouded in grey cloud for 3 or 4 days, we have confirmed the Honda 150s do pump in their advertised amperage (40 amps) very efficiently, very quickly.

This was one of the main reasons we

bought the Honda 150hp V-Tecs in the first place.

***Time Out:** For readers who may be reading F&B for the first time, the significance of this result cannot be over-stated. Whether the boat is a trailerable boat on the highway, or it's a moored boat working at sea or lying in a marina, what this demonstrates is that one of the most common reasons why people install gensets in their boats is no longer relevant.*

Far-Away has shown you do not need a genset to run a very sophisticated 12v toilet system, refrigeration, freezer and entertainment systems, as well as all of the ship's normal house circuitry, with solar power alone.

For many boatowners (especially those not fussed about airconditioning) this means they don't have to buy a genset, need to carry less fuel, and the cost of running and servicing a genset is eliminated.

This is a breakthrough of very considerable consequence for all boatowners planning new craft or upgrading older ones.

Solar Panel – The Minn Kota System

Again, another victory for the solar systems – the solar panel we positioned over the Honda 20 outboard, worked better than we'd dared hope.

Every morning and every afternoon for 8 days, I fished a 2 - 3 hour session using a combination of the Honda 20 to locate the dory where we wanted to fish and film, and the Minn Kota when we were 'on site'. At no stage did we have to recharge the dory's deep cycle Century battery and/or plug it into *Far-Away's* central 12v system - the solar panel kept up with the Minn Kota's usage throughout the entire expedition!

I couldn't believe it – and I was especially concerned when we had a long afternoon session on some of the days that were quite wet and cloudy. Then the boat would lay alongside overnight (obviously without any solar input) and we'd start again the following morning at about 7 o'clock with just an hour or so of daylight, and take off with the battery showing

Navigation in this region is relatively straight forward, and there are many excellent charts available. The latest C-Map NT "Max" was particularly impressive, and now includes the exact Port Hinchinbrook marina and channel chart info. We have some nav work to do though - between the GPS, the compass and the auto-pilot, we had 60° difference!





Left: Packed up and ready for Trewin Transport to bring it back down the coast. We decided it was too problematical bringing it back ourselves, due to the poor distribution of weight on the trailer's AL-KO tri axles.

maybe 60 or 65 amps out of a potential 85. Would it hold up we wondered? And would you believe, not only did it hold up, by the time we'd get back to *Far-Away* for brunch, the battery was almost charged back up again. *Boy, are these solar panels efficient when you get them set up properly.*

In this case, I want to stress to readers that we were using the Minn Kota very frugally and never using it for passage-making ie., if I wanted to shift from one location to another, we would lean over, start the Honda, lift the Minn Kota out of the water, until we were at the new location.

We never used the Minn Kota to relocate the dory, and only used it for fishing and then, only used the third and fourth setting in 9 cases out of 10. Yes, of course there were plenty of times when you'd kick it up to the #7 or #8 setting, to spin the boat around to pick a lure out of the mangroves, fight a tide surge or a current coming out of a creek. But generally speaking, we ran the Minn Kota on the #3 and #4 settings for 90% of the time and always used the Honda for anything longer than 100m or more location shift.

In this way, the solar panel input easily kept up with the output for the whole of the 9 days we were on the water. I couldn't believe it – this is the best result we've ever had.

I'd also like to observe that the Honda 20 finally did use some fuel in the end. We started off with a full 12 litre tub and 9 days later we still had half a tub left – simply bloody amazing! We'd taken 2 full tubs in expectation of needing at least one and

half x 12 litre tubs and ended up using a quarter of what we thought we'd use.

Ironically too, we used at least half of the fuel *we did use* on just one trip, when we took off and went exploring one rainy afternoon. We decided we'd leave Gayundah Creek, and go right around the Back Passage, then down to Haycock Island and returned. A trek of about 16-17 miles as near as I could figure, and most of it was done running at 3/4 -7/8 throttle. Not only did the dory handle the mixed bag of conditions (crossing the Hinchinbrook Channel here was quite rough as there was a 15-18 knot sou-easterly blowing at the time) but it handled the conditions like a boat twice as big – at no stage taking any spray over the sides at all. It is truly a remarkable small boat which we love dearly, and wouldn't swap it for quids.

Things That Didn't Work?

Actually just about everything did work. We didn't have any really serious problems with any of the equipment and although we decided not to fire up the desalinator at that stage, everything else was run extensively and for considerable periods of time.

As noted the fridge/freezer system was superb, the hot water system worked a treat (*ahhh! . . . there is nothing like the sheer luxury of having a hot shower in the morning or before you go to bed, is there?!*) And although we're not happy with the flush cycle of the Lectra-san toilet system, it was only because we couldn't figure out how to lengthen the flush cycle from the 7 seconds per flush it was set on, to

something like 10 or 11 seconds – resulting in us having to go through the flush cycle twice (for 8 amps) instead of possibly 6 amps for a 9-10 second cycle.

It's interesting measuring the 'loo in terms of amperage, but to take a leak is worth 4 amps, and for #2s, you're looking for at least 4 amps for each flush – and it can take up to 3 flushes to clean the bowl properly.

Time Out: Only in F&B could you read such fascinating techno, um, 'stuff' such as recording the amperage used flushing the toilet for #2s . . .

This all worked beautifully, too. It's dead easy to use – you put your finger on the button and press it! Even I can work this one out, without having to ask Ruth for instructions.

But apart from adjusting the flush cycle to a slightly longer period, there's no doubt the Lectra-san system/holding tank worked really well.

If you're going to stay in marinas or work on the Great Barrier Reef, or in ANY sensitive "green" zone or Marine Park area, this is the way it has to be in the future.

Other Bits & Pieces

We had various odds and ends that didn't work, ranging from the CD player that gobbled up Delta Goodrem and wouldn't spit her out which was okay for the first 7 times we'd heard her, but after that we were a bit frustrated by Delta's dulcet tones yet again, and she's no substitute for a good Johnny Cash track, is she?

Stuff like that we came back with a list of about 20 items that didn't amount to diddly, but in themselves all have to be fixed and adjusted in time for our next serious expedition which will happen in the first two weeks in November.

Yep, we're going back to finish that goddamn film on Hinchinbrook and we're not coming back until it's done!

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