

Cairns To Cooktown via the Hope Islands.

Part 1/2. Words and pics by Peter Webster



Ruth at the tiller of the Honda 15, motoring away from the eastern Hope Island. The fishing here is very good, especially when the incoming high coincides with either dawn or late afternoon.

This month, F&B's principal Project Boat, the 8.0 m Yanmar diesel powered Cairns Custom Craft sportscruiser, *Dusty Rover*, continues its passage north. Leaving from its most recent base at the Half Moon Bay Marina (at Yorkeys Knob, just a few kilometres out of Cairns), the team headed for the Hope Islands, approximately 60 miles up the coast, and a convenient stop-over on the run through to Cooktown, a further 25 miles distant.

After weeks of working on our production computers, we were certainly looking forward to the trip north from Yorkeys Knob to Cooktown. Mind you, boarding the Virgin jet airliner at Brisbane airport and arriving in tropical north Qld two hours later, is always something of a physical shock to the system. No matter how many times we do it, it still takes a day or so to adjust to the change in lifestyle, weather and work ethics.

We both find it surprisingly difficult to "change gear" and divert our thinking from the crazy world of publishing, computers, boats, books and advertising to the fairly serious business of preparing a craft for 7-10 days at sea, or in this case, out on the Great Barrier Reef.

Our boat, the much published *Dusty Rover* plate aluminium 8.0m sportfisherman, was designed by Marcel Maujean and built by his company Cairns Custom Craft for precisely the work we have been doing. Powered by a smooth, remarkably economical Yanmar turbo diesel engine driving through a sterndrive leg, *Dusty Rover* has a working range of around 400-500 miles, depending on the final loadings of fuel, water, camera gear, food, etc.

On this trip, we elected to arrive in Cairns around 2.30 pm, and as the airport is only 30 minutes or so from Half Moon Bay Marina at Yorkeys Knob, we expected to be in the boat by mid-afternoon.

Our strategy was fairly simple. Unpack the boat on the first afternoon, and spend the following day checking all of its fittings and equipment, topping up the fuel, and completing a short list of maintenance jobs that we had been unable to finish on our last trip.

Preparations

Once a boat like *Dusty* is set up this well, it is blissfully easy to prepare for a quite major voyage.

This time, we had the benefit of two extra Ronstan solar vents working in the wheelhouse area, as well as the two down below in the cabin. Once again, we were delighted to find *Dusty Rover* dry and odourless upon our return – a pleasing situation considering

we'd left *Dusty* with its Craft Canvas awnings down, to ensure *Dusty* remained watertight even in the heaviest tropical downpour.

Of course, boats still "breathe" moisture all the time, and in the tropics, where the air is often thick with humidity, condensation can be a real problem. However, these Ronstan solar vents have eliminated the problem on *Dusty* altogether.

