

RENOVATIONS & RESTORATIONS

Through the 1980s, the Cougar Cat brand was one of the major players in Australia's burgeoning powered cat market. The brand's uniquely shaped hulls were hugely popular with their owner operators, including many Government Departments, fishermen and SAR groups - a reputation that sustains to this very day. Many of these craft are still 'plying the ways' just as well as they did 25 years ago.

After the recession 'we had to have' in 1988, everything went pear shaped, and despite innumerable - and often tragic - attempts to get the brand back up off the ground, it didn't happen. Well, not yet, anyway. This is the boating industry, and as we all know, old moulds never die . . . As FNQ Contributor Don Gilchrist reports, this is one fiesty lady that is never going to give up . . . and still has a unique appeal:

She's A Cougar

Below: The sheer size knocked us for six. The bow flare unique to Cougar Cats is evident as is the extraordinarily useful ladder from the trailer to the foredeck. She is a big unit to be sure, but size helps in FNQ.



I'll try not to let the length of the tale get out of control by saying that all of my recreational boats have been named *Bandwagon*. B1 was a 16 foot John Haines 1600 SO that I refurbished virtually from a wreck into a family ski boat for our holidays to the River Murray.

B2 and 3 came along in time but B3 was a major departure from our theme, being a 36 foot Farr 1104 ocean racing yacht. Her job was to prepare me for premature retirement. It was really more burn-out than retirement but that is another story. After B3 came the non-bandwagon of my life. She was a 46 foot Jack Savage design that I ran away to sea in to save my life. She was called *Stylopora* after a little known species of coral found on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and I never felt inclined to change her name. I lived aboard her for 10 years and sailed around the world. When asked how we came to live in Cairns it is simplest to say that we moved from Adelaide to Cairns the long way; via the Panama Canal! It is a gross oversimplification, but it gets the job done without too much misrepresentation.

When we sailed back into Cairns in



the last weeks of 1999, I'd had enough of boats and sailing, and family issues were likely to see us living ashore for the next few years. But initially I could not face the idea of letting her go. When you have been through as much as we had together over the previous decade you develop a very personal attachment to the vessel that has looked after you so well. After about 18 months the folly of that notion was irresistibly apparent.

Nothing deteriorates faster than a boat that is not being used and that

B4 got us afloat again in FNQ and was a great boat but she did not tick all the boxes for year round use in our patch and *modus operandi*. She taught me a lot about how dodger/awnings need to work in the tropical trade wind belt.

deterioration is multiplied when the boat is an 18 year old short-handed ocean crossing yacht, under utilised and parked afloat in a tropical marina. The amount of maintenance was too much for me and in the end it was harder to watch her degenerate than it



B5 not long after her arrival in Cairns. The spreaders and a small aft extension to the existing dodger got us out there doing it, but I needed time to think about a new dodger, what I wanted it to achieve and exactly how to go about it.