



## The Jones' Girl

By Sally Jones\*

### The "BOAB" Boat Hire Experience - In Port Stephens NSW

**S**o you've found the perfect destination, but haven't brought your boat. How many of us have been in this situation? You're standing there at the ramp, the sun's shining, 5 knots of breeze and the water's flat as a tack, watching the masses returning with nice catches of tasty fish! Been there and done that, last November.

Don't get me wrong, we absolutely loved our recent holiday. We took our caravan and had an absolute ball. But we would have liked to have had our *Gizmo* there and gone out in paradise for at least one day. Oh, if only we could bring her as well! A bit hard to do when you're towing a 20 foot caravan. So on our return visit, earlier this year, we decided to hire a boat, and get out there amongst it.

The area I'm referring to is beautiful Port Stephens. It is 2.5

hours (210kms) north of Sydney, in close proximity to Newcastle. The trip is 800 odd km from our home on the Gold Coast. Any of you who have stayed there will be aware of the stunning scenery, the magnificent waterways and the awesome inshore fishing and world class sportsfishing action, just beyond spectacular Yacaaba and Toomaree headlands.

It is a delightful place to get on the water or caravan. We were staying right on the Little Beach boat ramp, at the Halifax Caravan Park. It is just below the Nelson Bay headland and VMR. The chaps were kind enough to show us around their headquarters. Rescues operations for the Central Coast are organised from here and these fellas have faced some monstrous conditions, during their rescues. Their base is very efficient and most of these guys are volunteers. It is an impressive place for folks to visit. The Inner Light Teahouse is also up here and you can combine a nice lunch or afternoon tea, with magnificent views

of Shoal Bay and surrounds.

So what's the solution to getting out on the water? The Hire Option! But not the "putt-putt" sort of craft that only goes 6 knots. Happily, there is a new alternative for those of us who hold a current boat driver's licence. It's called Boab Boat Hire. You may have seen their distinctive orange coloured vessels. They are in many places around Australia, including Port Stephens, Surfers Paradise, Cairns, Coffs Harbour, Broome, Darwin, and the Hawkesbury.

We contacted Chris Perry at Boab, and organised to take the middle of the range craft, the Sports Rider, out for the day. There are four vessels available to hire. The Centre Cab, Sports Rider, Kimberley and Runaboat. The 5.5 metre Sports Rider is a bowrider, powered by a Honda 135hp 4-stroke and 5hp auxiliary motor. She is built to Survey and comes supplied with EPIRB, all safety gear, VHF radio, stereo and a





**Above:** Little Beach ramp and jetty just east towards Shoal Bay, along from the main shopping centre at Nelson Bay. This is a wonderful area for safe family boating. **Below:** The Boab Hire system has real merit for countless situations - especially when the craft are of the calibre of these platieys. It's a good way of dealing with the vagaries of the weather, isn't it? Just go out on the good days . . . oh, that's Albert and Sally in the lower pics - handsome platiey, isn't it?



**Right: This is such a beautiful place - looking east here, out through the normally calm entrance to this vast estuary.**

Humminbird colour combo GPS/sounder. All you need to add is your fishing rods (even these can be provided for a fee), ice and yourself! It's a great concept to supply a vessel, extensively fitted out just like you drive at home, BUT with decent horse power. That way you can actually get about and see a lot of the waterways in the one day.

You can either meet at one of the ramps and Boab will launch for you (walk-on option), or pick it up the night before and launch if yourself. We met at Soldiers Point ramp and after some paperwork re insurance, licences, etc, we were on our way. Chris kindly organised ice, bait and the fishing licence for us.

We were really thrilled to be taking the Sports Rider on its maiden voyage. Wow, we had a brand new vessel! We headed out east for a cruise towards Shoal Bay and Tomaree Headland, where the ocean meets the bay. Gee whiz, the Honda purred along nicely. The Sports Rider is very quick too. Surprisingly fast out of the hole considering it's a big boat working with just 130hp. You could easily pull a tube of kids along with this baby.

The craft itself is made by Amara and has 4mm alloy plate sides and 5mm plate bottom. It has a comfortable ride, and handles moderate wind chop very well. She can be taken 2nm offshore in appropriate conditions. There are also dual batteries with isolator, big esky, nav lights and auto and manual bilge pumps. It's a first class fit-out and you feel safe and confident aboard.

We didn't venture offshore on this particular day, but spent a wonderful nine hours cruising and exploring the Port Stephens waterways. Areas like Shoal Bay, Nelson Bay, Corlette, Sandy Point, Swan Bay, Tea Gardens near Hawkes Nest, and North Arm Cove, a beautiful, secluded spot which is great for lunch. The reflections here, in calm



**To see Port Stephens and its associated waterways properly, you need to figure on being here for several weeks - or divide the region up into segments, and tackle them one at a time. Editor PW makes the observation that it is easy to lose 2-3 weeks just getting the feel of the fishing around the islands and offshore waters - let alone exploring the 'soft water' areas, such as the Myall Lakes, the Karuah River, etc!**



conditions, are brilliant. It has lovely tall gum trees right down the bank meeting the water. It's a top place to anchor and just chill out. The places to visit are endless and will require another visit! *(It's not hard to entice us back on the water again!).*

Other than a few small ones, the bigger fish eluded us on this particular trip, but I'm told there are excellent whiting, bream, flathead, tailor, blackfish, leatherjackets,

mullet, and garfish on offer. The break wall area on the outer northern side of Nelson Bay is one of the few spots where land based anglers have the opportunity to bag a pelagic game fish from the shore. Yellow-tail kingfish, long tail tuna and kingfish are caught here, appearing in the warmer months.

One of the highlights of the day was a pod of twenty or so dolphins frolicking alongside us, near



Baromee Point, on the North Western side of the bay. We turned the engine off (although it's so quiet, you wouldn't know it's even on!) and just floated with them. You could hear them exhaling air and splashing as they landed from their jumps. I've never had so many dolphins, swimming so close for so long before! It was one of those memorable encounters with wildlife that make going boating such a special pastime. You want to go back for more and the feeling of joy and happiness is carried with you for ages!

I know why they call Port Stephens the dolphin capital of Australia. You can spot them from the shore anywhere in Shoal Bay, Little Beach or Nelson Bay. Whilst out on the water, keep your eyes peeled in Shoal Bay and up near North Cove. There are 140 bottlenose dolphins that call Port Stephens home. Why wouldn't you? Crystal blue water, great snorkelling from the beach at Fly Point, sheltered bays, excellent offshore fishing, sand 4WD-ing at Stockton Beach and wonderful bush walks – it's a holiday paradise.

After an especially enjoyable day of swimming, cruising, fishing and just exploring, we headed back to the Soldiers Point ramp to meet Chris. This is an excellent set up - a floating walkway ensures you don't even need to get your feet wet when launching and retrieving the craft. You simply walk the boat off the trailer alongside the walkway and the reverse to put it back on. What a top idea! Wish we had more of these on the Goldy! In no time the Sports Rider was sitting pretty, back on the

shiny new alloy trailer. What a good set up! If you did launch this yourself at another ramp, it is a full drive on/off roller trailer and would be pretty easy to utilise this option.

Well, what are my thoughts and observations on using a hire boat? Overall the experience with Boab was first class. Easy to organise, pick up and operate. The actual vessel was set up in excellent fashion, with everything you need for a day on the water. It is just like using your own at home, except it's a different model and a different location. We all like to have the mod-cons, including a decent sounder and colour GPS. I think this is the most essential item, especially in new waterways. Don't want to end up stuck on a sandbank somewhere new! Paper charts are, of course, provided in each vessel. It is a good idea to familiarise yourself with these prior to venturing out too far.

Being brand, spanking new, I can only say our boat was immaculate. But I'm sure even after some use, the high standard is maintained. Being built to survey is another great safety tick. Having the option to order rods, bait, ice and ski tubes is also very handy. It means you can simply turn up and go, without looking for petrol stations, bait shops and the like. I really thought this is a great option.

Cost wise, it isn't cheap. But if you want to have a decent ride for the day, without any hassles, it makes good sense and I believe, represents good value. The Sports Rider was \$395 for the day, with walk on, walk off (from the jetty) option. Plus bait

and ice. If you choose to trailer it yourself, it is \$345. There are seniors discounts available, so do ask for these, if applicable. There is also a cost for the petrol used.

It's a great option for caravanners and those that don't want to haul their own vessel hundreds of km down the highway. No need to worry about extra fuel, bearings, wheels, blowouts and wear and tear on your own trailer. You can simply fly or drive there, stay in a cabin or motel, and enjoy a top day on the water.

If caravanning down there, I would certainly utilise this option again. I can recommend Chris to look after you. His service was great and he was more than happy for us to wait for the best day, weather wise, to go! His advice on the local waterways was very good too. It's a safe bet to say that the other Boab locations would be just as helpful and efficient.

So it's a big tick to Boab Boat Hire. Have yourself a great day on the water without the problems, and see the region properly. Nothing beats a ready supply of horses on your tail! Combined with a new, safe craft with all the extras, and you are set. Just like home, really!

We are set to return to Port Stephens next February. (Yes, we do love this place!). This time we will be taking our own vessel, *Gizmo*, a Cruise Craft Explorer 575 which we believe will be perfect for the Port Stephens region. That will be another wonderful experience, so stay tuned!

**F&B**