



Southwind SF20 Cuddy Cab Renovation

by Ben Kincade

We've all thought about it, talked about it, dreamed about it. And with hard work and no little resolve (especially when the going gets rotten) it can work out well: a bigger, better boat - yours, for a lot less cost.

"The Southwind was always garaged, had a big canopy, walk-through screen, pedestal bucket seats and a solid Tinka tandem trailer that had just had the brakes redone. . ."

January 2009 saw us at the negotiating table with a Cairns boat broker. There we were, coffee in hand on our back verandah, discussing the finer details and signing away the equivalent of a small house deposit for the purchase of a second hand, 17 year old, Southwind SF20 6.4m fibreglass cuddy cab, in what looked like excellent condition.

The SF20 was the precursor to the well-regarded blue water boat the SF655, which I believe is still in use today, under the Southern Star brand name.

The Southwind range of

boats was owned by or was in partnership with Yamaha at the time of this boat's production, so this article is not in anyway written to reflect on any of the current designs and products, more as an awareness raiser for the pitfalls of purchasing older boats in general. Yes, there are many excellent older boats out there that just need a little TLC or a bit of a re-fit, and they are a bargain and a pleasure to own - just be cautious and inspect properly before you buy. If we had done it properly (with "due diligence" as they say in real estate) in the first place, I wouldn't have bought this boat.

Back to the story: A mate

and I had basically talked our other halves into letting us buy a 'big' boat together. Neither of us had a lot of experience with larger boats. I had always owned and used tinnies of various sizes and Adrian had sailing experience. On top of that, we had both done a bit here and there at sea in various work roles and thought we knew enough to give it a go.

The plan was for this boat to be a learning platform, which could have led, eventually, to bigger and better things.

Now at this point in time we thought we'd done our research. We had looked at a heap of options, and decided

that with kids in both families, we really 'should' go for a cuddy cab or half-cab option with plenty of shade, instead of the dedicated big centre console with outriggers that first came to mind. Something we could use to fish, spearfish, do the odd overnight trip in, and then still take the family out to the GBR when everything came together.

We decided that a glass boat would be more comfortable due to the weight factor and ability to handle the slop created by the constant Trade Winds encountered out of Cairns.

Plate boats were not ruled out of the equation. However, there didn't seem to be too many around that fitted our requirements and price, and I had no idea at all about powercats, aside from the generally higher prices they commanded.

A lot of the plate boats we looked at were also geared more towards serious fishing, which wasn't going to cut it with the other half. In terms of engine size, we wanted something between 175hp and 225hp which would provide sufficient power to pull a biscuit with two teenagers on it, whilst also getting us out to the outer edges of the 'Reef in a reasonable time.

Well, we found the 6.4m Southwind advertised on the internet through a boat broker, but local to Cairns where we both live.

Looking Good

Southwind is a brand that is well known and respected. We searched the forums and old magazines for all we could find on the hull, handling characteristics, fit-out options and opinions, and pretty much all was good with the world. We even rang the dealer who first sold the boat, and even now, still serviced the boat every year - and he gave us the thumbs up, too.

It seemed this Southwind had hardly been used. A mere



178 hours or so on the clock of the V-6 two stroke 175hp Yamaha.

Yes, a new modern four-stroke would be nice, but there is a hell of a lot of fuel to be used before we could justify the extra dollars to upgrade. On top of that, the Southwind was always garaged, had a big canopy, walk-through screen, pedestal bucket seats and a solid Tinka tandem trailer that had just had the brakes redone. The seller was genuine, and said that the vast majority of the hours had been done in fresh water at Lake Tinaroo towing his kids around. There was also a nice new Lowrance colour sounder/plotter thrown in, as the previous one had apparently just packed it in. The sheen on the gelcoat and the condition of the canopy were also good telltales that the boat had been kept out of the sun.

Next up was a sea trial, or should I say a dam trial at Lake Tinaroo, and again, all went well. The engine started well, looked great, ran well and the boat also performed to what we were expecting, with the exception that the old Teleflex steering was a bit stiff. We signed the contract and thus began our lessons in older-boat ownership.

The first six months of ownership saw us using the boat regularly and commencing the process of fixing or modifying things to suit our

own needs. Something I admit I quite enjoy doing most of the time. A new Rhule 800GPH bilge pump was fitted and the old TMC 500GPH retained as a spare. These boats do not have a self-draining deck, so any water that comes on board ends up in the bilge area.

The canopy was then modified to fix a poor design, and clears were added to help in bad weather and to provide protection from the rain. Both were excellent modifications and were done by Tropic Trimming at Whiterock in Cairns.

We also made several attempts to modify the drainage off the windscreen over the walk-through hatch, something we have failed at and from all advice received to date, will probably never fix properly! If you are looking at buying a walk-through of any sort, have a very good look at the drainage system around the walk-through hatches and windscreen. There are gaps everywhere on the Southwind and it leaks on the cabin cushions and whatever you have in the cabin.

The boat only came with a sand anchor and an undersize reef-pick so we decided to add a third, better quality anchor. After searching the internet and forums once again, and also on the advice of our local Whitworth's staff, we went with a 15lb Manson Supreme and 6 metres of chain which was shackled to the 50m of

"The boat was starting to come together at this stage, but we were disappointed in its handling of gentle swell and its turning response times. It had the turning circle of a semi-trailer at idle speeds. . . ."