

Refurbishing, Restoring & DIY Boatbuilding

The Boat That Cap'n Jack Built*

(*With just a little help from 'is Dad!)



Do It Yourself
-with F&B!

Like many dedicated boaties I'd had a lifetime of 12' to 18' boats, but after being exposed to a true offshore game fishing experience off Bermagui N.S.W. in 1997, my ambition clearly targeted a larger offshore boat.

Local Bermy legends Jim and Bob Scott had taken me marlin fishing in their well appointed Edencraft and while we failed to hook up on this occasion, the sport and the whole boating experience had hooked me. I came away with a clear and uncompromising ambition to own my own offshore rig. Ambition soon spilled over into obsession: There must be a way to get this boat!

Finance, perhaps? Tattslotto? I know! I'll build the bastard myself!

As you do.

Getting Started Scanning boat magazines I found an add from Brian Poole at Boden Boat Plans. For a miserly few hundred dollars, I scored a complete set of drawings and instructions to build a 23ft alloy sea boat.

("Um, next I will need to learn how to weld this aluminium...")

Further enquiries led me to believe that 70% of the job would be TIG welded and 30% M1G.

My background was originally as a motor mechanic, but these days, I run a small powder coating plant, so below is the true record of a conversation that took place at a welding shop in Morwell Victoria.

"How do I weld aluminium?" I asked

"With lots of TIG," replied the Man

"What's TIG?" I asked again.

(Giggle, smirk went the Man) "About \$5,500."

"Then I'll have one !" I said.



Achieving the dream takes hard work, a lot of vision - and a helpful 3-7 year old son!

Report, & Pics by Tony Lethborg

The Salesman had agreed to spend half an hour showing me how this machine worked, (probably figured any longer was just wasting his time) and the very next day I was "Fizzing" frames together while the instructions were still fresh in my mind.

Hold The Bus It sounds a bit too simplistic, doesn't it? Buy a drawing, a welding machine you've never used before – plus a few lumps of alloy, and fizz your own boat together.

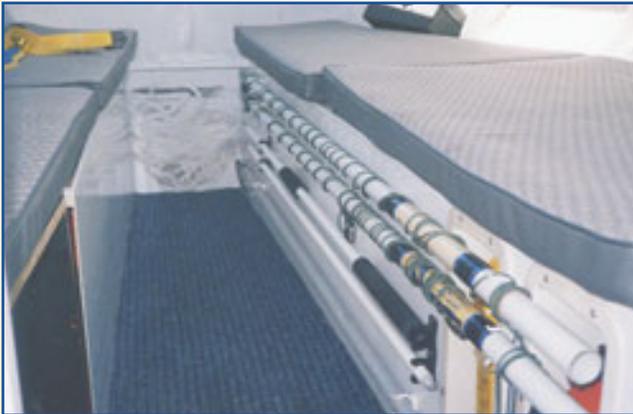
Well, aside from my mechanical background, I do possess one other qualification essential for this type of undertaking - I was "too stupid" to talk myself out of it, although my wife did try, briefly, to convince me that I was in fact, stupid.

But hey, you want simplistic? Consider this: I did not know, at this stage, that you could buy a pre-cut

kit and just weld it together. I did it the old fashioned way, with stock sheets, an angle grinder and a bar of Velvet soap to make it cut.

Before commencing any large or longer term project such as this, there are a couple of things to wrap your head around.

The world is littered with unfinished projects. Symbols



of good intentions, Monuments to “almost” and “gunna”. But this was never going to be a problem for me.

Firstly, in terms of personal motivation, there were no problems here. I’m a boat nut; I love all things about boating. You know the type. Each birthday, I receive up to a dozen birthday cards, each with a boat of some description printed on the cover, as my obsession is noted by all those around me.

However, to ensure forward progress, I made a mental commitment to 3 Sundays per month, minimum. I knew this would guarantee completion, even though I didn’t have a time line at this stage, being content to know that one day it will happen.

Next is cashflow. More commonly referred to as a “cash flood!” by boat owners around the country. But here is an area where the scratch-build strategy has a clear advantage over the kit boat technique.

Let me explain. Having negotiated a ‘rate per kilo’ for your aluminium with a local supplier, with the scratch boat strategy, you only purchase alloy as you need it, as opposed to the whole kit in a lump sum, up front, before you start.

Stock sheet is also about one third of the price of kit aluminium. This is fair enough, too, as in the kit, one hell of a lot of work has been done for you, and the margin for error has also been seriously reduced.

This is well worth the premium to many amateur builders, as it tends to produce far less sleepless nights and fewer grey hairs. In defence of the scratch build strategy though, spend a moment considering the mathematical numbers below, whilst remembering that the term “cashed up boatie” is a true contradiction in terms.

Hull weight: **1100 kg**

Average cost per kg: **\$5.10 (1999)**



Hull Cost: **\$5,610**

Construction time: **18 months**

= **\$311.66 per month**

= **\$71.92 per week**

I didn’t know these figures before I started, and I must admit, they even surprised me. Being able to progress without waiting for the bank account to catch up, and still not sending the family budget into a nose dive, restored a mountain of confidence from the immediate family. (*“Perhaps he’s not the basket case we thought he was!”*)

Ongoing Research Another advantage of the “scratch build” was not being locked into the total design concept. Once the boat was built to floor level, the drawings were scrapped, and a flood of ideas from various boating magazines started to take over. It was here that I discovered my first F&B magazine, and is the reason why I subscribe today.

Two principles of construction I adopted were

- No matter where your arms are at any given time, there should be a handrail there to hang on to, and
- You can never have enough rod holders.

Once focused on a particular idea, I would find myself walking past the project all week, planning the smallest detail in my head in preparation for Sunday’s attack. By the time I built anything I had done it 200 times in my head, down to the smallest detail.

On completion, I had built the boat, its seats, rod holders, coaming racks, handrails, outriggers, the game chair, bait tank, berley bucket, ice box

Obsession is rapidly becoming a certifiable medical state; I think it is time to stop!

Trailer Options Here we can make some real savings



with a small amount of initiative. As you may have seen in the pages of this very magazine, when building an aluminium hull it is mounted upside down on a steel frame to help prevent twist and misalignment, etc., during the construction.

I deviated from the specification supplied for this frame so that once the hull was removed from the frame and flipped over, the now redundant frame was recycled and galvanised, to become the most superb drive on/off trailer I have ever had the pleasure to use. Dare I use the words 'idiot-proof'? You bet!

We are all aware that the pleasure of boating can be won or lost at the ramp. The first time that Mum gets wet to the waist trying to help retrieve the family boat, then the party is truly over for all concerned.

But with a mixture of rubber rollers and teflon strips, our rig is easier to load than a Savage Snipe!

With the trailer brakes we had another win. I bought a completely knackered vacuum brake set from one of the local brake specialists. I then used the critical bits as changeovers for re-cycled parts, put a coat of paint on everything else, and we saved \$1,500 on new price. I love my trailer!

Painting As a powder coater, I was fortunate to have contacts in the paint supply industry. The end recommendation was the use of aerospace paint (total overkill) 2-pack epoxy primer with 2-pack polyurethane top coat - the same as they use on jumbo jets.

According to the specs, my boat can resist stone chipping at 250 knots on a runway and will resist undercreep while regularly swapping from the extreme pressure/temperature at 40,000 ft and returning to sea level (*clever boat, eh?*). All true.

After all the usual rough up and sand down procedures, I elected to spray paint it myself, as I figured it wasn't the same quality required for a car. A few small runs aside, it came up OK.

Engines - And Other Engines The paint is dry and it's time to power up. At home in the driveway I still had my Savage Osprey - only a few seasons old, and like brand

new. I hooked it up, and took it back to Terry at Crawford Marine in Morwell (Vic) where I traded it in for 2 x 115 hp Series I Evinrude Ficht engines. I'm not going to make any further comment here, except to acknowledge the fairness and uncommon decency displayed by Terry at Crawford Marine, which now has me sporting 2 x 90 hp 4-stroke Mercury outboards, and I love em! *Thanks Terry!*

Jack's Boat Let me explain. Somewhere during the construction process, my 3 year old son Jack decided I was building a "cubbie" and claimed ownership of it. I was left with no alternative but to christen it '*Jack's Boat*'

Okay, I might be a soft touch, but have you ever tried to reason with the logic of a 3 year old boat owner?

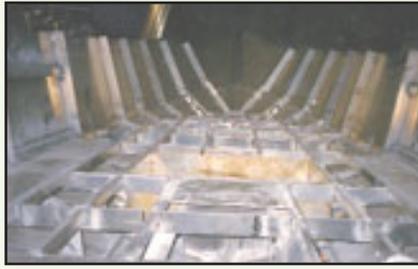
Jack is now seven, and to watch him grow up at such a young age as a boatie is a joy to behold and part of a follow up story that I simply must write. We (Capt. Jack and I) have now put in 4 seasons on the estuary at Port Albert where we live; we've chased tuna at Eden, tagged our own marlin at Bermagui and only recently cruised the beautiful Gippsland Lakes. She's big, comfortable, easy to handle and bloody cheap to run.

Assessment I make no bones about it - Capt Jack and I own a boat that turns heads at the boat ramp, especially here in Victoria. A boat conceived from an obsession and a serious lack of disposable income. You could not begin to imagine the freedom and enjoyment of true quality time that I have enjoyed over the past 4 years, at an all up finished cost of \$48,000.

Less my trade in (\$22,000) she is less than half price of similar boats not nearly as well fitted out, and with only single power plants.

Would I recommend others to be foolish enough to attempt such a project? I can only say "*Get A Life - Build A Boat!*"

Technological Advances As previously mentioned, these days you can buy a pre-cut kit and virtually eliminate anything going wrong, although I do know of one guy in Victoria who welded when he should have been reading, and built himself a lump of scrap metal! But companies such as CDM (Computer Design Marine)



have all but idiot-proofed home built plate alloy boats.

Another advance of only the past 4 odd years is the computerised MIG welder. These eliminate the need for TIG and are so easy to operate that no previous welding experience is necessary. Just point and shoot. Believe me, I've tried one and they are superb. Why did I try one, you ask ? Would you believe a37ft aluminium power catamaran?
(Help ?!XX!@# Where's my medication!!!)

F&B

