

Special F&B Report

Repowering Cats With 4-Stroke!

As competition heats up for your business, with imported craft flooding in through the Boat Show circuits, hard up against a welter of embattled Australian boat builders, there's an option that is becoming increasingly attractive to shrewd boat buyers - re-powering an existing classic. As 4-stroke outboards become lighter with higher power:weight ratios, this is becoming a very serious proposition indeed. Editor Peter Webster explains.

Back in 1980 - that's 25 years ago now, we published a 12 month analysis of our 21' SharkCat, in the January issue of Australian Boating magazine.

The dark blue and white hulled craft was based on the classic SharkCat 23' hull, with 2 foot deliberately chopped off the cockpit in order to keep the weight under 3 tonnes. It was fitted with twin Mercury 150 Black Max V-6 outboards and the silliest trailer anyone ever put underneath a SharkCat. We were to subsequently rue the day we ever clapped eyes on that trailer, but it was certainly light, and contributed no doubt to keeping the weight of the rig under the critical 3 tonne figure.

It was a magnificent craft - for that matter, still is. The 23 footer was actually too long for recreational use, being set-up originally for abalone divers and commercial fishermen, for whom the whole concept was to create the biggest, widest most stable platform they could purchase, with two outboard motors in each corner and serious attitude to rough water work.

There were no frills in those boats, and between the mid 1970's and the 1980's, hundreds were built to a formula that saw the resin squeezed through the fibreglass matting with a shovel - resin drips and dags were very much the order of the day. And nobody cared particularly, because these were rough, tough work-boats built to a formula and a price.

When we built the first of our SharkCats (we had quite a few over the years) this dark blue boat was one of Bruce Harris' first serious attempts at building something a little better - and

crikey, what a wonderful craft it proved to be.

In those days, the factory foreman was a fellow called Rob Legge, who later on achieved no little fame as the designer and builder of the RL series of trailer yachts, all of which started life in the same SharkCat factory.

Rob knew how to build boats, and using the wonderful design principles of the Harris 23' cat, blanked off 2' of the hull, and did what we now call a "cut and shut" to produce a unique 21' cat for the writer.

This craft we subsequently trailed right across Australia to Exmouth, WA and used for several years up and down the East Coast. Towed by our old Landcruiser, we saw a great deal of the East Coast (and the West Coast of Australia) and the boat never put a foot wrong. Even by today's standard its handling was exemplary - soft, dry, incredibly fast offshore and an absolute joy to use in rough conditions.

It was an exceptionally well-found craft - and it still is. Twenty-five years later nobody has actually produced a better hull than that original 23' SharkCat and that's the reason why it remains in production to this very day.

And that's the point of this report - as we sit back and watch a flood of craft come in from America, including some very spooey sportfishing machines, the writer cannot help but contemplate the alternatives or options to purchasing some of this imported gear.

Readers will recall last month we showed a picture of a beautiful 25' Hydrosports and a big, powerful Wellcraft Coastal sportfisherman. These boats are certainly exceptional



Although the pics are fully 25 years old, the author's shortened (21') version of the original 23' "classic" Sharkcat reveals a craft that has not only stood the test of time - it is just as contemporary today as it was revolutionary then. The most important things to check with these older cats are the underfloor bulkheads and cross bearers. Made of glassed over wood or plywood, they are (now) commonly replaced, resulting in a craft that will provide another 25 year's reliable service. With a pair of the new generation, light 4-stroke outboards, this type of boat-motor packaging can be extremely successful - and very economical.

