

Look Sharp

a tale of two Pittwaters

by ROBERT AYLIFFE

In early April, this year I got a call from Andrew Taylor, owner builder of the Bruce Kirby designed Norwalk Islands Sharpie 29', *Look Sharp*.

Andrew built *Look Sharp* at his home, high up on the Bilgola Plateau, above Pittwater and not far from my old friends, Mike and Dorothy Hyland.



Look Sharp cutting up the Derwent.

Building *Look Sharp* started in 1995. It was a considered and elegant job; every detail was a reflection of the man I had come to know from phone calls, letters and the couple of visits I made during the building process. Gaboon Ply, Bote Cote Epoxy Resin Systems throughout, high standard fittings, well considered lockers and interior living and storage space. Stylish, professional.

The boat looked a picture after launching. She sailed well, too, though the mast builder on Cockatoo Island made him a pair of composite birdsmouth wood and carbon fibre masts which were fundamentally badly engineered. Turned out that the major flaw was the use of carbon fibre tape on the inner rather than the outside core of the mast, virtually wasting its stiffening potential. The main mast finally went over the side, startling all on board and causing Andrew and his family some headaches.

SpunSpar, who make the masts for our Norwalk Islands Sharpies range supplied a 'proper' replacement mast.

It's a nice feeling of security, when it is blowing hard and the sea is flying, knowing that the mast has been properly engineered.

Andrew and his family used the boat around



Look Sharp's galley, full headroom, spacious and in contact with the cockpit.

Pittwater; he sent pictures of *Look Sharp* from time to time and friends in the area would tell me how good she looked.

All life moves on, things change and new challenges beckon. For the Taylor family, too, and *Look Sharp*.

Look Sharp was for sale.

In late April I got a call from Malcolm Scott in Tasmania. He had heard of a Norwalk Islands Sharpie 29, *Look Sharp* for sale through Lamoore

Yacht Sales yard in Palm Beach. He wanted to know if I knew anything of it. Malcolm is an experienced sailor, with a Sydney Hobart and three Melbourne Devonports under his belt, plus other yacht deliveries and considerable local cruising experience as well.

I expressed my confidence in Andrew's work.

Malcolm duly came to Sydney, bought the boat and elected to sail straight back to Hobart. Malcolm's Sydney Hobart race experience, combined with the legendary seakeeping qualities of this boat should I thought get him home safely. Bruce Kirby has built into all the NIS designs as many as practical of the lessons of the Fastnet disaster. These include self righting from 140°, witnessed by the test results published in *American Sail* magazine in August 1992 on the NIS 31. This boat has similar hull and topsides fundamentals as all of the range and the theory has been borne out by my own practical experience in my NIS 23, *Charlie Fisher*.

The companionway storm boards are not on a tapering opening, which tend to allow the boards to loosen and fall out in a knock down, but parallel sided, which means they tend to stay in. In addition, the placement of the hatch openings is such that in a knock down with sail in the water, the hatch openings are still above water and the cabin sides and roof are increasing the already exceptional tendency of the flared topsides to right the boat.

The easy self tacking rig, simple reefing and brilliantly easy sail handling, the natural tendency of these designs to self steer, the soft, dry, quiet ride when slightly heeled, make this 29er much more capable for single hand, open water sailing than the flat bottomed, shallow draft description might



Look Sharp after the wild drive to Circular Quay.

suggest.

I got another call from Malcolm a couple of days later, saying that the boat was much faster than he had expected, and there were some running rig and autopilot set up concerns he was concerned about. He had seen sustained periods of 14.5 knots on the GPS, the forecast was shifting a little quicker than he had expected, and work pressures in Hobart were closing in. So he headed in to Jervis Bay, where he was made welcome by the locals and especially the owner of Jarkan Yachts, the famed 'Kanga' Birtles and his staff.

Would I, Malcolm asked, be free to get a suitable trailer, drive to NSW, remove the boat from the water, set it up for travel, haul the rig to Sydney, get it on the TT lines ferry, enjoy the cruise to Devonport and trail the boat to Hobart, where we



Look Sharp at ramp, Jervis Bay.

satisfaction with about three hours to get from Jervis Bay to Circular Quay and the Tasmanian TT lines Terminal.

It was almost midday when I set off. What a run. All the way roadblocks, steep, one lane narrow hills and every driver trying to run the Le Mans, but then some truck would get in front and just creep. It really IS a goat track.

It seemed like I must have riled St Christopher in



Look Sharp leaves the Jarkan yard Jervis Bay for Sydney.

a past life.

Horror run. The traffic in Sydney on the last day of the school holidays at four in the afternoon towing a 30' rig is something else. The access to the site of the TT Ferry depot in Circular Quay is a traffic nightmare that you just want to wake up from. And I was so behind time. Thankfully the TT staff kept the gates open for me and soon the Patrol and the big boat were in the yard.

The TT Ferry is an amazing ship. I went in through the open bow, gaping at me like some space monster. On down into what really is a vast garage, three or four levels of semi trailers, cars, trucks, busses and camper vans as far as the eye could see. The staff was impressively calm, guiding and cajoling vehicles of all sizes and complexity into their allotted spaces.

I switched the engine off and sat back. It seemed so unlikely that I had made it at all. I thought of the running through all that traffic from Jervis Bay, Kiama, plummeting down then crawling up those Woollongong roller coaster roads and writhing through outer Sydney; such a relief to rest for a moment in the sanctuary of that vast hold. I realised my shirt was drenched in perspiration. I was so pleased to get out of the driver's seat and ride the escalators the three floors or so to my cabin. Disbelief almost. What a contrast!

Soft music, a porthole looking out, pleasant décor and a splendid shower.

A long shower later, a change of clothes and out on deck, just in time to feel the ship slipping the tug and moving away from the Circular Quay Wharf. What a sight. It is said that in Arthur Phillip's time, a convict was being arranged to be hanged at Pinchgut. He mounted the scaffold, and as the rope was placed around his neck, he was asked if he had any last words. He is reputed to have observed, 'Very fine harbour, you have here.' Such clarity.

I thought of him, as we slipped under the bridge in the gloaming light; past the opera house and out to the heads.

'Very fine harbour, you have here!'

The light fell away. We were treated on this mirror clear, black ink smooth evening to a ravelling necklace of lights along the coast.

Dinner. Heaven.

The Tasmanian Government, who own the TT shipping line, clearly see this as 'Showcase Tasmania'. The staff were enthusiastic, attentive and considerate, and most of all seemed really proud of Tasmania, and the fabulous and unlimited food we had available to us, all a part of the travel price. That went for brunch the next morning, too.

The oysters!

The accommodation, the array of bars, quiet reading rooms, cinemas, lounges, coffee shops, souvenir shops, observation decks, games rooms and general comfort reminded me of a large cruise liner from another era. This is one of the GREAT ferry rides! In the morning my view from the breakfast (brunch) table was of a smooth sea framing Flinders Island, an absolutely magnificent backdrop as the great ship cruised majestically by.

We made the entrance to the Mersey pretty much on the scheduled minute; it's a fabulous run in to the harbour. Within a surprisingly short time my amphibian rig was rolling through Devonport and onto the main highway down to Hobart. It's a four



Mirror smooth sea, a heavenly trip on the TT Line ferry to Davenport.

hour run, a snip after the drive to Sydney from Adelaide, and unlike the Phillip 'Highway', a real pleasure.

It took me back to more youthful wanderings in West Coast, Scotland. This is a very attractive part of the world.

Malcolm was waiting for me outside Hobart, and piloted me to the Bellerive Yacht Club Marina, Kangaroo Bay, where we backed the trailer down the ramp, and slid *Look Sharp* into the inky night water of the Derwent. Made fast, we left her at the dock, returning in the morning to commence raising the masts, rigging her, loading stores and getting her ready for the next days sail out on the Derwent, out to Storm Bay and down the coast, and finally to Lewisham ...



Look Sharp is backed into Tasmanian waters, Bellerive Yacht Club.

The staff and other boat owners at the Bellerive Yacht Club Marina were really friendly and cooperative. The mast raising equipment was simple and efficient at the club's maintenance berth. We really did feel welcomed there. A beautiful setting, with Mt Wellington as a backdrop, the Hobart City Centre not far away and all those boats on their moorings.

This is Tasmania!

After a couple of hours careful manoeuvring of the mast crane, we succeeded in lowering the masts into their deck tubes and lining up the locking pinholes.

We then unloaded the booms and sails, refitted the sail battens, attached the booms to the goosenecks, ran the sails back onto the mast tracks and reset all the lazy jack and reefing lines. It took two of us the whole of the rest of the day and some of the next.

Could not resist the thought that with the tabernacles we use on the NIS 18, NIS 23, and NIS 26 one person might do this in less than an hour. With the smaller boats it's between 15 and about 25 minutes to have the boat in the water from switching the car engine off. The big rig on the 29 requires that the main mast be slid forward on the tabernacles for towing, to prevent excessive overhang, a simple and light enough task but it does add a little time.

This is a big boat, and the rig height and sail size is impressive.



Look Sharp, Pittwater, NSW. (below)
Andrew Taylor's brilliant interior looking aft. (inset)



We took a series of photographs with Malcolm single handing the boat and pushing her hard. It's obvious that the NIS 29 is, like her sisters, a really fast boat. We kept taking shots for the best part of an hour. Malcolm and *Look Sharp* effortlessly carved up the Derwent. It was impressive to watch this big boat being spun around and driven like a dinghy. The easy tacking, for which these boats are famed, looked great and from time to time Malcolm would leave the helm, letting *Look Sharp* show another of her party tricks, self steering happily, while Malcolm went below or adjusted some thing or other.

A stirring sight.

Photographs taken, I joined Malcolm on *Look Sharp*. I suddenly realised that this was only the third time I had sailed on the Derwent, and it was also the third Norwalk Islands Sharpie that I had the pleasure of doing it on!



Look Sharp, showing highly complex self-steering gear (1.5 metres of string) in action.

The first time was on my own NIS 23, *Charlie Fisher*, with Michael Storer, Mick Tummel and David Wilson. The second time was with Rob and Jo Nolan, on their self built NIS 23, *Shearwater* at this year's Tasmanian Wooden Boat Festival, and the third time was now on Malcolm's NIS 29, *Look Sharp*.



Look Sharp leaving Bruny Island to starboard.

There are now four Bruce Kirby designed Norwalk Islands Sharpies in and around Hobart. The first is a really attractive NIS 18, built in SA by my old friend, Tony Kennedy, who now moors *Casper* off Bruny Island. The next was owner builders Rob and Jo Nolan's NIS 23 *Shearwater* and most recently the Angelo Pericleus built NIS31 *Serano*, owned and campaigned so successfully off the Tasmanian east coast by Roy and Dianne Barkas.

I was conscious of all that connection as we slipped away in the slight breeze, heading north, leaving Hobart so quickly behind us. It had been such a busy time, and sadly no time in it to catch up with friends.

We left Bruny to starboard, with a tip of the hat to Roger and *Casper*. We rounded 'Iron Pot' Lighthouse, at the entrance to Storm Bay, turning about 90° to port, in an easterly direction past Black Jack Rocks (aka 'Bob's Rock', of Incat pile up fame, a few years back). We passed between Betsy Island and the Tasmanian mainland, then, (while I slept!!!) we turned north-east across Frederick Henry Bay.



Entering Pittwater, Tasmania.

In light air now we continued north, avoiding Whale Rock and Spectacle Island to starboard, and at the end of Seven Mile Beach we entered (the Tasmanian!) Pittwater, heading north-west for the last stretch to the jetty at Lewisham, and a safe anchorage nearby.

I have not been on such a beautiful stretch of water since those Scotland days, out from Oban, so many years ago. It was made all the more memorable by the excellent sandwiches that Malcolm had prepared and the comfort, ease of handling and confidence we had in the superb boat that we were sailing.

From Pittwater, NSW to Pittwater, Tasmania *Look Sharp* looks as sharp as ever, and in Malcolm's enthusiastic ownership looks set to add to the growing reputation of Bruce Kirby's Norwalk Islands Sharpies in these wild and beautiful southern waters.

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Look Sharp at her new home, Lewisham, Tasmania.