

Spirits of Sherwood

■ by DARRYL SMITH

As I write this we are approaching the imposing twin heads of Port Stephens. It's late morning on Sunday with 5 kts of breeze from the west and we're nearing the end of our journey to Sanctuary and back. The visible signs of whales are seaward of us in the form of boats orientated in semi-circles - similar to the wagon trains of the Wild West. This is mirrored ahead inside the Port by a similar scene, this time involving boats and dolphins. Having already seen our

share of whales and dolphins on the 700nm return journey, we're happy to leave these local sights to others.

Having reached Sanctuary you may wonder why we would leave again. Well the Sanctuary I refer to is the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show. We journeyed from the Anchorage in Port Stephens to the show and back with all the bravado of early explorers on a new unproven design that had wet its antifoul for the first time just a week or so before our departure. With

the fit out continuing aboard during the trip north, we were well equipped for repairs, carrying a mini workshop stowed in the storage lockers.

The crew was made up of those that had a financial or professional interest in the boat. Leading this band of merry men, (who tended to get even merrier after beer-o'clock), was Craig, the designer and builder (who coincidentally also has a striking resemblance to Robin Hood) and willing crew - Nathan, the eager





Spirited One, just before departure from the Anchorage. (top)
Looking into the cabin. (above)

apprentice (got to get a job like that one day), Kevin, the instigator, Darryl, the amateur journalist, and the two Johns.

One just had to be Little John and it follows the second was Big John. Work commitments meant this was definitely a one John journey so, Big John joined us traveling north with Little John onboard for the return trip. This tale would not be complete without King Richard, who unfortunately was detained in a far away land called Singapore by work and family commitments. He did promise to join us for the next crusade however.

As we glided gracefully into Shoal Bay we could see a rabble forming on the jetty. They were waving their arms violently in some strange form of greeting. Aren't family great? My head was spinning with the events of the past three weeks and in fact, the last year. I pondered how effectively my heart has been 'spirited away' from my beloved multihull of nine years, a Crowther Buccaneer 40 Trimaran that sails by the name of *Wings*. What could do this to a long standing trimaran owner who possessed a vessel as beautiful and

graceful as *Wings*? *Wings* was strong and sturdy, sails beautifully and had served us well whether it was protecting my family from the elements in Bass Strait or revealing the beauty of cruising the Australian East Coast. She was always going to be in the photo's when we cruised the Pacific or did the Kimberley trek. Now, sadly, I knew this could no longer be the case. A separation was inevitable.

No ordinary boat could do this, could change your dreams so effectively. It needed something special... Pretenders had come and gone for years and all had failed to tempt this sailor to drop one hull and join the twin hull ranks. That was until I saw this new Spirited Design.

The lovely lines of this boat are the first thing that hits your senses. Surely this can't be a kit boat? Kit boats are meant to be easy to build - and ugly - aren't they? Where was the hard chine design whose flat bottom slams so loudly when coming off a wave, or the deep V that buries so effectively when loaded up with real life necessities rather than a daypack that wouldn't nourish a four year old? This spirited one looks like it was popped out of a mould. Can't be! Now there's a great name for a great boat, *Spirited One*, thanks Lady Alison. (Fair mistress of Kevin.)

I once heard monohull sailing compared to sitting on a fence watching the world (aka multihulls) go by whilst a sadist sprays you with a fire hose. If this is so, then strip planking two 12m x 1m hulls must be penance for past crimes against humanity - for the penance is inhumane. Not only do you get to build them one inch at a time upside down, you then (many times over) get to review how unevenly you did it- with countless hours of fairing. What's fair about that? Seems the best part of this exercise is the party you throw for the turning over ceremony.

But here was a boat available in kit form for the home builder or finished to perfection by your builder of choice. What a great concept! You're not tied to a particular builder or timeframe to build and minor customisations are easily integrated without the usual project home style pricing escalation. If you'd have to rob the bank to buy a Spirited 380 outright and don't have the time to build, do what we did - get a few mates together and share in 'The Spirit.'

Pretty boats, however, don't always work well at sea no matter how good they look at the dock. Curved decks that can turn an ankle are more for aesthetics than functionality. But this one was undoubtedly a head turner. Integrated composite beams... not heavy bolt ons. Composite stanchion bases and rigging fittings ... not leaky chain plates etc etc. This boat was fine.

But how would this *Spirited One* perform? Well everything on paper looked right for speed and safety. Slim hull entry at waterline that swept smoothly back to the stern. A length to beam ratio in each hull that Gloria Marshall would be proud of. Forward, there were flat decks devoid of complex curves or toe stubbing steps. Flush strong nets with the ability to shed green water quickly. A centre catwalk for easy access to the bow, ample flat working area at the base of the mast.... the list is endless.

For the sailor there were twin helms - and no high chair like helm position exposed to the elements (some designs almost require working in high places permits just to steer them). And would you like mini-keels with that sir? No thanks. I love sailing all yachts, including mono's, but after *Wings* I could never again own one keel let alone two. Mini keels appear to me to be a choice made to simplify building rather than enhancing the sailing experience-less efficient upwind and they slow you down downwind. No thanks again. Dagger boards for me.

And to round out the sailing experience, a modern rig with prodder mounted screecher and room for a kite.

Twin diesels, mechanical propulsion. This boat will pivot on its own length without resorting to bow thrusters. These sometimes smelly workhorses are nicely contained in their own compartments away from where humans live.

So, our maiden voyage was a memorable one.

We had finally finished preparations for our departure at 11pm on the Friday before the show opened. We woke the next morning with a 25 kt westerly challenging us to come out and play. Our initial steps were tentative, running before the wind with headsail only. Port

Stephens disappeared all too quickly and we were at our decision point to head north or retreat back to the anchorage from whence we came. There was only one answer really.

Up went the main and *Spirited One*, half dressed with headsail and one reef

was reaching northwards at 20 knots. The official record was 19.6 knots on the GPS and, since the log was a late starter, we unanimously decided to add a 0.4 knots allowance for the averaging effect of these devices. Craig was pacing around like an expectant father in a delivery

**A few of the merry crew. L to R Kevin, Big John, Darryl. (top)
Craig, taking from the sea to give to the poor.....crew. (bottom)**





Howard at work. Drop down window shows access to galley.

ward, nervously scanning all points of the boat each time we surged forward on a gust.

A noticeable point for me was the ease at which she accelerated to this speed. It was deceptively fast. No tell tail rooster tail, no creaking, groaning or shuddering, no clouds of spray billowing across the decks. As we caught the waves in front and sliced on through, the buoyant bows knew it was time to go to work and they kept the bows high.

As the day wore on, the wind eased but stayed in the west. There was movement in the galley around sunset as the preparation of the evening meal began. The galley up design provided fantastic visibility under way and the large drop down window made access to the cockpit easy for passing nibblies out to the hungry crew. No sooner had someone asked "What's for dinner" than the trolling rod answered fish with a whirr of the reel. What a beauty. It fed five of us for two dinners. Once the fish was no

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Craig in the galley still boatbuilding.

more we caught a second, larger one. Even the fish loved this boat! The walk through transoms made landing them a dream - just reel it in right up the steps and into the cockpit. No gaff or net required here!

We had travelled 120nm before undertaking our first jibe, initiated by the autopilot who seemed upset by the lack of popularity at that time and decided New Zealand would be good to visit.

The crew had retreated to the cabin to brew some coffee where the 360 degree view made this a safe and warm exercise. The autopilot thereafter went by the name of Howard.

Consequently, we then performed our first tack to get us back on course. I thought I was dreaming. Could it be *Spirited One* tacks better than my beloved trimaran? Cats aren't meant to do that are they?

Assigned to the dogwatch, I took the opportunity for an early nap. The huge queen size berths run transverse across the bridge deck for easy access for both occupants. And the headroom would satisfy a Zulu warrior. But something was missing when I came up on deck for my watch. I wasn't quite awake yet and was missing that adrenaline rush you get from the midnight free fall from your bunk seconds after banging your head on the

cabin roof. That's the Crowther way that I was familiar with having sailed on a number of old Spindrifts. (Stalwarts do claim it is character building though and saves on the first coffee.)

On the second half of the trip north the winds were very light, and with a timeline to meet, we motor sailed through the second night at sea. I did initially have concerns that 2 x 21 hp was not enough power for this cat but the twin Nanni's were superb. We motored on one engine at a time easily exceeding 6.5 kts whilst consumption was less than 2 ltrs an hour. Want to go faster? Just start the second engine to add a few more knots. As soon as a breath of wind was felt, the log jumped to 8 kts.

Two days and two hours after leaving the heads of Port Stephens we were entering the Gold Coast Seaway. There, waiting for us, was our sister ship from Stallion Marine. And what a sight she was. The Cat looked in the mirror for the first time and recognised its reflection. Sleek, graceful ... could that really be us?

Stallion had sailed down from the Sunshine Coast where they are assembling the kits for customers who do not want to build themselves. Together we motored up to Sanctuary Cove where we tied up next to each other and compared notes and boats. Stallion's

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"The addition of the TracVision M3 to KVH's product line now enables us to offer maritime satellite TV solutions for consumers cruising on boats of virtually any size" said Richard Chapman, Managing Director of Coursemaster Autopilots who distributes the award-winning range of KVH satellite communications systems around Australia.

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Note: Flat working area around the base of the mast.

Spirited 380 was launched within a day of *Spirited One* and had recorded 23 knots in a 20 knot breeze with the aid of a wave or two.

The boat show was a hectic time for Craig and his partner, Marina. (The nautical version of Maid Marian. Only a truly passionate and dedicated yacht designer would search until he found a beautiful partner with a nautical name!) And of course there was young Will - err - I mean Nathan.

My better half, Deb and I spent Saturday night of the Boat Show handing out Spirited 380 brochures at the Riviera Ball. How we got an invite was another story.

My fellow guests thought I was drunk when I claimed our boat had a water line of 74 feet (not a lie if you count both hulls) and did 20 kts with the engines off and consumes 2 ltrs an hour at trolling speed versus their 40 ltrs per hour. We had the "how big is your boat" contest

won - until they realised ours was a catamaran. The fact that Riv don't make a 74 footer gave it away... or maybe it was the 20 kt boast.

Rumour has it that *Spirited One* was expelled from Sanctuary because Nathan was found cavorting with older women in the Tavern in the wee hours of Sunday morning. Whilst he denies this, the evidence shows he was a bit seedy the next day. He was, however, bright enough to respond to a serious question from the gallery (aka tavern) overlooking *Spirited One*. "What are the two wheels for?" was the call. "Well", he responded, "The one on that side (port) turns the boat left, and the other one turns it right". Amazingly, this answer was accepted.

Before we knew it, the time had come for the return journey. The forecast was for light headwinds most of the way and this held for the first few hours but soon we had 16 kts on the nose. What? We had to tack more than once in 300nm? But it was a good test of *Spirited's* windward ability. We were charging along at 10 -11 kts in 16 kts of breeze. We soon had the tacks down to a tee, getting the heady in before full pressure came on and without the need for the winch handle. The log who had turned up for work during the show registered 11.6 kts as our maximum during this period.

Coursemaster Howard was fresh from a makeover by the experts. There were serious claims the crew had molested his controller on the trip north, changing all the settings, a claim strongly denied by all



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on board. Unfortunately Big John was back at work in Sydney so was an easy target to shift the blame to. What did that button do again? I must say, Howard did a brilliant job on the return trip, with a prime ministerial single-minded focus on his purpose!

Sunset was again approaching so we brought out our secret fishing weapon. We rattled the pans in the galley and the trolling rod again answered the call. Brilliant Craig! How did you design that feature in?

We had opted for Tactic instruments on *Spirited One*, partly for their functionality and partly for the ease of installation. And what great instruments they are! If you don't like where they're mounted, pick them up and take them with you. What every twin hull boat with twin helms, twin engines and twin daggerboards needs is twin sets of instruments! Just before the end of our journey we did realise the "faulty number 2" analog wind display suffered from

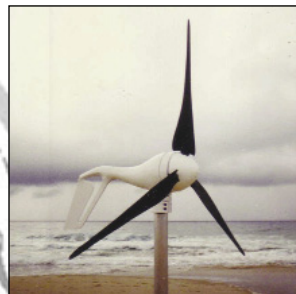


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U.K. marine electronics manufacturer Tactick has just received the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise in the Innovation category for their Micronet range of wireless, solar powered electronics.

For Australian distributor Oceantalk it is an acknowledgement of the vision they had in bringing this technology to Australian boat owners.

Managing Director Robin Kydd is delighted with the award: "When we first took Tactick on board, they were a relatively small company – but we recognised that they were developing the technology that was going to take on the world. And they did. We're really proud to have supported them in the early days and now, of course, to be the exclusive distributor in the region."

Tactick was established by two young brothers just ten years ago but today their Micronet range is used across the globe. It's the technology of choice for Olympic sailing teams, owners of ocean racing yachts and thousands of cruising yachtsmen... and it's easy to see why. Wires and connections cause 80% of marine electronics failures so with the Micronet wireless, solar powered system there's a massive increase in reliability. Installation is also so much simpler as there are no wires to run through decks and up masts.

Being lightweight and self-powered Micronet contributes to superior speed and performance and the instrumentation is fully portable so you have access to data where you need it. It also helps that the items are totally waterproof to a depth of ten metres! "Already this year they have launched a new Race Master wireless compass, speed and depth instrument for sports and keel boats; there's a new Power Boat Wind instrument for motor boat owners; and a new wireless Remote Display that fully interfaces with all main brands of marine electronics. In the next few months we are also going to see the Maxi range for large racing yachts."

For owners of boats large and small, sail or power, it is definitely worth finding out more about this award-winning technology: just call Oceantalk on (02) 9981 9500, fax (02) 9981 9555, email: sales@oceantalk.com.au or visit www.oceantalk.com



Spirited One returns to Port Stephens.

operator error. It spent the whole journey set on a +/- 0 to 50 close hauled readout where the "better numero uno" instrument was on standard +/- 0 to 180 readout. And we cursed it all the way for providing the 'wrong' readout. The only excuse I can offer is we were exhausted after many hours working to lighten the boat by tipping excess beer out through the five human bio-filters on board.

The kite went up on the second day after two false starts. The wind was light and flukey and blew from three different directions before settling in the north west. Then it died out totally. But it was nice to get a bit of colour up, even for a short period. We continued south, motor sailing on one engine and covering 9 nm an hour with some assistance from the current. (You gotta love multihull cruising, traveling 50% faster than a mono in 5 kts of breeze!)

The crew realised we were close to returning home when Broughton Island came into view. This was the first time this crew has sailed together but it won't be the last. There was talk of Lord Howe Island, Noumea and the Kimberley's. All plans spurred on by a successful trip, fair weather, good company and pleasant sailing in a boat full of spirit.

Memorable moments.... For me it was how well this new catamaran sailed. The first few hours reaching at 18-20 knots with reduced sail, a crew of five and a mini workshop on board made me eager to see what she would do in racing trim with full sail. Some of our crew logged their first coastal passage during the trip and the grins on their faces were unforgettable. Little John took navigation lessons on the way and often the excited call would come out to the cockpit "we have traveled 15cm in the last hour"... Maybe still a few lessons to go.

Many thanks also for the watchful eye-or should I say ears of the VMR Coastal Station operators we chatted to along the way. What a great job they do. We did however sound a bit Shakespearian once or twice when trading Romeo's during our position check. The newcomers on board liked it anyway.

If you want to get a glimpse of this Spirited beauty for yourself, try Craig's website at www.spiriteddesigns.com.au or you can catch her in Port Stephens for a while before she moves to Pittwater. You will recognise her. She is like no other. Don't get too close though or she will spirit away your heart as well...

Well done Craig and Marina, she's a classic. ❖