



Living here boating

WITH WARREN STEPTOE

Impressive all-rounder

KEKOA is the second phase of a concept developed between its owner, renowned charter skipper Luke Fallon, and Townsville boat builder Peter O'Brien.

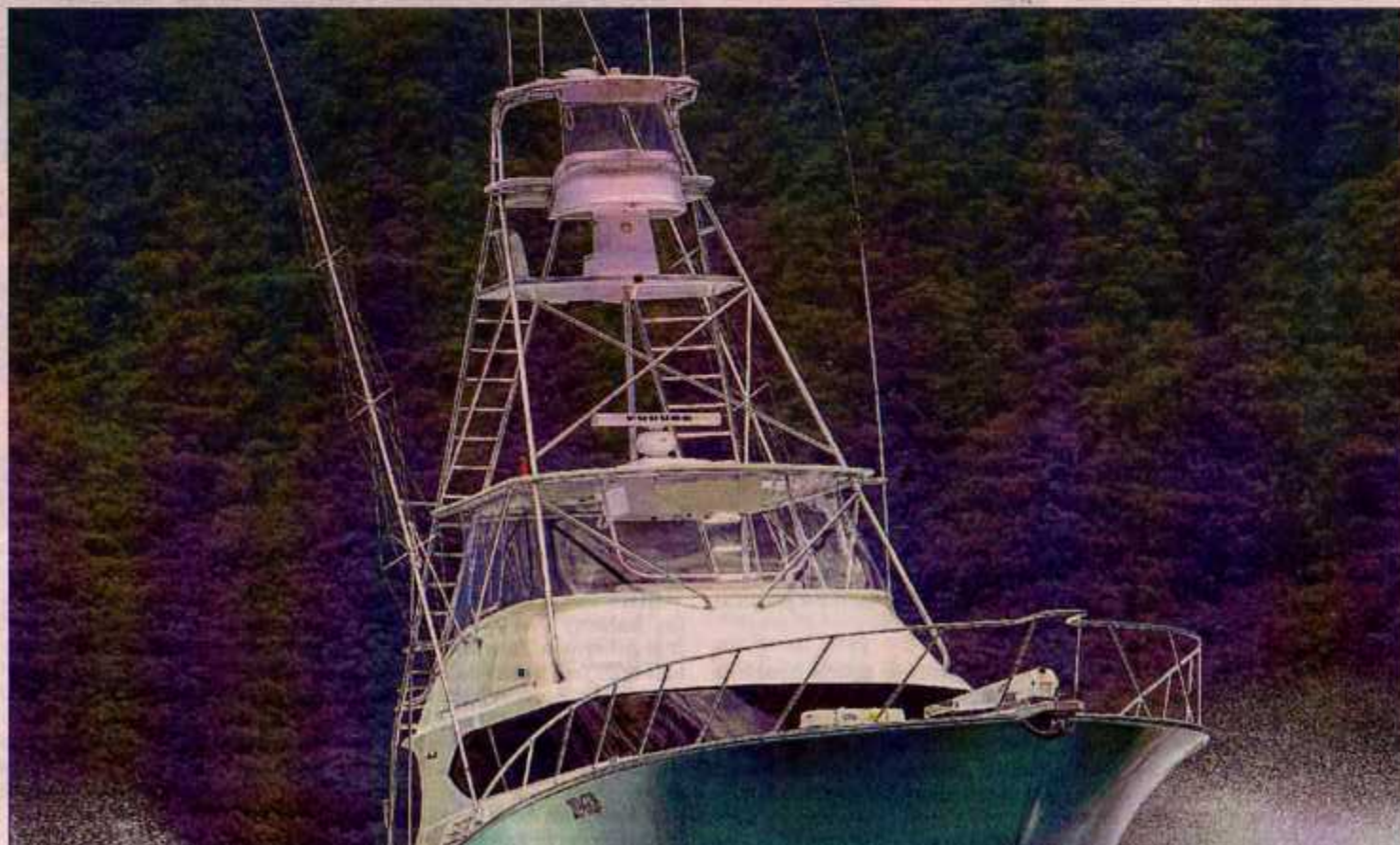
In concept, the first Kekoa, a 47-footer, was purpose built to be a unique combination of upmarket gamefisher and mothership in one – which could also support dinghies for inshore fishing. The concept, and the team, worked so well that after several years' successful operation, a decision was taken to expand into a bigger and even more comfortable boat, an all-new 56-footer.

Anyone who has served their time as crew on charter boats (which I have) won't spend long aboard before they come to appreciate the collective expertise at work here.

The Kekoa is also particularly well finished and when I mentioned this to O'Brien, he casually dismissed a substantial achievement in the boat builder's art with words to the effect: "We've never built production boats. People ring us asking for a price list, and are surprised when I tell them we don't do that. We talk to our customers to work up a set of specifications – and then quote on them."

He went on to say: "Sometimes I'm asked why anyone would come to Townsville to get us to build a boat and the answer is that it's companies like us you come to when you want to get a boat built rather than just buy a boat."

Kekoa's annual program includes fishing the Cairns heavy tackle season and a series of billfish tournaments at Innisfail, Hinchinbrook and Townsville, before heading south before



Then, after a spell on the hard, Kekoa mother-ships a pair of dories carried on her foredeck to fish Cape York for the famed barramundi to restart her fishing season in autumn.

A maximum of four guests are catered for with a double-berth stateroom plus crew quarters sharing a bathroom along the Kekoa's portside downstairs. While to starboard another stateroom with twin double-decker bunks shares a second bathroom with yet another double stateroom in the bows.

It's a versatile arrangement – as it needs to be when constantly differing guest sleeping arrangements must be allowed for.

Upstairs, the galley is portside opposite a dinette big enough to accommodate at least six. An L-shaped lounge with coffee table portside and a settee stretching from the dinette to cabin door along the starboard side occupy the space aft to the cabin doors.

In addition to the usual engine room entry hatch through the cabin bulkhead, the Kekoa's engines are fully accessible by removing both of these lounges and the salon floor. An engine will fit through the salon doors in the (eventually) likely event an engine must be removed.

Up top, the bridge is roomy enough for a fair-sized party, although I suspect it will more often be Luke Fallon's retreat. Black Marlin Towers flew up to Townsville from its Gold Coast workshop to build Kekoa's aluminium tower in situ. The riggers are imported Rupps.

The Kekoa's cockpit is all fishing. A Reelax



The O'Brien Kekoa 56 going through its paces off Townsville with Gold Coast skipper Luke Fallon at the helm.

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— Peter O'Brien

heavy tackle chair sits centrepiece in a deck beautifully done in teak by O'Brien Boats.

Twin livewells grace the transom. The transom door opens underneath the covering board instead of leaving crew vulnerable to an impromptu swim through an open door.

At the forward end of the cockpit across the cabin bulkhead there's refrigerated stowage plus an ice shaver feeding three brine boxes on the starboard side.

The engine room entry way is incorporated into the steps up to the cabin doors.

Two V10 MTU 2000 M92s producing 1015 hp each drive through Twin Disc

MGX 5145A transmissions. An Onan/Cummins gen set supplies 240V power.

Which brings us to an innovative set-up operating Kekoa's onboard refrigeration and airconditioning. A common belt drive attached to the port engine connects a series of compressors via individual clutches to a 240 volt motor and a power take off.

Thus the fridges and aircon can be run on shore power, from the Onans 240 V supply, or off the port engine. Paul Jindra from Jindra Energy Conversions in Melbourne designed and installed this system.

Below the waterline, Kekoa's props sit in

half tunnels in the hull bottom to increase fuel efficiency and decrease draft.

Luke calls 25 knots at 1800 rpm a slow cruise and at that speed the MTUs were burning a total of 230 litres/hour. Luke told me that while trolling baits, Kekoa's fuel consumption was a miserly 10 litres/hour in total.

Luke also told me they saw a whisker under 38 knots on the GPS during early sea trials.

An impressive top speed for an all-round impressive boat.

For more information visit the O'Brien website www.obrienboats.com.au

JD's testing Queensland waters with showroom at Runaway Bay

IN an industry that has suffered from the effects of the GFC and rises in domestic interest rates, an Australian company is using a strong Australian dollar exchange rate and the power of the trailer boat/cruiser market to help lift the industry from the water.

Following seven successful years in Carlingbah, on the fringe of the southern waterways of Botany Bay in NSW, JD's Boatshed has opened a new showroom at Runaway Bay.

General manager Mark Taylor said: "It's an exciting time for the boating industry of Queensland thanks to our fantastic weather,



JD's Boatshed general manager Mark Taylor says it's an exciting time for the Queensland boating industry

great lifestyle and ease of access to numerous waterways. Who wouldn't want to be here?

"More importantly who would want to be here without a great boat? With the Cobalt

and Glastron models we believe that we have the perfect match for Queensland's boating enthusiasts.

"JD's is a family-owned business and all our customers are treated as such, all the way from first inquiry."

The launch of JD's Boatshed at Runaway Bay last month gave the Queensland market its first look at the Cobalt range of Bowriders and Cruisers.

"These are beautifully constructed boats with the most comprehensive warranties available in the boat building world, which not only

provides the consumer with peace of mind when boating, but also gives us supreme confidence in a quality product," Mr Taylor said.

Glastron is the other quality American product that JD's Boatshed will distribute exclusively to the Queensland and NSW marine markets. Glastron have been building boats since the 1950s and have built more than 500,000 craft worldwide.

"Most people are mindful of price – buy on value," Mr Taylor said, "and that is exactly what these brands offer to prospective owners – fantastic value for money."