

MY BOAT - Alan Dowler, *Balancing Act*

By Dick Richards

***Balancing Act*, a re-born Spencer 'Serendipity' 29. arrives in the Squadron.**

In the 1970's the New Zealand but Australian born yacht designer John Spencer (1931-1996) drew plans for both large and small yachts that became extremely popular, particularly with home builders; his hard chine plywood or cold moulded designs were known for their practicality, attractive lines and windward ability; both fibreglass and timber versions were a commercial success. The Squadron had a fleet of Spencer 30's built by David Binks that raced successfully in the Half Ton division from the 1970's to the early 90's. Several cold moulded plywood 29ft. *Serendipitys* remained in the pool until comparatively recent times. Both designs were raced but also proved to be comfortable gulf cruisers.



Balancing Act at the Squadron.

The Squadron pool is now dominated by large and luxurious yachts and power boats, many imported from Europe or America so it was a surprise to find a pristine example of a small vintage yacht moored cheekily alongside the grand lady *Catriona* in front of the clubhouse on I finger.

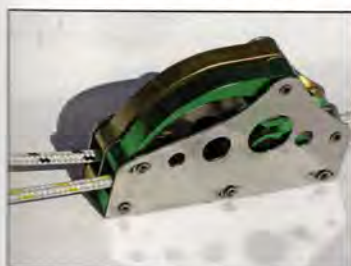
Balancing Act was rescued and restored by Alan Dowler for his wife Janet who presently crews on Peter Vincent's *New Morning III*. Alan is well known as the builder and skipper of the trimaran *Stickwoman*. He is now building a larger trimaran but has spent a year part time restoring the *Serendipity*.

The boat was built sometime in the late 70's with a double diagonal cold moulded plywood hull, fibreglass deck, cockpit and coach house. Alan removed the outer skin of plywood and carefully constructed a new one, sheathing the finished hull with vacuum bagged glass and epoxy. Most ribs were replaced, doubled in number in front of the keel and quadrupled at the

keel. The cast iron fin keel was removed along with the timber that supported it. The keel bolts and the full length of the timber sections of the keel were replaced and with most of the bilge area. The iron keel was then re-attached and also glassed to the hull using a load spreading layup of uni-directional glass out to the chines, to provide extra strength. The old internal furniture, bulkheads, bunks, galley and engine cover were removed, redesigned and replaced with modules of light-weight foam core and epoxy that can each be removed to inspect the hull if need be. None of the new furniture modules weigh more than four kilograms each, including the port and starboard bunks that are combined with the cabin-side lockers. Vacuum bagging was used for all glassing, inside and outside the hull. The cabin is enhanced by olive wood veneer on the foam core bulkheads and some other vertical surfaces. Alan machined 2 mm veneers from a cut down tree from a neighbour's property; the light and dark striped pattern of the olive looks like an exotic African timber and softens the austerity of the new interior. "It's a small boat inside, with a sparse fit-out, and a bit of tree goes a long way." The fibreglass deck, cabin and cockpit was refurbished, cabin windows replaced and the hatches rebuilt.

The quality of the restored mast and the ingenious design of the stainless steel and aluminium deck fittings is traditional and robust, with Alan having designed and made much of it by hand, from the spreaders (carbon fibre) to the deck jamming cleats, backstay and spinnaker blocks, bow fitting; the handsome aluminium gunnel rail and the engine controls. The restored diesel's decompression lever has been re-located to the cockpit in reach of the skipper, placed there to simplify shutting down the engine but also so that Janet can re-start the diesel using sail power only if required. By decompressing the motor, putting the prop in gear until the motor spins enough to drop the decompressor, it will start by its own momentum, saving battery power, or start with no battery at all! - if you have decompressors, try it on your own boats.

The interior fit out is almost complete, and Alan says "it will probably stay almost complete for quite some time to come, now that it's in the water and out of his shed at last (haha)." New sails have been ordered and we look forward to seeing Janet and her crew, all female?, sailing around the cans in her 'new' boat next season.



Deck Jammer Balancing Act



Interior looking forward showing the replaced ribs



The new cabin interior.