

By Ian Roberts, Rear Commodore



Skipper's first evening at sea

HAVING bought a Bavaria 41 named *Pohono* in Sydney in January 2018 with the intention of sailing home to South Australia it was not long before these plans went astray. Cheap airfares, and the seduction of Sydney Harbour, Pittwater and Cowans Creek are just a few of the attractions that kept me returning regularly to Sydney and delaying the return of *Pohono* to Adelaide. The fact that I was on a swing mooring in Fairlight that was owned and managed by Robbie Teharne made staying in Sydney very easy.

As I continued to sail in Sydney Harbour, I also realised that perhaps *Pohono* was not the ultimate yacht for me as my sailing ambitions began to evolve. I left *Pohono* in February 2020 with the intention of returning, as was my wont, about three weeks later to continue to enjoy the Harbour. I did not bargain on COVID-19 shutting down the borders. It was not until November that I was able to return and deal with the mess of not being on my boat for effectively 10 months!

The new difficulties of travel, coupled with my desire to source a yacht which I felt could be competitive for racing in Adelaide and cruising in our Gulfs, led to me listing *Pohono* for sale in December 2020. I listed her with a broker from Pittwater but was foiled in the sale process for a while as this area was locked down extensively over the peak selling season of December/January.



Crew l-r: Bruce Roach, Macgregor Greer, Peter Hutchison, Ian Roberts (skipper), Peter Hutchinson, Andrew Smiles

Throughout this period I was, as most yachtsmen do, searching the Internet looking for the next big thing. I formed a very good relationship with a broker in Pittwater (Andrew Withers) who assisted me in this process. Thankfully, I was quickly able to source the yacht that I was very keen on. This was a Beneteau First 44.7 (a sister ship to *Vulcan*) by the name of *Le Billet* based in Pittwater at the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club. With the capable assistance of Andrew, I was able to sell my beloved *Pohono* and purchase the vessel (but not the name) in a relatively short and trouble-free timeframe and process.

Being the proud owner of a brand new yacht, now named *Bowline*, I was obliged to sail her home to Adelaide sooner rather than later. Thankfully, I have been blessed with being part of a successful crew on *Kaesler*, ably led by Colin Fraser, over the last eight years. It took very little persuasion for some of the members of that crew as well as a mate to agree to help me deliver *Bowline* to Adelaide.

Bowline came with an extensive sail wardrobe so the first challenge was how to get this wardrobe home. After a few phone calls it was arranged that friends Geoff and Myra Hood would fly to Sydney, visit their son and drive my ute and their trailer loaded with sails and surplus gear back to Adelaide. Craig Evans, formerly manager of CYCSA and now the manager of the Royal Prince Alfred, was simply fabulous in his assistance to me and my crew to get *Bowline* ready to leave Sydney. After arranging for the signwriting for the name change it also required all of the technical changes to be addressed such as EPIRB, AIS radio call signs, and other modern day yachting requirements to be completed.

Sailing had been cancelled in Pittwater in the days leading up to our departure due to debris floating down the Hawkesbury River from the extensive flooding at this time. Undaunted, the good ship *Bowline* eased out past Lion Island, leaving Cape Barrenjoe on the right and after a series of tosses of the coin turned right to travel south along the coast to Adelaide. The lure to travel north was very strong.

The water was filthy and full of debris, requiring the crew to be constantly vigilant. By sailing a significant distance offshore the advantage of the current was significant and the speed overground increased greatly. Unfortunately, the winds were all headwinds and light, resulting in the 'iron topsail' getting a serious workout.

The weather did not look favourable around Gabo Island, and as a result it was agreed to go into Eden and wait the weather out. This allowed my friend Magregor, who had joined us for the sail home, to exercise his significant fishing skills and feed the crew accordingly.

Setting sail after about 36 hours in Eden we proceeded to round Gabo, keeping Australia on the starboard side, and headed for Adelaide.

With light headwinds again the motor was given a run, and a run, and even more running!! So much so that we began to worry



Light winds during the delivery



Early days with the autohelm

about the diesel levels. When we could we sailed, but frankly light headwinds did not assist. Consideration was given to going into Refuge Cove. The weather didn't necessitate it and it was too far off the rhumb line to warrant the use of the extra diesel. As we entered Bass Strait the wind abated even further to the point that as we came to pass the entrance into Port Phillip Bay and head towards Lady Julia Island consideration was given to water-skiing, as the sea state was so benign.

Again, nervous eyes were looking at the diesel fuel gauge! Seven miles from Portland the motor sputtered and I quickly switched it off. As *Bowline* wallowed in a flat sea with not a zephyr of breeze, thought was given to how we could address this. Several phone calls later the Sea Rescue were on its way to tow us back to Portland to refuel. The ignominy of it! The Sea Rescue Squadron of Portland was simply fantastic. Not only did they tow us into port but also assisted us to refuel by driving the embarrassed skipper to the fuel station to fill up jerry cans to assist in the refuelling. There is no fuel at the Portland marina.

Again, after a night on the marina we set sail at first light with the intention of heading to Adelaide as quickly as possible.

Blighted by head winds and initially very little wind, we motor sailed until just short of the Pages when we picked up the best winds of the trip and scooted up the Gulf to the Squadron. The best sailing of the whole trip was while travelling up Gulf of St Vincent. Competition soon developed between the various helmsmen as to top speed to be achieved. Ironically it was Pirate Pete who won the day by 0.1 of a knot with a top speed of 11.4 knots, much to the chagrin of the other skippers.

Highlights of the trip? The camaraderie and support of the crew. The trailing of a large fishing line for the whole trip without success,



On the race course for the first time during the Winter Series



Happy group having brunch after arrival

except catching an embarrassed tern by his wing (released with no injury save for the ego of the fisherman). The splendid cooking of Pirate Pete and the fellowship of the Sea Rescue from Portland.

Other fabulous aspects of the sail were almost taken for granted, such as the fabulous sunsets, the full moon and the morning glow that all offshore sailors can relate to we had on each and every day.

No damage was done to the boat on the trip home except when a bolt in the autohelm sheared off. Given the long trip this speaks volumes for the soundness of *Bowline*. We utilised a No 2 and a No 3 headsail and a cruising mainsail, and the rest of the significant sails travelled home by road.

The watch system used was as recommended by Chris Perry (apparently used by Jimmy Howell). This was 0800 hrs to 1200 hrs, 1200 hrs to 1600 hrs, 1600 hrs to 2000 hrs, 2000 hrs to 2300 hrs, 2300 hrs to 0200 hrs, 0200 hrs to 0500, 0500 hrs to 0800 hrs, repeated. This allowed for sufficient sleep and for people not to be on the same hours each day. It was a simple system and worked well for all crew members.

Navigation was done via Navionics and Predict Wind when in range. Friends and family were able to follow our trip on Marine Traffic and it was astounding to me how many people followed us.

Arriving in the Squadron Pool late on the evening of Easter Sunday all the crew wished to do was to have a long hot shower. A leisurely breakfast was the order of the day next morning after the boat was cleaned up and 'put to bed'. Visits by friends and family on this happy occasion were greatly appreciated.

Should anyone wish to contact me with respect to victualing, preparing the boat or the route home, please do not hesitate to do so.



Crossing the finishing line in our first Squadron race