

MY BOAT: MARGARITA

Story and photographs by Gill Baker



Ernie and Rick enjoy a perfect sail

The Importance of Being Ernest!

OUR *Margarita* has a new owner! She is now under the care and control of Ernest Jimenez, an experienced sailor with a fascinating family history of sailing. Rick and I are sorry to say goodbye to her. We've had her, in one form or another since 1980, some 36 years. We started the build from a paper pattern of the wooden frames which make the shape of the mould, progressing on with foam, fibreglass and more fibreglass. After endless work over 13 years, finally the launch took place in 1993 and was then followed by 23 years of sailing. We loved the cruising lifestyle. We took her to Sydney, where we lived aboard, and we sailed to Far North Queensland, which we loved. All up, *Margarita* has been in South Australian waters for eight years during which time we have enjoyed the RSAYS and the Gulf. *Margarita* is ready, willing and able to be taken into a whole new era by Ernie, who we know will love her as we do and give her the chance to fly!

Ernie came to Australia at the age of five, the youngest of six children. His parents, Alex and Carmen fled Franco's Spain in the early 70s and settled in Sydney. They worked hard and by 1985 were thinking of retiring and touring around Australia in a four-wheel drive vehicle. By chance they met a young Spanish couple who were sailing the world in a small yacht. Until then, they had never had any interest or knowledge of boats, but they realised that there was a different world out there from the one they knew. Within two months they had purchased a boat, some charts and attained some rudimentary sailing skills and with Ernie, now 18 years old, set out from Sydney Harbour to circumnavigate the world.

The boat, a Duncanson Capella 37 ketch was appropriately called *Nova Vida* which is Portuguese, meaning 'New Life'. It certainly was a new life for them. The first leg was fraught with problems which included engine trouble before leaving Sydney Harbour, heading out into a black nor-easter and being swept down the coast

towards Nowra. In spite of this Carmen, who could have been expected to give up sailing, decided she liked it. Another drama unfolded as they were approaching Mooloolaba. Ernie, calling on the radio for directions, saw Alex collapse and altered the call to a Mayday. The Coast Guard and a helicopter came out to rescue them. The helicopter's winch was broken, so that they could not lift him and fly him to hospital. The Paramedic had to jump from the helicopter and get into the rescue boat as well as Alex, leaving Ernie and Carmen to sail the boat by themselves in a horrific storm. Alex was rushed to hospital and a perforated ulcer was found to be the problem. After his recovery they decided to sell the boat as too many dramas had happened, but as we know, boats can take a while to sell. Some weeks later, as they had not sold it, they decided that they may as well continue with the voyage.

They went on to Darwin and then to the Cocos Keeling Islands. In those days it was a different world as far as communication

at sea was concerned. Carmen, in a queue to use the public phone to let family know they had arrived at Cocos, found that time had run out before she could get to the phone, so she did not make a call. What she did not know was that, had she made the phone call, she would have been told that one of her sons, Alex Junior, had been shot in Sydney and was in a critical condition. He was innocently drinking at the Coogee Bay Hotel where he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He had been shot through the chest, perforating both lungs and he died twice while on the operating table. His good recovery was due to the fact that he was very fit and active.

Two months later when they arrived in Sri Lanka they called home, heard the news of the shooting and, happily, that Alex Junior had recovered. The drama was over and they had known nothing about it. Alex Junior and another brother Valero joined the boat and they sailed from Sri Lanka to Sudan, five people in a 37-foot Duncanson.

Alex, Carmen and Ernie sailed on into the Mediterranean and arrived in Spain where they were given a great welcome. Alex wrote a book about their travels, written from the point of view of *Nova Vida* and it is very informative...if you can read Spanish! Alex and Carmen and Ernie had proved to be a good team. Alex was a very practical and innovative person and soon became a proficient sailor. Carmen cooked wonderful Spanish dishes in mid-ocean and Ernie was the strong crewman.

They crossed the Atlantic, went through the Panama Canal and then across the Pacific back home to Sydney. The voyage had taken three years.

They met Alan Lucas while navigating the Panama Canal. There is a chapter on their adventures in *Nova Vida* in his book *Cruising Australians* published in 1989.

Ernie joined the Army and was in training for the SAS, continuing his energetic and adventurous spirit, jumping out of helicopters etc. Unfortunately he was badly injured in a road accident which meant leaving the Army and many years of rehabilitation.

His brother Alex has a yacht in Florida and he and Ernie have done some extensive sailing in that area around Cuba, the Caribbean and the Panama Canal.

Ernie saw our advertisement for *Margarita* on line while looking for a Roberts 53. There was *Margarita*, sounding Spanish, with a mirror-ball in the salon, indicating her role as a 'party boat'. His brother had bought a Roberts 53 some years ago in Adelaide and Ernie had helped him sail it to Sydney. Maybe history will repeat itself, this time with the brother helping Ernie sail *Margarita* back to Sydney? Ernie contacted my husband Rick who sent through all the extra information required and the



Ernie relaxes aboard his new boat

surveyor's report. Ernie drove to Adelaide and when he viewed *Margarita* across the water from Freeman's Landing, his love affair with her began! We took him out for a sail on a perfect day. Subsequently she was lifted out on the travel lift at Adelaide Marina for a survey. The surveyor gave *Margarita* a glowing report, remarking on a very well built boat and Rick, as the builder, felt he had passed the test as well.

Ernie is based at his brother Valero's Joadja Distillery near Mittagong in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. This is a historic mining village which his brother has made into a distillery. Valero is producing a whisky and, of course, he is maturing

it in Pedro Jimenez casks, what else? A limited bottling has just been released. Ernie himself is in the process of distilling his own rum, naming it 'Southern Crossbones Rum' or 'Crossbones Rum'. It is in the early stages of production and he is hoping that this enterprise will help him finance his sailing adventures. He plans to take *Margarita* to Sydney for a while and then set sail out into the wide blue yonder.

