

By Barry Allison

This is another in the series of articles by Barry Allison recording some of the many and varied adventures of our Senior Members of the Squadron – this time the incredible lives of Pam and Peter Mander and their cars, boats and planes.



PETER was born in Adelaide, and attended Nailsworth Primary School and Adelaide High School. Peter's parents were both creators in their own fields. His father was a sheet metal worker and body builder, and Peter was encouraged to work after school which reinforced his interest in motor cars. He gained an apprenticeship at General Motors Holden at Woodville and later worked in their drawing office at Elizabeth, further reinforcing his interest in the sport of cars.

This early interest in motor cars and rally driving eventually set him on a direction into boating, when Graham Jones, his rally navigator at that time, invited him on a week-long sailing cruise from Outer Harbor to Kangaroo Island on board Squadron Member Ron Patrick's 23 ft carvel-planked boat *Judy Ann*. They had such an enjoyable time that Peter decided that he had to have his own boat, but it would have to be a larger craft. It was apparent that the only way Peter could achieve this was to build his own boat.

Peter was a founding Member of the CYCSA, and he joined the Squadron on 9 February 1972 when he began crewing for Ron Patrick and Graham Jones on *Judy Ann*.

With no knowledge of naval architecture, it was thought logical to seek out a designer who was known for fast seaworthy yachts. The Dutch designer E G van de Stadt had been successful in several designs being sailed at the Squadron, and he was approached for approval to build a mould for fibreglass hulls which began a long association with Van de Stadt yachts. Although it was not normal to give approval for production outside Holland, Peter was authorised to build the Pion 30 design in Australia, and plans and photographs were sent here to enable a mould to be built.

The first Pion 30s were *Dynasty* for Peter Mander, *Valkyrie* for Rick Ottaway and *Blue Angel* for Karl Texler. There was a tremendous amount of interest from many yachtsmen as the design had won the European Best Design competition. Peter's *Dynasty* was completed at his home and launched in 1974. Then the mould was leased to Ollie Linsar who continued to build hulls. At this time, a strong friendship developed with Bryan Price of 505 dinghy fame, who taught Peter many of his sailing skills.

Meanwhile, Peter built his own factory at Holden Hill which allowed him room to build yachts, and from there he began building the 11 m cruiser-racer design Zeemeermin (mermaid in Dutch) and this became the Mander 11. The first boats built were *Panache* for John Gerard, *Emma* for Ralph Phillips, *Valkyrie II* for Rick Ottaway, *Kamatu* for Alan Swinstead, *Wavelength* for Ian Greig, and *Bloody Mary* for Brian Davidge. Other designs from Van de Stadt were built, including the Maestro 31 *Cardiac Arrest* which went across to Western Australia. Then the minimum 40 ft design for Admiral's Cup competition was introduced with David Urry purchasing *War Games*, followed by *Water Frontier* for Mario Minuzzo and *War Lord* for Ian Scott. A 24 ft mini-tonner was also developed and later became a successful trailer sailer.

In 1989 Pam and Peter decided to purchase a fleet of houseboats at Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury in NSW and over the next 12 years the business name was changed, the boats were refurbished and the eleven boat fleet and his business grew. This growth happened during the 'recession we had to have' and allowed Peter to purchase his own marina and to consolidate both businesses.

While at Brooklyn they met up with old friends, John and Lesley Clarke (of *Ned Kelly* fame) who were also operating a houseboat business. This friendship initiated their first group holiday to the canals in France to examine the engineering aspects and the quality of craft being hired on these canals, and provided some insight as to the quality that international visitors would expect. Peter and Pam planned a second trip back to France in 1999, this time to be on a charter boat that they thought would be ideally suited for their



Peter's Van de Stadt designed *Infra Red*



Rouge Bonnet in France

houseboat business on the Hawkesbury. They intended to improve their fleet to cater for international customers and offer modern craft with three cabins incorporating ensuite, and double or single berths. It was only 18 months after their return from France that an offer was made to purchase their businesses, and the sale of both Ripples Houseboats and Sandbrook Inlet Marina was confirmed. This made it possible for Peter and Pam to retire early.

The life on the canals in Europe had completely captured the Mander's lifestyle, so in 2003 they travelled back to France to purchase a suitable canal boat for their own use. In 2004 they bought *Rouge Bonnet* and began cruising the vast network of canals in France. *Rouge Bonnet* was a modern 11 m canal boat, complete with a bow thruster to assist when manoeuvring in locks. For the next four years Peter and Pam explored most of the canals in France, with many friends joining them. They reluctantly decided to sell *Rouge Bonnet* when the opportunity arose to purchase a 15 m GRP canal boat *Justine*. She needed a minor internal refit to include a dishwasher, separate laundry and a separate workshop, but the interior layout remained much the same as that of *Rouge Bonnet*.

In 2008, *Justine* and other friends headed out of France to explore the canals in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, visiting the exotic cities of northern Europe and making enduring friendships along the way.

In 2013, an opportunity presented itself in the form of a 15 m boat externally identical to *Justine*, but with minimal use and fitted with turbocharged engines which offered far greater speed and control. A quick decision was made and *Ariane* became their next boat, which continues to this day. She had been an ex-charter boat, and at 49 ft long and with twin diesel engines she was an ideal craft to continue living on and exploring the canals of Europe. In the following years *Ariane* cruised the Danube via Vienna to Budapest, returning to the Rhine in October 2015. Further explorations were made along the Rhine and the Lahn Rivers in Germany, and the Seine in France to visit Rouen near the Atlantic Coast, opening up waterways not previously visited. *Justine* remained in the south of France spending time on the Rhone, and visiting Bordeaux and Toulouse where she was eventually sold in 2019.

However, there is another aspect of Peter's life which is not generally known – he began learning to fly in 1996, initially in an ultra-light Thruster fabric aircraft at Holbrook in Victoria. After many logged hours and study, he gained his licence in 2010 and continued to fly up to 2018. In 2009 he and his flying instructor flew across to Busselton in West Australia to collect a Jabiru fibreglass light aircraft that Peter had bought. They flew back to South Australia in thirteen hours, landing at Goolwa where she is now housed.



Jabiru fibreglass light aircraft

Over many years, Peter and Pam have been rewarded by enjoying the company of friends from Australia, including Squadron Members, past owners of boats that they have built, and many canal friends gained as they share time on the waterways of Europe.

Today Pam and Peter are restricted to staying in Adelaide while the COVID-19 restrictions apply. The real problem is not necessarily flying to France, but returning to Australia. Their plans are to continue to explore the many waterways and historic cities of Europe, and we wish them well in their adventures.



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