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BY KEITH INGRAM



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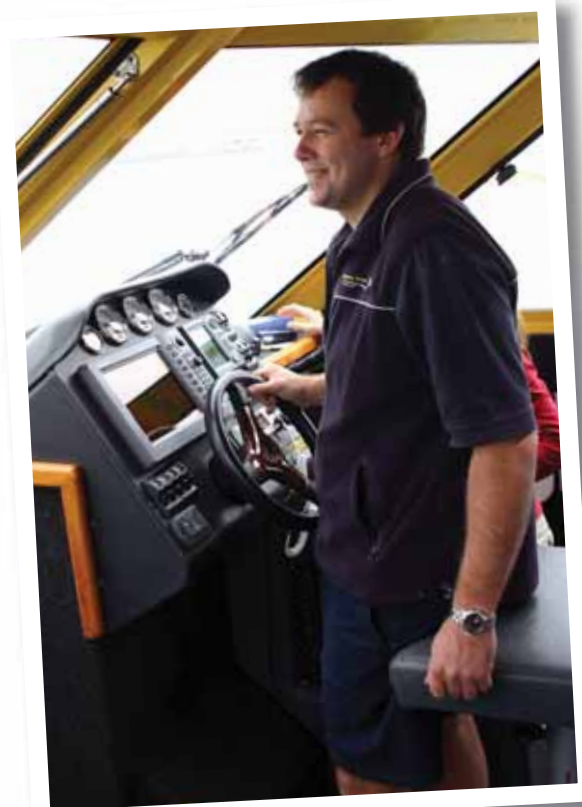
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Geoff Williams at the helmstation

Manukau Harbour, the home of Auckland's second port, has often been ignored as a backwater. Yet the harbour is a scenic treasure that most Aucklanders have yet to enjoy.

The harbour supports a vibrant recreational and commercial inshore fishery. It is home to many seabirds, and at certain times of the year it is a breeding ground for flounder, mullet and also our oceanic sharks, including the bronze whaler, the seven-gillier and the grey nurse.

The harbour entrance is protected by the notorious Manukau bar, which has claimed many vessels and lives over the past century. This predominantly surf zone is also home to a very small population of Maui dolphins, and at certain times of the year the New Zealand fur seal visits to haul out and whelp.

The harbour itself is bound by five councils, plus the overarching Auckland Regional Council, or ARC. I mention this point to highlight the problems of trying to start any new venture involving the Manukau waterways. Each council has its own interpretation of how it deals with the Resource Management Act, which can be frustrating at the best of times, and at worse, potential opportunities for the people of Auckland risk being lost.

Geoff Williams is a local lad who grew up on the harbour's southern arm, Awhitu Peninsula. He was born into a boating family and learnt to love the harbour as a youngster. As he grew up the call of the sea took Geoff to Nelson, where he studied at the fishing school and went to sea on the factory trawlers for Amatal, more affectionately known as Talley's Navy.

While he was in Nelson this young fisherman met his love,

Sarah, a hairdresser, while getting his hair cut at a local salon. The relationship blossomed, and they soon married and began a family.

Geoff had a desire to spend more time closer to his new family and bought a small inshore fishing boat, a 13m Jorgensen design, and started chasing tuna. The tuna industry at the time was experiencing a bit of a flurry, and his trips into the Manukau Harbour to unload at Onehunga rekindled the flame and his early love for the harbour.

He could see an opportunity and he and Sarah, with their young family, have taken the plunge to pursue a dream of running a ferry and tourist charter service on the Manukau.

This would be a significant family commitment, and as the Williams did not wish to upset the local authorities, they spoke to all the councils, including the ARC. To operate successfully they needed to have approval to land on the beaches of the regional parks, plus other ramps, wharves or structures. Clearly, the harbour lacked any form of formal infrastructure to cater for tourism or commercial ferry activities.

The ARC was in a conundrum, as it had no precedent. No other operators were doing what was proposed on the harbour, and a variety of other tourism dreams that had attempted to get started, including the most recent, by Jane, "Janie" Gifford, had all faltered or failed because of a lack of sustainable patronage due to poor landing facilities.

But the council was sympathetic, and its members could see the potential benefit to the local community and the harbour. Twelve months later, the Williams received approval to land on the beaches and use what limited facilities were available. ▶



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ABOVE:
Dry feet boarding
is easy on the harbour
with limited facilities

RIGHT:
A cabin of happy
day trippers



bit to give the specified 18 passengers. Her power would be a Suzuki 250hp four-stroke outboard, and the same motor would be duplicated twice on the larger cat, which was yet to be built.

The construction contract was let to Extreme Boats of Whakatane. The *Manorua* is of positive buoyancy and is 8.4m overall, with a beam of 2.9m and a draft of 500mm. She has a dead weight of 2.5 tonnes, and carries 200 litres of petrol in underfloor tanks.

The *Manorua* ("Man" for Manukau and "orua" for *Orua Bay*, the name of his Dad's old boat), quickly reaches her service speed of 25 knots at a fuel consumption of 45 litres per hour.

There is no head or galley on the vessel, as she is designed for short water taxi voyages within the enclosed limits of the Manukau Harbour.

Meanwhile, the design specifications for the second and larger vessel had been confirmed and the building contract was let to Metalwork Innovations of Tauranga. The *Manukau Cat* is a fully equipped scenic cruise and passenger vessel with an overall length of 12.4m, a beam of 4.4m and a draft of 500mm light and 600mm when laden with 48 passengers.

She is powered by twin 250hp four-stroke Suzuki outboard engines and has a service speed of 18 knots laden, and an economical scenic cruising speed of eight knots.

We thought that this could be a "wet feet" boarding due to the lack of the above-mentioned facilities, but we were pleasantly surprised as the *Manukau Cat* came down the channel and nudged up on to the beach. The front hatch was opened and the gangway quickly lowered to allow us to board 2m from the vessel and keep our feet dry.

We were immediately impressed with the *Manukau Cat's* workmanship, décor and presentation. This was a smart little vessel that any tourist operator could feel proud to deliver his tour group to for a scenic cruise on

the Manukau Harbour.

The *Manukau Cat* has been designed to protect passengers in inclement weather by making maximum use of the internal space, eliminating side walk-decks. There was an early consideration for a flybridge or observation deck, however this was discounted once the weight-to-power ratios of outboard power became an issue.

The helm and conning position is immediately to starboard inside the bow entrance.

The conning position is well suited for single-person operation, with easy access to the front hatch when loading over the bow. The instruments are well laid out, and the engine controls are the new Morse electronic control systems.

As with the engines, the Williams decided to keep a similar electronic package on both vessels, including a Furuno Navnet VX2 plotter, but because of the shallow nature of the harbour, Geoff elected to have a separate LS4100 Furuno sounder. Communication is via a Uniden VHF. The *Manukau Cat* also has a Panasonic music system and a separate audio system on board.

To port, a short companionway drops down into the hull to the head, which has a large electric macerating toilet discharging into an 80 litre sewerage holding tank. Unfortunately there are no pump-out facilities on the Manukau, so the operator abides by the local rules and regulations for discharges.

On the opposite side, down in the starboard hull, is a functional galley with a sink, stove and the usual bits you would expect to



Getting along at a fair clip

see to cater for morning and afternoon teas and the like. On top of the stove we spied a large, rectangular purpose-built urn that holds around 60 cups and is heated by the two top burners of the gas stove. It is an efficient way to boil the billy for a large number of guests.

As the *Manukau Cat* operates in the backwaters of Auckland's "other" harbour, there is no access to the facilities and services enjoyed by those on the Waitemata Harbour. Because she is moored, trying to maintain refrigeration on board with outboard power was not an option.

Being a day vessel, the preferred option for catering is to use chilly-bins. These are also used for the licensed bar service. It is all part of the experience of the day.

Moving into the main saloon, the seating for 33 can be configured in standard forward-facing ferry seating, or some seats can be removed and replaced by tables for smaller, social groups of up to 25 people. This makes her ideal for functions such as barbecue cruises and evening social outings.

Moving aft, we step out into the sheltered cockpit where a further 12 seats are provided in bench-box type seating. These boxes also provide storage for the lifejackets carried on board. There is a small extension landing on the transom where the two large Suzuki power units are mounted.

Fuel is stored in two 550 litre in-hull alloy tanks. There are two 200 litre water bladders for fresh water. To supply the power required for the vacuum cleaner or other maintenance work, the *Manukau Cat* carries a small, 240 volt petrol-driven gen-set, which is lifted out of the hull and mounted on the small landing area between the outboard motors, the same area where the barbecue is fitted, when required.

The *Manukau Cat* has the ability to cross the bar, and is surveyed for 48 in Manukau enclosed waters, and for 30 in West Coast inshore areas. Within these limits, she can transfer to the Kaipara Harbour in the north, or further south to Raglan or Kawhia, should potential charter opportunities arise.

During our review of both vessels, it was hard not to get caught up in the enthusiasm of this husband-and-wife team, who have taken on a significant challenge. They are clearly committed,

and they are not looking for any handouts. They have come into the industry with their eyes open, and have committed and built vessels which are more than capable of meeting the tasks ahead.

However, one area beyond their control is the lack of safe

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The purpose-built urn in the galley



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A close-up view of the helmstation

berthing infrastructure or access on the Manukau Harbour. With five councils from Franklin, Papakura, Manukau, Auckland and Waitakere all bordering the harbour and having separate responsibilities, you would think that this boaties' playground would be bursting with excellent ramps, pontoon landings, jetties and the like. Not so.

It is a sad indictment on those who could collectively make it blossom that this beautiful harbour has been ignored. The only good landing facility for tourists or social cruising guests is at Te Toro on the Awhitu Peninsula, where the Franklin District Council boat ramp has an added pontoon built and installed by the Counties Sportfishing Club.

Clark's Beach has a dilapidated groin that stops 6m from the channel. A pontoon or jetty extension would help the local community to get access to the harbour.

Matakawau Point is a growing area for the future, as Aucklanders move south and settle on the Awhitu Peninsula either in holiday homes or permanently. This area is a short hop across the harbour from Cornwallis, which has a lovely rebuilt wharf.

Unfortunately, the fender piling on the wharf has been designed for large vessels that are no longer seen on the Manukau.


It is not safe for the *Manukau Cat* and similar vessels to use the wharf, as the fender pilings hold her a metre clear of the steps if she tries to get alongside.

Onehunga, the jewel in the Manukau crown, is a small commercial hub with no pontoon or landing steps suitable for picking up or dropping off passengers, regardless of the tide. It's not much to ask for, is it?

So why is it so difficult for the five councils to pick one spot each and develop a small, safe, all-tide landing facility for small craft?

Let's not forget the ARC, which owns and manages some of our finest regional parks, some of which border the Manukau Harbour. Providing safe water access to these parks will

improve Aucklanders' opportunity to enjoy the fine facilities that the city's ratepayers have all contributed towards.

All this need not cost millions. The biggest cost we see will be trying to get any of these improvements for the public good through the Resource Management Act process, which is in the hands of our councils. Our local bodies should do something positive now, before another opportunity is lost. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Manorua	
Length overall	8.4m
Beam	2.9m
Draft	500mm
Deadweight	2.5 tonnes
Construction	alloy pontoon vessel
Engine	Suzuki 4-stroke outboard
Power	250hp
Service speed	25 knots
Fuel consumption	45 litres per hour @ 25 knots
Fuel	200 litres
Designer	Scott Robson Design
Builder	Extreme Boats

Manukau Cat	
Length overall	12.4m
Beam	4.4m
Draft	light
	laden
Engines	2 x Suzuki 4-stroke outboards
Power	2 x 250hp
Service speed	18 knots
Fuel	2 x 550 litre alloy tanks
Fresh water	2 x 200 litre water bladders
Designer	Scott Robson Design
Builder	Metalworks Innovation

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