



# COUPLE SELL FARM TO FUND JET BOAT ENTERPRISE

BY CAROL FORSYTH

Down south, where water temperatures range from 8.9° to 21° Celsius, New Zealand's fourth largest lake has beaches, inlets and four significant islands. Separated from Lake Hawea by a 35km isthmus, Lake Wanaka is over 300m deep.

A licence is required to fish these waters and channel 16 is unmonitored. Two local maritime outlets, Wanaka Marine and Lakeland Adventures, operate a voluntary channel 66.

Owned and operated by Simon and Danni Stewart, Lakeland Adventures runs a fleet of vessels, including aqua bikes, kayaks, water bees, two jet boats, a 6.5m Stabicraft named *Dual Image* and a 17m power cat. They also operate a fleet of 20 bicycles.

Simon says his journey from a high country musterer to running Lakeland Adventures was a dream come true. "I've always been nuts about boats," he says. "When I was mustering around Walter Peak Station, friends and I would slip across to Queenstown to go waterskiing in the evenings. It was a very social place for a young man."

Simon had been farming for most of his life and was also keen on hunting. In 1977 he nearly bought a jet boat enterprise. Prior to moving to Wanaka, the couple ran a 650ha farm and successful agricultural contracting business in Southland. But it took a few more years of frustration before he finally took the plunge.

"Start cleaning up, we're selling the farm!" he told Danni.

Their search for the perfect vessel took them far and wide. "We had a list and would drool and then discharge them all, including *Dual Image*," says Simon. "When the boats on our

short list weren't up to scratch, we looked back at *Dual Image* and realised we just had to have her." It seemed only the expensive shoes would fit.

Getting the Ekman-designed *Dual Image* to Lake Wanaka was a story of perseverance. "It took many resource consents, 72 hours of steaming from Whangarei to Oamaru and a long road trip.

"Two pilot vehicles escorted us from the salt water of the ocean to the fresh water of Lake Wanaka and Scullys Transport were excellent to deal with and very professional," says Simon.

Danni laughs as she remembers trees being cut back and *Dual Image* getting hooked up in the Christmas decorations as they went through Oamaru. "I heard somebody turn around and exclaim: 'There's a bl\*\*dy ship going up the street!'"

Being a farmer, Simon says he was not an ideal student when it came to attaining his Local Launchmaster ticket. "Distance



Dual Image

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Simon and Danni Stewart

learning with Graeme Turner in Dunedin helped me through.”

Simon’s sea hours were made up of recreational sea time, fishing in Riverton and Fiordland and acting as deckhand on various commercial vessels. His trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific voyages also took him on many seafaring adventures.

Their three sons and daughter help in the daily running of Lakeland Adventures, and Simon employs other staff when necessary. “When looking for staff, appearance is the first thing I look at. And then in the first few sentences, if they are full of yap – I put them off.”

He also looks at the cut of a person and isn’t interested in CVs or references much. Stability and local knowledge impress him. “I look for ‘good blokes’.”

Lakeland Adventures make approximately 140 fishing trips per year. *Dual Image* runs regular cruises and charters across the lake to various islands. “Motu Waho Island is one of my favourites,” says Simon. “I love telling people how this area evolved from the first settlers, farms, gold and onto tourism.”


He is passionate about the bird-rearing programme on the island and enthuses over 30 buff weka brought from the Chatham Islands in 2002. These large, reddish-brown birds were released into an aviary on the island but nine escaped by swimming to the mainland.

“In 1912 they were extinct on the mainland and now four islands on Lake Wanaka have buff weka,” says Simon. “And did you know we have 32 species of native bees and none of them make honey?”

Simon is also passionate about the world around him and the delicate nature of the eco-system. Informative commentary on board includes history, the birds and bees, kanuka, mistletoe and lichens.

“Apart from being beautiful, my tours are personal, unrushed to suit all ages and punctuated with subtle humour. Often a two-hour trip becomes three hours and I vary the trip to who is on board. When people are on holiday they need time to be unrushed and not treated as just another number.”

*Dual Image* also serves as search and rescue vessel, often rescuing houseboats and kayaks. “One winter a guy went down the flooded Clutha River in an old kayak. After he was airlifted to hospital, we brought back the kayak.”

With Mt Aspiring National Park, a World Heritage site, as their neighbour, Lake Wanaka’s *Dual Image* cruise with Simon and Danni reminds us that nothing should prevent us from achieving our dreams. 

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