



# BAY BELLE II BUILDS ON 50 YEARS OF HERITAGE

The old *Bay Belle* (below) and the new

BY KEITH INGRAM, PHOTOS BY MAGIC MEMORIES



For over 50 years the *Bay Belle* has been an icon of the Bay of Islands, having begun operations in the late 1961 on the famous Cream Trip cruise, taking passengers through the inner islands of the bay and along the Cape Brett Peninsula.

In 1973 the *Bay Belle* made way for a faster, more modern vessel on the increasingly popular cruise and began a new life as the main passenger ferry vessel between the two Bay of Islands townships of Paihia and Russell, operating up to 15 return trips per day. Her marine diesel engine has clocked over 240,000 hours and throughout her 50 years of service within the Bay of Islands, the *Bay Belle* has carried over 5.3 million passengers and travelled more than 610,000 miles, the equivalent of 28 times around the world.

Replacing the *Bay Belle* is a modern aluminum vessel.

The public was invited to suggest a name for the new vessel and several suggestions were made, but there was an overwhelming response from the residents of Russell and Paihia to keep the history of the *Bay Belle* alive and retain the name.

The *Bay Belle II* was built in Invercargill of solid marine alloy construction by Gough Bros and sailed up the coast to Bay of Islands by a crew from Fullers InterCity Ferries in March.

Although she is of a more modern design and construction, she shares many features of the first *Bay Belle*, with the open upper deck that has been so popular with travelers over the years, and side-door loadings. She was built specifically for the passenger service between Paihia and Russell with an overall length of 15.95m, a 4.98m beam, a draft of 1.3m and a displacement of about 27 tonnes.

Fullers InterCity Ferries was clear about what they wanted as a replacement vessel for this short run across the bay, which is akin to a tram doing some 15 return trips daily.

It was left to the designer, Tony Gough, to interpret the ideas and turn a wish list into a functional design that can be expected to last another 50 years. This in itself was a tough task, but this southern boatbuilding yard has a reputation for designing and building no-nonsense workboats and she will provide good service during her lifetime.

The brief specified she had to be able to carry up to 100 passengers in all weathers, and on nice days they had to be able to get outside to enjoy the ambience of the short crossing. The top deck needed to be self-managing so the size was designed and built to enable only the maximum number of passengers up top that would stay below her stability numbers.

The passenger observation deck is therefore restricted in



The simple wheelhouse has all the key aids to navigation

size and width, with a fenced space where simple bench seats are provided. Access is via a set of stairs off the aft deck and the Salt rafts are stacked and stowed on both sides, outside the rails.

Similar bench seating is provided on the aft deck and a large hatch behind the ladder gives access to the lazarette below. Side-loading is provided for through two small gates in the side bulwarks off the aft deck, although the main loading is via the for'ard side watertight doors just behind the conning position.

The *Bay Belle II* is expected to operate in all conditions, including rain, hail and fog and during all but the most violent storms

The seating in the main cabin is arranged in a for'ard-facing configuration designed to handle the knocks from commuters' bags, backpacks and tourist baggage. The journey across the bay lasts only seven to 10 minutes, depending on the weather, so comfort was not a major consideration, although we note the glued-down waterproof carpet strip to eliminate any unexpected chills from the alloy seating into the nether regions when we least expect it. The seats are finished with a nice strip of timber on the backboard to soften the commercial tram look.

There is no provision for a passenger toilet, or head, on ►



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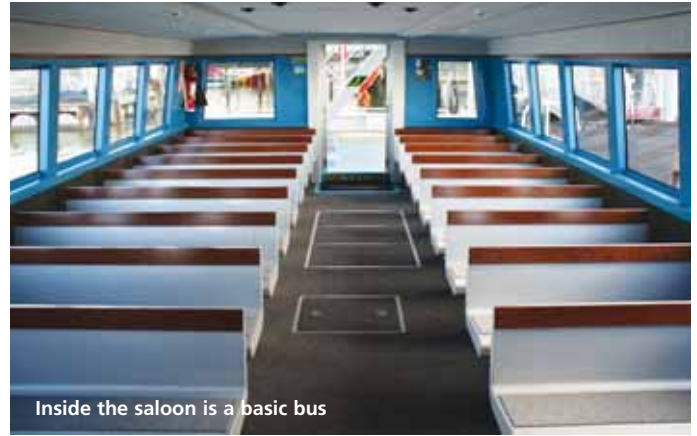
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board, eliminating another facility to either go wrong or to be serviced and cleaned.

Up for'ard, the bridge is fully enclosed with an aft sliding door that may be locked for security. The conning position provides good vision and easy access for berthing when the skipper is operating single-handed.

The specification for the electronics package was the same as for the *Excitor III*, also operated in the Bay of Islands by Fullers, as there was the chance that skippers would swap from boat to boat.

Supplied by Advance Trident Limited, this package included a Simrad NX45, 12in multifunction display, plotter, sounder and radar with a Simrad Hi Speed GPS antenna and BR24 broadband radar scanner.

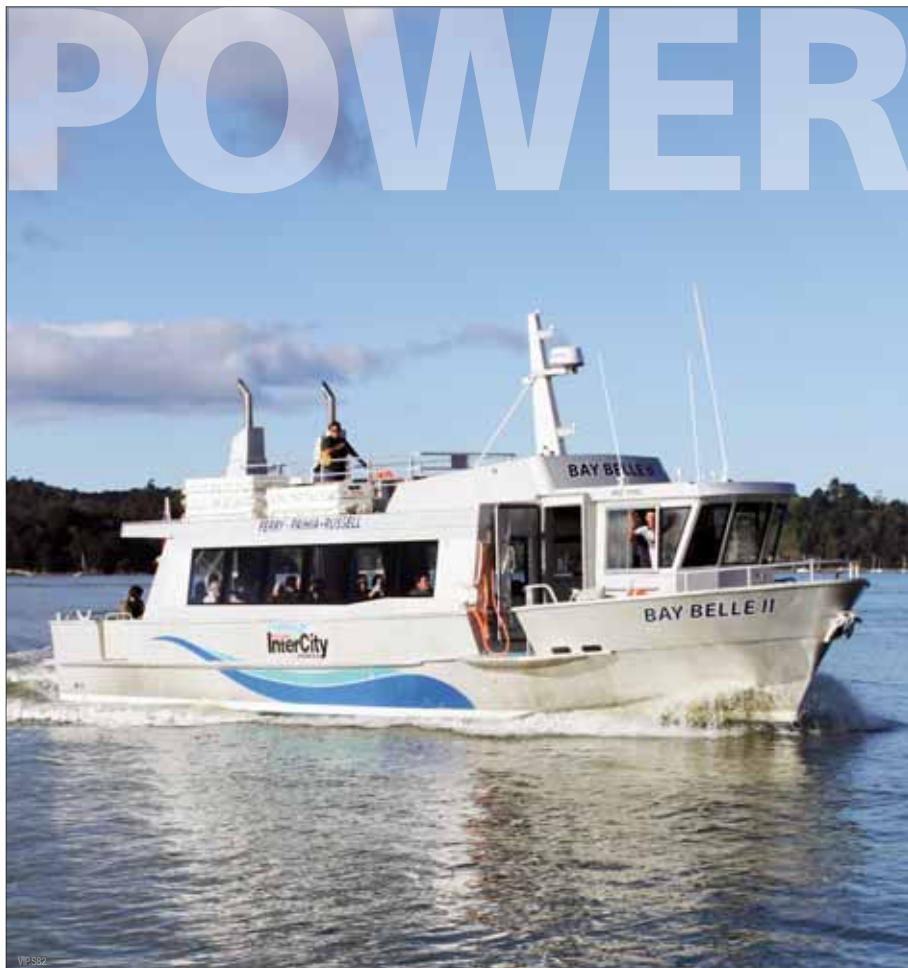
The sounder is hooked up to a 600 watt 50/200kHz

transducer. To ensure everyone else who needs to know can locate her at a moment's notice she is fitted with a Simrad NAIS 300, Black Box AIS transceiver. The broadband radar has proved to be perfect for close detection of targets between Russell and Paihia.

Finally, for radio communications, she has a Cobra MRF 80B VHF marine radio. This sounds like a lot of hi-tech kit for what is essentially a cross-harbour, short-journey tram, we thought. That was until we remembered her route crosses the main shipping channel to Opuia and its large marina.

Don't forget, the *Bay Belle II* is expected to operate in all conditions, including rain, hail and fog, and during all but the most violent storms, because she forms a key part of the Bay of Islands' commuter life and infrastructure.

She is powered by a Scania D1 1265M marine diesel



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The cross-passage behind the wheelhouse

producing 265kW @ 2100rpm and driving an 812mm propeller. This single-engine combination gives a service speed of 12 knots.

The decision to go with Scania for the main propulsion was easy, said operations manager Barry Nielson. "We already have several Scania engines in operation within our marine fleet, as well as several 48-seat Scania coaches. This new engine fits nicely into our existing training, maintenance and service schedules," said Barry.

The engine may be accessed via a flush hatch in the centre aisle of the main cabin sole. Further aft, directly over the engine, three more panels can be unlatched and lifted to give easy access for routine servicing.

The area under the cabin sole is fully insulated to ensure the noise does not intrude on commuters' wistful thoughts ▶



Hatch to the lazarette

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*Bay Belle II* is built for a purpose and ease of operation over long hours




The *Bay Belle II* sees a return to the principles of the hardworking, small ferries of yesteryear

and hull will be left to weather and take on her own natural, protective patina, in keeping with the company's environmental policy.

Their recent EnviroGold Award, awarded by Qualmark in recognition of the company's efforts and commitment to reduce their operational impact on the environment, is to be applauded.

The *Bay Belle II* sees a return to the principles of the hardworking, reliable, people-moving small ferries of yesteryear.

She has a functional, almost utilitarian look about her, but given the number of daily trips she is expected to do, week after week and year after year, functionality is the key aspect that will ensure her operating success into the next half century. 

of yet another day in paradise or the ambience of the occasion for tourists.

Outwardly, the vessel displays good lines with a fine entry, spreading quickly to a large, load-carrying hull that generates minimal wash at service speeds. The rising chine quickly turns the bow wave while it is still green, reducing the tendency to toss spray that may be picked up by the breeze.

The reverse sheer windows up for'ard are an excellent choice, as they reduce glare, are easy to clear in the rain and provide more space in the wheelhouse. Above and behind the wheelhouse, a low screen softens the overall look of the topsides and affords some shelter from the wind for those on the observation deck.

Fullers InterCity Ferries decided not to paint or treat the alloy structure and apart from the graphics, the topsides

#### SPECIFICATIONS

Hull	Aluminum
Length overall	15.95m
Beam	4.98m
Draught at full load	1.3m
Displacement	27 tonnes
Engine	Scania D1 1265M
Power	236kW @ 2100rpm
Propeller	812mm
Speed	12 knots
Passengers	100 pax
Designer and builder	Gough Bros
SSM company	Maritime Management Services Ltd