

Voyage North with Tropicbird
By Jon Goodsall

Following the exhibition of the good ship "Tropicbird" in the Sanctuary Cove boat show, we (Bill Cole and Jon and Rosemary Goodsall) finally took delivery on the 28th May at Hope Island marina, squeezed in 580 litres of fuel, filled the water tanks to the brim, loaded up with the mountain of provisions required for a long trip and made ready to set forth on the morrow. Little did we know what the morrow had in store for us. It really was a repeat of the previous four days, when anything that could go wrong, did!

We departed at 0600 hrs on the morning of the 29th, hoping to make Mooloolaba that afternoon. After a good run through the Broadwater, where we found Tropicbirds performance had been unaffected by the weight we had added, we started to run across Moreton Bay, a nasty stretch of water. We had planned to run up to Tangalooma, and then proceed up channel to Caloundra and then on to our destination. By the time we reached Tangalooma, the weather was looking far from fair, and we decided to call it a day, and anchored up opposite the resort. Just as we set the anchor, we were hit by a severe squall with winds gusting 50 kts; it proved the ground tackle was up to the task and that we had set it properly.

It eventuated that we were to spend five long days and nights in pouring rain and strong winds, playing cards, reading and praying for the weather to break. Finally, the gods looked kindly on us, and we set off for our almost forgotten destination, Mooloolaba, on the morning of the 3rd June at 0630 hrs. Moreton Bay was up to its normal tricks, with the 4 metre swell breaking on the shallow banks, and giving us an interesting ride. Once out into the coastal waters, the swell was on our starboard quarter, and with 15-20 kts of SE, we were zooming along. Tropicbird handled the conditions well, and we were at the mouth of the river at 1200 hrs.

The entry into the river was somewhat hairy, as the flood had created a sandbar at the mouth, on which the swell was breaking. So it was a question of waiting for a break in the sets, and then sallying forth at great speed. All was going well until we noticed a surfer on his board attempting to catch a wave at the mouth, and in a direct line with our course! He did get out of the way, in some haste!

We refuelled, reprovisioned, and received some excellent service the local Raymarine dealer who resolved some problems we were having with the communication between the auto pilot and plotter enjoyed a good night out with old friends, and the next morning were off to Double Island Point for an overnight prior to crossing the Wide Bay bar the next day. Sea conditions had moderated considerably, and we had a very comfortable run up the coast, at around 16 knots and the boat behaving impeccably.

We crossed the Bar at 0900 hrs and had a wonderful run up the Great Sandy Strait and across Hervey bay to Bundaberg, in glass conditions, so we decided to test her legs. This demonstrated one of the great attributes of the displacement hull form with no change in attitude or fuss as we ran at 20 knots. The ride was excellent, and we were soon in the marina having a long hot shower.

Off the next morning at sparrow, with our destination being Gladstone. Once again, the conditions were perfect and we were tootling along at 16 knots until we hit a fog at Bustard Head, which slowed us down for about half an hour. Once clear, we pushed on, arriving at about 1500 hrs, picking up more fuel before enjoying the delights of Gladstone.

Despite a light fog in the area, we were away next morning, 6th June, around 0900 hrs, timed to get us through the Narrows, with the idea of overnighing in the Shoalwater Bay region, a lovely area, with beautiful island groups just begging for visitors (but not too many!). The Narrows is a short cut on the inside of Curtis Island, and dries. The passage can only be worked at a tide depth (Gladstone) of 1.5 m

plus draft. This was where Tropicbird with her shallow draft and protected propellers excelled, and we sailed through with a few open mouths gazing at us! You know what we mean!

As we transited Great Keppel Island the South East Trades started to make their presence felt, and by the time we were abeam Port Clinton, the wind had built from calm to 15-20 knots and building, so we decided to make for a beautiful little bay known as Pearl Bay. It really is a pearl, giving shelter from east through to north, and with magnificent pine and eucalypt forest coming down to water's edge. We were hoping that the trades would ease off the next day, but we were to be disappointed yet again, and we ended up staying for four nights. It was, however, a more preferable location than Tangalooma, with a lovely beach to walk on, turtles to save from disaster, and a wonderful couple who were sailing up to Magnetic Island in their Wharham catamaran.

The next stage of our trip proved to be the most taxing in terms of the weather. Because of the delays in starting the trip, and the further delays because of the weather, our original plan of spending time in the Shoalwater Bay area had to be abandoned, and we proposed to go to the Whitsunday Islands in two stages. Both stages were to be 10-12 hours duration, and they were predicated on good weather- winds in the 10-15 knots range and seas 1-1.5 m. We must have been dreaming; we ended up with 15-20 knots, and 2-2.5 m seas. Departing at 0630 hrs on the 10th June, the conditions were to test the boat to the full. With the seas astern, we opted to hand steer a zig zag course, which from the comfort of the helm station with its excellent visibility was a pleasant alternative to the auto pilot. After five hours, we decided to call it a day and to shelter behind Hexham Island, an excellent anchorage with natural breakwaters extending down both sides of the bay. A group of hardy fishermen was in the process of setting up camp on the island and roaring off in their boats to acquire some dinner, with little luck (or so they told us). A pair of ospreys and their offspring kept us amused with their attempts to satisfy the chick's hunger. The next day, our friends in the Wharham cat arrived, and once they had squared away, came across with some lovely fresh garfish, which we had great pleasure in consuming with gusto that night. In the meantime, the fishermen had broken camp and headed off for the mainland, but ran out of fuel some three miles before their destination. The radio was good listening!

The next day the wind had dropped to 10-15 knots, but the seas were still in the 2 m range. We decided to head off for St. Bees and Keswick Islands, and left around 0630 hrs. The pangs of hunger got to us about three hours later, so we hauled off and anchored up in the lee of Digby Island to feed the inner men and woman. Once satisfied, we set off for our destination, arriving around 1500 hrs. Once again the decision was made to hand steer in the following sea and the boat performed well.

Following a restful night, we were off early for Hamilton Island, where we intended to leave the boat as we were all running out of time to reach Cairns before other commitments arose. Conditions were much the same as the previous two days, and again we hand steered the course.

Hamilton Is. marina staff were excellent. They went out of their way to find us a berth when the marina was preparing for an influx of outrigger canoe contestants, to be closely followed by the Race Week sailors. And the boat was well looked after.

The resumption of the trip was delayed for a month whilst the weather sorted itself out; strong wind warnings, rain and general unpleasantness! However on the 17th July, the forecast was good for three days, and we (Bill and Jon) jumped on a plane for Hamilton Island, arriving at 0900 hrs. We bought some minor provisions, payed our dues, and off at 1000 hrs. Our overnight was to be in the lee of Cape Upstart, and our arrival at around 1500 hrs brought the locals out to have a stickybeak at this flash new boat. It is fair to say that they were amazed at the economy.

The next day was to be a long haul, 130 nm, to Cardwell where we proposed to refuel and overnight. So, yet again, it was early away in magnificent conditions, SE at 5-10 knots and seas <0.5 m. We arrived at the southern end of the Hinchinbrook channel around 1300 hrs and at Cardwell around 1500

hrs, averaging 16 knots. The channel into the marina at Pt. Hinchinbrook is badly silted, and we arrived on the afternoon of the spring low tide, 0.1 above LAT. The locals were all signing to us that there was no water, and could not believe it when we proceeded in with about 0.6m of water under us. After refuelling, we set course for Goold Is. for a very peaceful night.

The final day was to be a 120 nm run in almost calm conditions, and we ran at an average of 18 knots, after allowing time to gaze at seven pods of humpback whales frolicking on their way south. We tied up at 1330 hrs at the Half Moon Bay marina, well satisfied with our purchase and the performance of the boat.

While we did not carry out any definitive fuel economy tests on the voyage, depending on whether we ran at around 14 - 15 knots or 18 - 19 knots, consumption was between 1.25 & 1.5 litres per nautical mile, under the prevailing conditions, which we consider to be extremely good.