



REFLECTIONS 150 YEARS

Bruce Dover

Bruce Dover: I started probably as an eight or nine-year-old off a little while, my dad used to take us out on a Moth in the Gold Coast there for a few years, which was where I started. But I probably really didn't start again till I was in Singapore, and that was in the years of, I guess, 1983 to 88, and coincided with the time that Jim Lawler was in Singapore, and it was Jim who got me back into sailing in Singapore.

Richard Palfreyman: Is that where you met up with Ian Macintosh as well?

BD: Yeah, I mean Ian Macintosh was there about the same time, and Ian and I both through journalism of course, because I was there as a foreign correspondent, and Ian was there as manager of the ABC Asia Bureau, and Jim was in the lookout for some crew, and we started sailing with Jim out of the Changi Sailing Club there. Both developed I guess a bit of an interest, and it was Jim (who) became the catalyst to get us into not just sailing there, but I guess into offshore sailing, and then of course the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club.

RP: By that time, Mac had come back from Singapore as well, he'd brought down a small yacht called *Sawasdee*, and I think you ended up sailing with him and partnering with him.

BD: Well we had *Sawasdee* up in Singapore and sailed on *Sawasdee* up there for a period. I came back a little earlier than Mac, and I went to Melbourne initially, and then Mac came back and was going to bring the boat back. He then asked me whether I'd become a partner, and agreed obviously, and he managed to get it into a 40-foot container and get it back to Sydney.

I managed to finagle a move then from Melbourne to Sydney, convincing them that the Melbourne Herald needed a Sydney correspondent, and so we began sailing *Sawasdee* there, initially just casually in the weekends and on the twilights. But it was a good little boat, a very forgiving boat for a couple of learners like us I suppose but we both continued to sail with old Jim Lawler on both *Morning Tide* and then *Charisma*.

RP: Right, you must have had some great trips on *Charisma*. Sydney to Hobart?

BD: We all did, I guess, a lot of offshore, a lot of the short offshore races, and *Charisma*, despite being more of a cruising boat than a racing boat, was very competitive. Jim was very selective I suppose about the sort of people he chose to have his crew. We sailed the

boat hard, but always, there was never any shouting. It was always done with a great good deal of good humour, but the people you sailed with had all done a tremendous amount of sailing, a lot of offshore sailing.

I mean, Trevor Cosh, young Jim Lawler, who'd done countless races...collectively, they had hundreds (of) Sydney-Hobarts between them. So, they were great blokes to learn from. We did countless Sydney to Gold Coast races. I did two Hobarts on it as well. It was just a great learning experience.

I mean, Jim was not only a consummate sailor, but seamanship was one of the things that he taught all of us, and I think it's one of the things that we all took away from the period that we all sailed with Jim, was just that both sailing and seamanship, and you need both to be competitive and look after your crew.

RP: You couldn't have asked for a better mentor or a teacher, I guess, in both sailing and life than Jim.

BD: I think Jim gravitated to people like Macintosh and myself and even Trevor Cosh. We'd all been overseas, and all spent a time overseas, and when you came back to Australia, I think it can be very parochial, and it takes a while to adjust, and I think we'd all come back within a few years of each other, I suppose. I think we all struggled to reacquaint ourselves, having been on the world stage and then suddenly back in good old parochial Sydney. So there's a common bond there. Jim was very much about go for a sail, get out there, be competitive, to come back and sit in the cockpit and tell a few old war stories and have a beer and solve the problems of the world.

RP: And after Jim was lost in that tragic (1998) Hobart race, you guys all still stuck together. I think you ended up in a consortium with *Azzurro*.

BD: As you say, there was always a core of us who'd sailed with Jim at that stage, I suppose, for 10 or 12 years, and Jim was certainly the nucleus. In 98, I'd just come back from Beijing at that stage, Macca had come back from Jakarta, Coshy was just in the middle. None of us could actually have the time that year to go down in *Charisma* to do the Hobart. So Jim was sort of co-opted to go down on *Winston Churchill*. And I think he regretted the decision because he was, for the first time, going with people he didn't really know on a boat that he hadn't fully prepared and wasn't really happy with. Interestingly, he called all of us the day or so before the race. We all had this weird conversation as though we knew that something was amiss. Tragically, the *Churchill* was lost, and Jim was one of those.

And afterwards, it left a huge hole, I think, in all of our lives. He really had been the nucleus, but we were all determined. Well, I guess the core of us, which was Trevor Cosh, Jim Lawler, Macca and myself decided we should try to continue on. And so we then started to cast around, and had a couple of trips to New Zealand, because New Zealand was still the best place to find the sorts of boats that we were looking for. And yes, we finally found *Azzurro*, which was a Clark 46, which Coshy and I and a few other friends of Coshy's sailed back from Auckland back to Sydney.

RP: And from all accounts, that was a fairly rough and eventful voyage.

BD: We had four or five days of the most beautiful, stunning sailing where we were making great time, averaging seven, eight knots in lovely reaching weather in blue skies. We were eating ice cream, the fridge worked and cold beer. But on about day five or six, we got caught in a clear air front where...we were receiving weather faxes on the HF radio, and we could see that there was a bit of activity around. And so we were being reasonably cautious and we knew that there were a couple of fronts out there. So we reefed right down, had just the storm jib up, although it was a very big storm jib in our opinion. Two fronts went through and, yes, there was a bit of breeze, and we could see the cloud and lightning and so forth. But about two o'clock in the morning, the stars were out, and the boat was wallowing around. So we thought, oh, well, we'll put the sails back up.

So we put the full main back up and the jib was on, and out of nowhere we just got this 50, 60 knot blast that hit just like a thunderbolt...and there was just no sign, and it just suddenly blew and blew. We had to try to get the main back down and get the boat back under control. But because we'd had such a gentle sail, we'd been just taking off our PFDs and safety harnesses and swapping (them). As the other crew came up, you'd just hand over yours and you'd go and find a bunk.

Of course, at this stage, we needed all hands on deck and everybody was struggling to find their tethers and their PFDs. So there was an enormous kerfuffle downstairs as the bunks were overturned and people. In the meantime, Coshy and he had a mate of his who had been a ship's captain and, I mean, an oil tanker, but had never sailed before. But Coshy simply gave him a course and said, and Coshy was trying to play this 46-foot boat, with full main and 50, 60 knots, like a dinghy trying to just play the main in and out. And the boat was vibrating and then I had to try to get up and get the main down. And it had the old slugs in the (mast) track. And of course, at this stage, we were running...and it took us nearly an hour to claw it down. And my fingers, the joints in my fingers, from trying to drag (it down). We finally got the main down and tied up, but we were still doing eight or nine knots. We were heading back towards New Zealand!

And so we had to then try and turn the boat round because the seas were building. So just trying to jive the boat around was pretty scary because we had this engine at full speed and picked the gap between the waves and then...because if you got caught halfway around, you were going to be just broached. Well, so we managed to get round, but the wind just kept blowing and a couple of the crew had hurt themselves...one had cracked some ribs and (had) sort of severe sea sickness. So it ended up that, given the conditions, that only Coshy and I could actually steer the boat. And it just blew for about another 36, 40 hours at 40-plus knots. And so you had to surf every wave and surf down the other side. And so out of the corner of your eye, you can actually see the breaking wave behind you, and it broke, and you had to literally surf every wave. So it got to the stage where the boat had no coamings in the back. So every wave, sort of, would fill the cockpit...so you're up to your waist in water as you tried to sit down and get a bit of rest. But we could do probably just 20 minutes, 15 or 20 minutes at the most, before you were absolutely exhausted...and you'd just go and plonk yourself down in the cockpit. You can see why it's

fatigue which must catch shorthanders because you got to the stage where you're literally hallucinating. But we had to keep trying to go until the breeze finally died, and then there was another two days to go...but it was absolutely exhausting. I mean, I've never been so tired.

RP: How successful were you with *Azzurro* when you raced it back here?

BD: We did some of the Coffs Harbour races, the Gold Coast races, Lord Howe. I mean, she won the Lord Howe race. We certainly won her division there against some pretty hot competition, and she was a placegetter. It was a very sensitive boat to sail, and a good big old IOR boat with a very big main that you have to have it right in the slot. I mean, if you had it in the slot, the boat would be a knot and a half faster, and it'd just take off. But if you weren't in the slot, and it was such a narrow slot, that you could just feel it just wasn't right. In the right conditions the boat went surprisingly well. I mean, it was a timber boat. Again, some of the hot shots, they were often surprised. The boat, timber boat and old boat went very, very well in the light as well. But we never did do a Hobart in it.

At that stage, I'd started to look around for a boat of my own....just because I had aspirations to do a bit more racing and cruising, I suppose. And so I left the syndicate and that's when Robin Harris took over my position. The boat continued, *Azzurro* continued for another couple of years. But then I think everybody decided they were looking to do some other things with boats, and so she was sold.

RP: So in looking for your next boat, you again turned to New Zealand and again went over to pick it up. And that as well is another story, I think.

BD: I'd been looking at boats for six or eight years. And even before I came back from Beijing and Hong Kong, I used to talk to old Jim Lawler every week about boats that I'd seen or boats he'd recommend. And I kicked the tyres of boats all around Asia from Taiwan to Hong Kong to Singapore.

At that stage, the internet was starting to come into its own and people were starting to put boats online. And a bloke down in Picton, in New Zealand, thought he'd try out this internet thing by putting this boat up that had just come on the market. And I think within about six hours of him putting it up, I'd put a phone call in! And he was amazed...he'd never, he couldn't believe this thing actually worked!

It was the sort of boat that Jim had often talked about. It was a cruiser racer, I suppose, a bit older style. It was an Alan Warwick design, and Alan Warwick was an architect by training, so the boat was always very cleverly fitted out inside. And the new owner had bought it only three or four years previously. And he wanted to do a Sydney to Hobart and Auckland to Noumea race. And he spent about \$300,000 New Zealand dollars getting it up to full ABS, American Bureau of Shipping, Cat One. He'd put a new keel on it, a new rudder. It had been strengthened throughout inside. It had new sails. And then he did the '99 Sydney of Hobart, and the Auckland to Noumea, and that was it. He ticked that box, and so it was up for sale!

And at that stage, the Kiwi dollar to the US dollar, because I was working for CNN at that stage and being paid in US dollars, it was a great buy in US dollars. And so I went down and had a look at it and thought, look, it just ticked all the boxes. It was comfy, but still reasonably competitive...a timber boat, triple skin Kauri.

RP: So you and a couple of others went over to pick it up in Picton...I think that's on the north of the South Island...

BD: This time it was myself and Jim Lawler, Ken White, his partner, who was a French lady who was actually a great cook...and Ken himself had done a lot of miles as a solo sailor, and a couple of other mates, and brought it back from Picton. Again, we had some very nice few days where Ken would get up in the morning and cook fresh bread and coffee, and Anik would prepare a three course French meal most evenings, so we had a few lovely days. But then once again, in that eight, 10-day voyage back from New Zealand, you get smashed along there somewhere and we got 40, 50 knots, but the boat handled it very, very well.

RP: Can I go back just briefly to bringing *Azzurro* back over? Was there an incident on that where the EPIRB went overboard and Coshy's wife thought he was lost at sea?

BD: In that whole incident where we (had) 40, 50 knots, the EPIRB was actually on the back of the boat, but *Azzurro* had runners and jumpers, and the point when we were trying to actually jibe the boat...one of the runners must have flipped the EPIRB into the water. So the next minute we could see behind us, the light, it's on, it's gone off and the light's flashing and we got on the radio, and the only guy (was) at Sydney radio who couldn't understand, we were trying to tell him that the EPIRB had gone off, it was lost, (but) that we weren't in trouble. But we needed to report it because otherwise they launch the full search and rescue.

By this stage, it's an hour or so. Well, because the EPIRB had worked and AMSA had picked up the signal, and of course it had gone (off) and yes, they were aware that we were on a voyage, and of course they immediately rang the contacts and the first contact on the list was Viv Cosh, Trevor's partner. So she's got a call saying that this boat's halfway back from New Zealand, the EPIRB's gone off...does she know that? You know, (what) do you think? She's got no idea!

But fortunately, there's Russell Radio in New Zealand was listening into the conversation and finally after about, so he could hear us trying to explain, he came on the radio and said, listen, I'll ring AMSA and explain what's happening and let them know that you're okay. So fortunately, at about 30 minutes after poor old Viv had rung everybody else and they were gearing up - good God what's happened? - they got a call saying they'd heard from us, and it was all okay, we were under way.

RP: One of the things about *EZ Street* that I really admire, and your seamanship, is the way you handle that big boat by yourself. I think you've done some single-handed cruising in it.

BD: Yeah, *Azzurro* was a boat that you needed, to shorthand, it meant four people who absolutely knew what they were doing. But *EZ Street* has a much more manageable sail plan and set up so that you could, I mean, certainly shorthanded it meant myself and one other. But one other being somebody with no experience, so you're literally doing it yourself. And so I've sailed it up to Whitsundays. It is a manageable boat, but like all things, you need to think about systems...and I did come out of the Wide Bay Bar there on the way back; I had this big, call it the 'Whomper', but that's a big asymmetric reaching sail. And I had a mate who'd never sailed before and had it up and it's terrific in about 10, 15 knots.

But as we came out of the Wide Bay there, and crossed the bar, the wind just started to build. We were going along, seven, eight knots. Then it started to get dark, and the wind started to build. Suddenly we were getting 20 plus knots, and I had to get forward, but I couldn't really leave the wheel at this stage because the boat was literally surfing down every wave, and we're doing 12, 14 knots at this stage! And there's a fishing fleet of squid boats, but we had to get through. There must've been 30 or 40 squid boats out there. We had to get (the sail) down, and we're getting closer and closer to the Southport bar then and I'm like, how am I going to get this down? Anyway, the autopilot actually held the boat. The boat's very steady, and (so) I put it on autopilot and gave instructions to the bloke. If I should disappear, just to let everything go and dial zero, zero, zero. But I just managed to get forward and get it (down). But we must've travelled between Wide Bay and Southport averaging 12, 14 knots.

RP: You were also part of a crew that took *Gretel II* down to Tasmania, I think. That must've been an epic voyage in a 12 Meter.

BD: Given that *Gretel II* was designed for Rhode Island, and 12 knots, and had no safety lines and was certainly not an offshore boat in terms of being waterproof or weatherproof...but the owner had had the boat in Sydney for a number of years and he'd spent a lot of money having it fitted out, I guess, as a glorified day sailor. It still had the big spinnaker launching manhole in the front of the boat. It had a lot of hydraulics, so everything was hydraulically driven, but very, very complex. It did have a cruising set of sails, but they were still very big sails in a boat that size. And so we had to pick our weather. The breeze was largely fairly light. And going across Bass Strait, we had what the breeze was, what the boat was designed to do. We had 10 or 12 knots just off the bow and the boat was extraordinary. Couldn't hear a thing. It would do eight or nine knots of speed in 10 knots of breeze. You could steer it with your fingertips. You could see what the boat was designed to do. And it was just extraordinary. It was such an efficient boat in that wind speed and that speed.

But unfortunately, as we got down to Tasman Island, we got something like 30 or 40 knots at one stage. And you're talking about a boat that's 33, 34 tons. The boat's doing 12, 14 knots powered up. It's got a little tiny wheel, which is very low geared, so were starting to surf down the waves and having to try and control it. It was busy, but it was like driving a steam train and, again, it did actually power up. As we were coming up into the Derwent, we went from no breeze again to, again, 40, 50 on the nose. And we had to reef it. We were running out of fuel. It was two o'clock in the morning. With the motor at full speed, we did have two reefs and the storm jib up, we were doing about two knots across the ground.

And the owner was very keen to get the boat to the Royal Tasmanian (Yacht Club) no matter what. I asked him how much fuel he had left. And he said he wasn't sure. They didn't ever tell us how big the tank was because they never really used it in an America's Cup boat! We figured we must be getting very low. And then he wanted to see whether he could call someone at two o'clock in the morning to bring out some fuel. And I said, "Look, I don't think anyone's gonna come out in 40 knots at two o'clock in the morning to bring you fuel". He said, "Well, what about the Water Police?" I said, "I don't think the Water Police come out to boats who are running out of fuel in the middle of Storm Bay". And I was the delivery skipper. And I said, "Look, what we're gonna do, we're gonna get up and around Bruny Island and we'll just go and find somewhere to shelter". We had a bit of a standoff and I finally said, "Look, you said I'm the delivery skipper. I'm the skipper, I'll make the decision. I know it's your boat, but if you want it to get there...". Because the idea of trying to short tack up the Derwent in pitch black conditions in 30, 40 knots didn't appeal.

But we did get round, and we found a spot and anchored up...(and) on the next night we had a lovely sail up the river.

RP: This seems to be a good point, I think, to ask you about some of the life lessons you may have learnt from 34 years of sailing large and small keel boats.

BD: The thing about sailing is it's a great team sport, particularly offshore. When you're in a decent blow and the boat's on the edge and you're starting to fall off waves and you've got to go onto the bow and do a sail change, you're absolutely reliant on everybody else doing the job and know what your job is. It's a good lesson in leadership.

People have a very clear understanding of what it is they need to do, and they know how to do it, then they'll get on and do it. And it's that thing of trusting them, as long as everybody's clear about what's expected of them.

That thing of sailing with old Jim is that there was never any shouting. Everybody knew what they had to do and everybody looked after each other. So if you're on the bow and you're being ducked in the water, whoever's with the helm and whoever was on the winches was looking after you, which is an important thing.

One of the mistakes we all can make, and there's been some tragic outcomes, is that sort of task saturation. Where an owner decides he wants to be the owner, the skipper, the tactician, the navigator. And even in a short offshore race, that task saturation, you can easily make a mistake.

I mean, if you're on the helm, you need to be on the helm and not looking at the sails or trying to tell people what to do. Your job is to steer the boat. And you can't steer the boat and be navigating as well.

I've nearly made the same mistake myself. Just got tired and nearly went round the wrong island or into the wrong place and could have put the boat on the rocks.

RP: By profession, you're a journalist, a foreign correspondent, an author, a media consultant, a media manager. You've done a lot of stuff over the last 40 years or so. Tell me a little bit more about your background. You started, I think, as a cadet journalist with the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane?

BD: Yes, with the *Brisbane Telegraph*, which was the then afternoon paper. So I started as a cadet by accident. I was actually going to go and study medicine, but I was never quite sure about that. But my sister found and saw an ad in the paper for cadetships and she said that I should apply.

I mean, I'd only been to a small public school, Boonah State High School. And there was a new editor in, who'd just arrived at the *Telegraph*, who'd just come from Melbourne. He was a bit of the old school, and both old school in every sense, the old school tie. Someone had told him at one of the clubs there in Brisbane that (his son) was coming (in) for an interview, that his son went to Brisbane State High. And the Brisbane State High, of course, is one of the better private schools. But I turned up, and he's interviewing me and he's looking at my tie and he says, "Oh, B-S-H, eh?" You know, wink, wink! I had no idea, what he was talking about, but thought he liked my tie. Anyway, he said, don't you worry, mate, it'll be okay. And so the next minute...you're starting on Monday, you've got the job. And I thought, no way! (On the) Monday I start, I get called into the office. This bloke says, you're not from Brisbane State High, are you? I said, no, I'm from Boonah State High (laughter). He'd apparently embarrassed himself because he'd told this bloke that his son was right and was in (to the job), but I got the job as a result of the old school tie.

RP: Well, they obviously made a pretty good choice because you ended up down in Brisbane with the *Herald Sun* and then as a foreign correspondent in Singapore. And between that, you'd done stints in Canberra as a political correspondent.

BD: Went from the *Telegraph* down to the *Melbourne Herald*, which was another afternoon newspaper. And the poor old *Telegraph* closed a few years later, as most afternoon newspapers were.

But in those days, the *Herald & Weekly Times* was still a very wealthy and powerful organisation. It owned the *Courier Mail*, the *Melbourne Herald* and the *Sun Pictorial*. Had the interview in the Adelaide newspaper and the Perth News. So again, by good luck, there was the position in Singapore came up and the writer or their correspondent up there had apparently had writer's block for nearly 12 months and hadn't filed.

And they'd actually had chosen somebody else who then at the very last moment couldn't go, but they had to fill the position within a couple of weeks because the correspondent up there wanted to get out. So I was in Canberra at the time and I got a call from the editor, would you like to go to Singapore? I thought he meant for a couple of weeks on a junket or something.

I said, oh yeah, sure. He said, look, you're gonna leave in a week's time and you're gonna be there for three years. How's that?

It was a bit of a shock, a bit of a shock to my partner at the time, I think that I was leaving town. But within a couple of weeks, I arrived in Singapore as the Southeast Asian Correspondent. The next three or four years were a pretty exciting time. In Southeast Asia, we had the downfall of the Marcos regime, the Indira Gandhi assassination...

RP: I think you won the prestigious Perkin Award, didn't you?

BD: In that year, we had Father Brian Gore, the Australian priest who was arrested for the murder charges...it was a pretty eventful year, 1986, I think. Yes, I was awarded the Graham Perkin Australian Journalist of the Year for my foreign news coverage. It was a time the papers still had money to fund foreign correspondents, so you could literally go anywhere. And there was a great bunch of fellow foreign correspondents in the region at the time...Ian Macintosh, Paul Lockyer. I spent some time with Neil Davis before he died. Neil took all young Australian journalists under his wing, and he was a great mentor just in the way that he operated in Asia and the contacts he had. And he was very, very generous in the way that he shared his knowledge.

RP: Then also, I think you spent a lot of time in China on behalf of Rupert Murdoch.

BD: I came back to Australia after my stint in Singapore and worked in television for a while with Channel 10 and people like Chris Masters and others, on the short-lived...

RP: It was on *Page One*?

BD: *Page One*. Then that folded and I went back to *News*...and I went back to *The Australian* and I was deputy editor of *The Australian* a couple of years. But then my wife was offered a job back in Vietnam to set up the *Fred Hollows Foundation*.

I somehow convinced Ken Cowley, who was then the head of *News Limited* in Australia, that maybe they'd find a role up there. And, somehow, I ended up in a business development role working for the parent company *News Corporation*, and that included *20th Century Fox*, (and) *Star TV*.

Rupert was desperate to break into China, with 1.2 billion potential television viewers there. And he had to start to find a way to get the Chinese to trust him. Rupert had just taken over *Star TV* at that stage, which gave him access into China. But unfortunately, about a year after having purchased it, he made that famous speech in which he said that satellite technology was an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere.

The Chinese thought they might've been talking about him. And so it was a very tough time, but we managed to somehow finagle a deal where we were going into joint venture with the *People's Daily*, official mouthpiece of the Communist Party in China, to form an internet venture to put together an online technology newspaper.

RP: But then you had the cheek to actually write a book titled *Rupert's Adventures in China*, which wouldn't have gone down well with the boss, I wouldn't have thought.

BD: Rupert's third wife, Wendy Deng, was actually working for me. And I can sort of claim credit for introducing Wendy to Rupert in the sense that, at a cocktail party, I said, Wendy, Rupert, Rupert, Wendy...and the rest was history.

Look, it was a fascinating time to be in China, and to be Rupert's man in China, I suppose, if you like. I mean, I wrote a book, which is really just a journalistic account of Rupert's attempts to crack the market. And he was, by most accounts, happy with the book, except for where I may have revealed accidentally that his relationship with Wendy had started before he'd actually left his second wife, Anna, and he'd told the children otherwise. And so, that he felt a little bit slighted by.

RP: I think it's time to get back to sailing. You've been an amateur's member now for 34, 35 years this year. How would you sum up the club as it celebrates its 150th anniversary?

BD: The Amateurs has always set itself apart. It came into being as an alternate to the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, which was wealthy men with professional crew and boats. And the Amateurs was set up to try and provide an outlet for ordinary people to get out and sail and get into the sport of sailing.

And there is this great Corinthian spirit about the Amateurs. It's still pretty much as it's always been. It's very much about just people and their boats getting out...and I mean, seamanship, it's still a thing that's always been part of what the club's tried to promote. We're keen to promote and help people learn to be better sailors and better seamen. It's just that great conviviality around the club. And I think when I first joined the club in '87, '88, one of the first things that I was shanghaied into was a working bee (by) the then Commodore Bob Lawler, they were replacing the deck. And as someone who'd just joined the club, it was a great way to actually meet people that you might not normally meet, crew that you'd never normally come across.

And it just gave you a bit of a sense of ownership of the club. And I think, isn't this great? I'd grown up in a country town and that was the way things happened in the country town. When people were in trouble, you even just got together and did things. And I thought that was great. And I thought, well, this is just sort of club that would suit me.

My time at the club, I always tried to continue that idea.

RP: Is that what prompted you to join the Board in 2007?

BD: I'm not sure it was my idea to join the Board, but there'd been a bit of a coup a few years earlier. At the time that Bob Lawler was Commodore, many of the flag officers were also offshore sailors. And Bob was a bit of a 'my way or the highway' sort of bloke.

And he got an awful lot of stuff done, Bob, but Bob wasn't much for consensus, I suppose. And there'd been a bit of a divide, I suppose, factional had developed in the club between, I suppose, the offshore brigade, as we were called, and the older classic boat owners and...

RP: Saturday sailors?

BD: Saturday sailors. There'd been a bit of a coup where, instead of the normal turnover where Bob would stand down and the Vice Commodore would become Commodore and so forth, the classic boat owners mounted a bit of a coup and there were proxy battles and a lot of dead men voted and they were trawling the people, the aged homes of Sydney getting these. And as a result, they threw out the Board. And so, at that stage, there was a very strong offshore division. Four or five amateur's boats would go to Sydney Harbor every year. There was a bit of a standoff between the sides. And there was a bit of a change in the whole attitude at the club. And the new Board, new Commodore, didn't believe in working bees. And they thought that everything just got contractors in. And so there was a period where working bees disappeared. It was just paid contractors taking over.

And then the next Commodore, Bill Hogan came in. And I think Bill was keen to try to make amends. I don't know who he talked to, but somehow the offshore blokes pushed me forward. And suddenly I found myself that I was on the Board and I was the offshore representative there. I mean, so I'm not sure I volunteered, but I could see that it made sense.

RP: So was there an offshore philosophy which you were bringing back into the club?

BD: Very quickly, Bill asked me then to go from being just a director to become a flag officer as the Rear Commodore. One of the things that I convinced Bill to (do) was also to get Trevor Cosh on the Board. The great thing about the offshore group, and particularly sailing with Jim and Coshy, it was this self-reliance. And we were all taught to look after the boat, and we all serviced the engines and we all put a new keel on *Charisma*. We've always done a lot of our work ourselves.

And in the working bees earlier, it was predominantly offshore people who turned up and did the bulk of the work because that was just what we did. Because we had skippers and owners who were engineers and who were very good at it and organising us, but that was part of it. One of the things I wanted to do when I came onto the Board was to try to re-invigorate this idea of working bees and teamwork and giving everybody a bit of a sense of ownership of the club. And Coshy's a marine engineer and he's great on the idea of preventative maintenance. Up until that stage, the club just kept running (things) until they broke and then you'd have to go and get a new one. Coshy started to instil this idea of preventative maintenance and so we started to look around at a program of refurbishing.

Well, it started out as a small program. We ended up refurbishing the entire club, I think, in one means or another. But it was that idea of just trying to reinstate some of that feeling of collegiality for like and that comradeship that comes with working with other people and around a club and everybody does feel a sense of ownership there.

RP: Well, I think most members regard your time as Commodore as a period of renaissance and that both in its efforts to bolster the ageing membership, you changed the constitution, you upgraded many of the club's facilities. Let's start with membership.

BD: One of the things that I noticed when I came onto the Board was that the membership was declining. Like all sporting clubs, it was getting harder to bring new members on and the average age of the club, when I joined the club in '88, the average age of a lot of us was probably 35, 40. Twenty years later, it was the same membership, except we're all just older.

And so suddenly the average age was 60 plus. I had advocated for some time, and Trevor Cosh and I both, that we should look at the idea of some sort of crew membership which would encourage a pathway for others to get through. But there was a lot of opposition. We tried over a couple of years, but we were opposed on the Board and people just said, oh no, you couldn't have another level of membership and how would we do it? And wasn't this that skippers and owners feel that they were somehow being duded? But when I took over as Commodore, I actually produced a graph and some figures which showed that if we kept going the way we were, that by about 2027 we'd actually have more non-paying members than we had paying members. And the average age was going to be over 70.

RP: Everybody on the life membership?

BD: There was a very big influx around the same period that I joined all the years before. Something like 20% of your members are going to become life members. And so I think when people saw the actual graph and the crossover, it started to get their attention. So we proposed two things. One was a change in the life membership arrangement. So if you still had a boat and you were still active, then after 35 years, you didn't become a full life member. After 35 years, you'd get a 35% discount. And at 40 years, you got a 40% discount. And if you made it beyond that, you were no longer had to pay.

RP: So was that part of the constitutional changes?

BD: Yeah, so part of the constitutional change was (a) the introduction of what we call the active life membership. And then the other thing was to actually introduce crew membership. On a Friday night, we often had 150, 160 people down there on a twilight, of which 50 were potentially members and the rest were just guests and crew or people who came. And even on Saturday racing, a lot of the crew...I mean, yes, the boat owners were full members, but there were people who'd been coming for 30 years that still weren't a member. And we had none of their details. We didn't even have any record of who they were.

So I started to propose the idea of a crew membership, both as a pathway that people who came on as crew members might actually then become full members down the track. It also said, look, there's a lot of people here who like the club. They've been coming for 20 years. If you gave them a formula and reason to join, perhaps they might actually pay up. And it was fixed at about a third, I think, of the full membership with the idea that

after three years, they'd have to be offered to become a full member. But it's actually worked very well.

So from a period where we were down to about 360, 380 members, we're almost at 500, which includes 100 crew members now who are all paying annual fees and a number of now who've actually bought boats and converted to full membership.

RP: You've spoken quite rightly about the huge value of volunteerism. What are some of the major projects over the last five years or so that you and Coshy have overseen?

BD: One of the things that Coshy and I were aware of was the place was getting a bit run down. We'd actually acquired the Green Shed. The Mosman Amateur Sailing Club had basically become defunct. There was a deal done where we would assume the liabilities of the club and take over the Green shed. But the Green Shed initially was decrepit. It was run down. They'd let out some space, I think, to the local private schools to store their Lasers. But that had fallen through. Coshy and I put up a proposal to rescue it because it would be a great facility if we actually restored the pontoons and the deck. As a place to work on your boat it's a fantastic idea.

Well, I guess, was the first of the projects. We managed to get a grant from the government. I think I said that we were actually building the Mosman Seamanship Training and Sailing Institute. With volunteers, we re-piled the place. We put a new deck on it. We re-planked all of the ramps. And suddenly people saw that, wow. And there was just a great atmosphere. I mean, it's the first time there was a working bee on again and there was a benefit, and it was great.

I think then we decided we'd replank the entire deck at the (main) clubhouse. And then, of course, as we pull up the planks, we discovered that all the joists were rotten, and the posts were gone. So a project that was gonna take a couple of weekends took four or five weekends. (With) a lot of work by volunteers we rebuilt the deck at the club.

The slipways and the cradles were actually close to falling apart. And we'd been quoted something in the order, for new cradles and slipways and rails, of about \$1.2 million for which the club had nowhere near the reserves. In the end, Coshy designed the cradles. We constructed and built them, again with volunteer labour. We replaced the rails, which I think the total cost was about \$30,000. And they're actually two of the best cradles of that type in the harbour.

The fast tender, the *Jack Millard* crane, again, we discovered was not actually up to spec. And we had to build a new one. Once again, I think we were quoted \$72,000 by an outside contractor. And I think for \$3,500 worth of steel, Coshy designed one. We had another of the members certify it. And again, it was welded and erected on site and put up.

The shed itself, the dinghy shed, we completely rebuilt and re-piled.

RP: And as well as keeping up the physical assets of the club, there's also the question of maintaining the various leases with government departments that control some of the aspects of our being there. Where do we stand with those issues at the moment?

BD: One of the issues, again, when I came as Commodore was that the club was still operating a little bit like a little club from the 1960s. In fact, we were still doing timesheets the same way we'd done them in 1963, because we still found the timesheets from 1963 hidden up in the attics. But there are a whole range of things from the governance side that we had to (do to) bring the club into the 21st century.

All of the leases needed to be renegotiated. Again, there were some issues in there which required a bit of finessing because our leases are complex and that part of the land we occupy, the buildings, is Maritime's responsibility; other parts are with the North Sydney Council, and the Green Shed is with the Mosman (Council). So, we're having these multiple negotiations. There were some issues there which had been glanced over in the past as to where we were supposed to be mooring boats. In fact, we know that the position where we moor the *Nancy K*, we discovered was outside our lease. And Maritime had actually outsourced the contract negotiations to a third party who was making a big song and dance about the fact, so we had to declare that the *Nancy* was in fact moored on the holding mooring. But, during working hours or when the wind was blowing more than 10 knots, needed to be alongside. And the *Jack Millard* wasn't supposed to be on the deck. But we put rescue boat on the side of the *Jack Millard* and managed to say that, no, it was a Mosman Bay rescue boat on call.

So we managed to get round some of that. But that was a challenge. But we got all that through. And I think the leases are now good. They're now on a rolling 10-year basis, which is about the best you can get. Our insurances were inadequate. We had no insurances to cover the work done by the slipway, which would have put us in huge jeopardy. If there'd been an issue with somebody's boat, if it'd fallen off the cradle or something, there was no...there'd be no insurance coverage.

RP: And another more recent issue with the slipway has been the environmental considerations and the new laws that have variously come into effect about what you do with waste.

BD: On both occupational health and safety and environmental requirements, we had to go through a fairly big period of change and adjustment, and some cultural change. We have introduced a whole range of health and safety issues, so that the tender drivers are all properly trained, that our Officers of the Day have all had training in evacuation procedures and first aid, and there are a whole bunch of safety management steps put in place.

On the environmental side, one slip up and you could jeopardise your entire lease. There are weekly inspections by the North Sydney Environment to see that our waste is being treated appropriately. There's a lot that people take for granted, but if there was an incident and there was a spill or there was antifoul, I mean, they come down very, very hard. And certainly then, your lease could be an issue.

It's an attractive spot. If they actually did want to go to tender, there's no way that we would ever be able to afford to stay. Someone would take it over and turn it into a flash little trendy restaurant or whatever.

I mean, they would be prepared to, we still pay largely a peppercorn rental. But again, we own the building, we've maintained the buildings and they're very happy with what we've done. But there's no guarantee that future governments (won't) say "well, we'll put it out to the highest bidder and see what happens". So you don't want to give them an excuse to come and take it away.

RP: You spoke earlier in our conversation about the way you regarded seamanship as one of the most important things that one can get out of sailing and going to sea. How much has the club been involved in training and helping its members to also improve their seamanship as they sail at the Amateurs?

BD: One of the things that I started as Rear Commodore, and then I've encouraged and continue to encourage the flag officers now, is to run training. We've run first aid courses, which are more about first aid at sea. Courses on diesel maintenance and radio operations. The diesel maintenance thing was terrific. The number of people have got no idea where to even start if the engine won't start or it stops.

Giving people some knowledge about coming alongside and the use of spring lines and tying up. It still amazes me the number of people that come in and got no idea how to use a spring line or use a spring to get off with the winds blowing on the beam. We've got people in that club who've got a wealth of experience, and I think we should continue to encourage that passing on. Sailing's been with us for a couple of thousand years. I think the club should always make sure that we continue to find ways to have that knowledge passed on.

RP: You are, I think, only just giving up the role of club Treasurer. How do things stand financially 150 years on?

BD: The club is in relatively healthy financial condition. One of the things that I did do when I became Commodore, we had healthy reserves of \$400,000 or so, but they'd been sitting in a term deposit and earning 2% for 10 years. And I think I did convince the Board, look, that we should actually invest our reserves. That's been worked out very well. And we've had a couple of very good years in the stock markets. I mean, they're very conservatively invested, but the reserves now stand at nearly \$800,000. We've been getting a return of 8% compared to 2% just on dividends and the actual value of the holding has gone up. It means that we do have a healthy reserve, but it's also our CapEx fund. And going forward, we're going to have some significant CapEx items. And the pontoon is at the end of its engineered life. Now, it may be good for five more years or 10 more years, but a new pontoon is going to cost anywhere between \$500,000 and a million. So we'd eat into those reserves very quickly. It's an old club and an old building, and that building is going to require some significant ongoing maintenance at some point. We're fortunate that we've got reserves and the club runs at a break even or better, on a cashflow basis...we actually

make some money. What money we make, we reinvest. For a small club, it's probably one of the best positions of small clubs in the harbour.

RP: Finally, Bruce, as we go into the next 50 years at the Amateurs, what should not change at the club?

BD: It's just that spirit, that Corinthian spirit of collegiality...that we're all just sailors, there's no class distinction. I remember at the last Gaffer's Day we had that huge crowd down there. There was 300 people down there. And I was talking to Hughie and Bomber Treharne, two great sailing icons who've travelled the world and been to events from the New York Yacht Club to the Admirals Cup. And they said, only the Amateurs can do this. It's the sort of thing that only the Amateurs would do because it's just this great atmosphere and it's just men, women, just out there, sailors having a yarn...it's great.

I think that spirit, it's just distinctively the Amateurs. It's just about a love of sailing and not much else. And I think that's what we want to keep the heart of things going forward.

RP: Thanks, Bruce. And long may it remain the best kept secret in Sydney.

BD: Exactly, and so it should. Thanks, Richard.