



REFLECTIONS 150 YEARS

Martin van der Wal

Martin van der Wal: Well, Marxian in the sense that why would I join any club that would have me as a member, as one of the Marx brothers said. Yeah, I was reluctant because I had been sailing on a boat out of the CYC for several seasons. I hadn't been very impressed with the culture at the CYC. I was a young hippie basically, and it didn't really suit my view of the world. So when I got a call out of the blue from Bill Gale asking me if I wanted to keep that sail number, which I'd noticed, and I thought it was quite nice to have an A100 on your sail, and without really thinking in depth about it.

Ian Macintosh: So you'd just bought *Hoana*?

MvdW: I'd just bought *Hoana*, yeah, and I really didn't know what I'd bought. I had no idea of her history. She'd been at Elizabeth Bay Marina for sale for a long time. She was covered in paint. She was covered in Surf White and Mission Brown. There was no wood to be seen on the boat anywhere. It looked like a nice hull, and it looked like a nice boat, and it was within my price range. For some reason I felt drawn to wooden boats, having spent about a month digging the osmosis out of my previous plastic boat, and getting quite over that, and actually selling it for a profit! I thought, "Well, this is a good deal. You buy a boat, you do it up a little bit, and you sell it for a profit!". And I thought, "Oh, well, here's an old wooden one. I'll do that up a bit, and I'll sell that and get a profit".

IM: How much of *Hoana*, when you first saw her, was a working bee rather than a sailing project?

MvdW: Being young and naive, and not really knowing very much about what I was doing, I had looked at one other boat, another timber boat, and I'd had it surveyed by Rick Wood, actually, and he had told me that they'd done an interior lining of the boat with masonite, and I should probably stay away from it, because masonite didn't belong in a wooden boat. I thought, "Oh, well, okay, I'll remember that". So I checked *Hoana* out for masonite. She didn't have any masonite on board. She had a beautiful shotgun on board, as well as a whole lot of other lovely things.

We lived in Elizabeth Bay at that stage, and I'd walked past, and I looked out, and I'd seen the boat a few times, and my partner, Susie, had seen the ad in a little glass window on the little marina that used to be there, and she said, "Let's have a look at this one". So we organised it, and we went out. I'm strolling around the deck, looking at everything, thinking, "Oh, she feels good underfoot". The dealer had opened the companionway hatch up, and

Susan had gone down below, and she said, "I love this one". I thought, "Well, that's a big step forward. If she really loves this one, I'll have a closer look." Anyway, we got it surveyed, (by) a couple of old salts, (an) old Norwegian-Swedish surveying company, whose name I've forgotten. I've still got the survey somewhere. They told me to stay away, that this boat was nothing but work. She was old. She was tired. Yes, you could go sailing. Everything was fine. You could go sailing. The motor was probably 1930s. It was petrol. A lot of cracked frames. "Don't take this boat on". They gave me a strong warning. "Don't take this boat on."

By that stage, somehow, I'd kind of just decided that I was going to get this boat, because we'd gone for a test sail, a crazy test sail, actually, with quite a decent nor'easter blowing one afternoon. And the dealer's apprentice, who was with us on the boat on the day, said, "Well, what headsail would you like to put up?" And I said, "Oh, let's put the biggest one up and see what she does (laughs)". So we got this huge number one up, charged out through the Heads, straight into the teeth of this big nor'easter. And we were well overpowered, and it was quite a sea running as well. But the boat just felt so confident, and even though I was making all the mistakes in the world, the boat wasn't, and she tacked and came about, and she behaved herself, and she did everything right. And she felt so good under us that when we got back to the marina, I'd sort of decided, "Yeah, I'll take her on".

IM: So somehow, the way Sydney Harbour works, Bill Gale found out that you were the new owner, and obviously knew she had the Amateur's sail number. He contacted you, and you fetched up at the Amateurs. What were your early impressions of that club, and what changed your mind about belonging to the club?

MvdW: Well, Bill told me a bit about her history, which I hadn't known. That she had a circumnavigation under her belt, and that she was quite a well-known boat on Sydney Harbour, and that she'd belonged to the Amateurs for a very long time, and it would be good if she came back to the Amateurs, and that way I could keep this rather glamorous sail number as well. So I went over there. Bill was there, he introduced me to Vic Dibben, and the two of them gave me a bit of a walk around the club, and a bit of a background on *Hoana*. There was a photograph behind the bar at that stage of not my *Hoana*, but *Hoana 2*, a nice old black and white photograph, and I thought, "Oh look, there's no poker machines here. It doesn't have the same feel as the CYC. It feels historic, it feels interesting". I'd motored over there in *Hoana*, and she was alongside the pontoon, and I looked at her. "She sort of belongs here, yeah, I'll do it". 35 years ago.

IM: One third of *Hoana's* life under your custodianship.

MvdW: Yeah, I wrote a piece in the (SASC) newsletter several years ago, which was titled 'Tragic Lover', and I think that's exactly what I am. You don't like to animate inanimate objects, but it is very easy to animate an object like *Hoana*. You can feel that she's a sort of living thing, even though it contradicts all reason. But when I look at her history, and the history of her ownership, you can see that she's picked her owners as much as her owners have picked her, I feel. Two of them have been top sailmakers, two or three of them have been yacht designers. I think she has got something about her that makes things happen

to keep her alive. And twice now she's been pretty well knocked out of the game, and twice she's had people who have been willing to put her back in.

IM: So what's the difference between, as wooden boat folklore goes, a custodian, and what are generally referred to as 'poor bloody owners'?

MvdW: (Laughs) It helps if you're a bit handy with your hands, or willing to learn. There's always something to do, and you have to be prepared to reframe your attitude towards owning a boat, otherwise they're not the boat for you. That reframing involves a sort of relationship where you know that this boat's been handed on to you by a whole line of other people, and with a bit of luck you'll be handing this boat on to another line of people. So it's just passing through your hands basically, and that's really what a custodian is.

IM: How does she sail? What's she like to sail after 35 years of sailing her, and maintaining her, and loving her? What is she like to sail?

MvdW: I can't say that I've got an enormous range of experience with sailing lots and lots of different boats, because I haven't. I've crewed on a lot of different boats, I've helmed a few, varying in size from you know 100-foot schooners in the Mediterranean to you know dinghies on Sydney Harbour.

IM: It sounds like a fair range of experience to me.

MvdW: Well not in depth though, not really. But when Charlie Peel and the Hayes brothers put their heads together and they built *Hoana*, they were building her for a purpose, and that purpose was to get out on the Harbour in her class, which was a big class of the day, the coach house, auxiliary coach house class - to get out there and show the other designer-builders on Sydney Harbour that they'd come up with something better, and better meant quicker. *Hoana* started her racing off very successfully, and she's been a successful racing boat ever since.

She is a quick boat, which of course is very gratifying. But she's also incredibly well behaved. Even if you've made foolish mistakes and picked the wrong headsail for the day, or found yourself in a bit of a tight spot, you'll know exactly what she'll do. She won't surprise you, she won't do anything uncomfortable. The only time I've ever had the boat squat under pressure, I was in 47 knots of breeze, caught out in a wicked westerly, and the boat was going so fast that the water level was up around the gunnels. She had squatted into her own trough. But that's one time over 35 years that she's ever done that, and I mean we were pressed, seriously pressed. But I've had her trucking on GPS, reaching in 35 knots, travelling at 12 and a half knots, and consistent. This is not just a one-off GPS reading, this is an average over minutes. She doesn't squat into her trough, she actually gets up and goes, and that gives you a really good feeling. When you're on the helm and you feel the boat come alive, which she does, she comes alive, she really does, unlike any other boat I've sailed. And that's why every time I go out, I'm still excited about sailing *Hoana*, after 35 years.

IM: When she was built, she had a centreboard. At some point, she didn't have a centreboard. You put a centreboard back in. On what basis did you do that?

MvdW: I realised that she had been a centreboarder. Of course, Bill told me she had been a centreboarder. I started corresponding with Joe Adams as to why the centreboard had come out of the boat, and he said, oh, well, they took it on a shakedown cruise to New Zealand, and it was a metal board. It had rattled in the case the whole way across and kept them awake all night. He'd got back to Sydney after that year's excursion, and he took some old salts out, including Cliff Gale. He had closed the companionway hatch while they were on the helm, and he had raised and lowered the board, going to windward, and asked them whether it was up or down, and none of them could tell the difference. So on that basis, he said the board is useless. It was a thin plate, like a cousta boat plate. It was a thin plate, and as a yacht designer at that stage, he said it had no chord in it. It couldn't generate any lift. It would basically just drag. The boat was already four feet deep and a long keel. It had enough keel to get to windward quite happily. So he dropped it out. He filled the slot full of concrete. He put a bit of furniture over where the board had been, which had table hanging off it and some lockers in it, and that's how I got the boat, with all of that interior still in the boat. As I got to know the cousta boats more particularly, I got started talking to cousta boat sailors and talking about their centreboards, and I said, well, it's a flat plate. What's it actually doing? They said, well, we don't actually know when it's up or down ourselves. The only time we really know it's up or down is when we're motoring into our mooring, because all of a sudden we can turn tighter corners. It doesn't translate as a genuine feeling through the boat when the board is up or down. So I raced the boat for over a decade with no board.

IM: And did pretty well?

MvdW: Did reasonably well, reasonably well, but I had to sail fatter angles than everybody else. Otherwise you made too much leeway. And that was all very well if you weren't in tight traffic situations where everyone was pushing you up all the time and you know, to get from the start line up to Beashel (buoy) you might be doing five tacks and everyone else is doing four. You're not going to be the quickest boat on the paddock. And I just had this niggling thought in the back of my head that I was racing a three-legged thoroughbred and that she really needed that fourth leg. I'd inherited a little bit of money and finally found myself in a position to, if I did it myself, I'd build a new case, build a new board. (I) jackhammered the concrete out of the slot with my heart in my mouth, wondering what I'd find. Put everything back together again.

First board I made, I made a crucial mistake. I was laying up the carbon fibre on one side and I let it go off before I laid the carbon fibre up off the other side. The board went in with a twist. Not much of a twist, but enough of a twist because the very narrow slot I was putting it into, the board jammed. So I had to build a second board, but I learnt by that stage. So I built a very stiff board out of marine ply and carbon fibre with a lead insert. Doesn't weigh much, 38 kilos. Enough to pull it down firmly, but light enough to be pulled up very easily by children even, with a four-to-one tackle that I've got on it. And that season she really was back to being a four-legged thoroughbred. You could feel it. She

tacked through tighter angles. She took off after a tack. The leeway was virtually negligible, whereas before it had been quite substantial.

IM: And she wasn't noisy down below?

MvdW: Well the new board fits so tightly that there isn't much play in it. Sometimes (it) knocks a little bit on a rocking anchorage. I've got it so that I can lift the top off the case instantly, and I just whack a towel down there and jam it overnight, you know. Not going to keep me awake.

IM: Takes no water?

MvdW: The board and case hasn't leaked. I attribute that not to my skill but to the wonderful attributes of 3M 5200, which (chuckles) it's all stuck together with. I basically grafted my new case onto the existing case that was up to the cabin sole. So once I'd uncovered the old case, it was still very sound. I chipped the concrete out carefully, fared it all and basically just bedded, grafted the new case on top of the existing case. Added athwartships bracing fore and aft on the new case, and also in the middle. And it's worked very successfully. I haven't touched it ever since.

IM: You're doing well.

MvdW: It really has made a difference. And for everything you do on a wooden boat that a lot of people know, like *Hoana*, you get a lot of advice from a lot of different angles and a lot of different perspectives.

IM: Particularly at the Amateurs.

MvdW: At the Amateurs. But also, you know, Hank Kaufman owned *Hoana* for a while and as soon as I put the board back in and he was a long distance member of the Amateurs, living in Queensland. He suddenly found out that I'd put the board back in and this message popped out of the blue saying, "I'm glad you put that board back in. I could never understand why Joe took it out".

I've got three letters with Joe explaining to me why you would never put a centreboard back into *Hoana*. He was adamant about it. He said the boat just didn't need it. Well, sorry Joe (laughs), the boat does need it.

IM: And you were in regular contact with Joe until he died?

MvdW: He would like to keep track of how *Hoana* was going, I'd sort of just keep track of his thoughts on what I was doing. I think the last letter I got from him was from where he was living in the Philippines only weeks before he was murdered, which was obviously a tragedy.

IM: The Amateurs has existed for 150 years based on yacht racing and over that 150 years the divisions have changed, boats have changed. We've got things like the Super 30s nowadays, plastic boats, and yet what you refer to as the 'coach house cruiser class' has

been very much a backbone of the Amateurs for at least almost half its existence. You wrote a wonderful piece a few years back entitled 'Class Warfare and Gender Politics'. Can you take me through the essence of class warfare and gender politics as related to the Amateurs?

MvdW: To the Amateurs? Well, the Amateurs I believe from what I've read was founded on the Corinthian principles that were becoming rather more strident during the latter part of the 19th century. The feeling that professionalism was all well and good but the average person had not only the right to participate in sports but almost a duty, a patriotic fervour that seized the world in a funny sort of way from what you read. The Corinthian mentality was class warfare in the sense that it was maybe a resurgence of something that had happened previously but definitely a belief that the ordinary person could also participate in what had, up until that time, been seen as aristocratic pursuits. I think the Amateurs was founded very much on that principle and that's why it's got the name of the Amateurs. Most of the racing going on on Sydney Harbour at that stage was professional sailors, like it was in Europe.

IM: Owned by the gentlemen.

MvdW: Owned by the gentlemen, who could afford to pay for top skippers and top crew to win large prizes. Not only the glory, but also the money. Wagering. The bookmakers were out on the harbour big time. Reputations were at stake. Money was at stake. Glory was at stake. And so it was high-stakes game.

The Amateurs was founded by bunch of blokes who basically sailed converted fishing boats. Open boats. Mullet boats. And loosely raced them to begin with, back from their fishing grounds which I believe were a place called Blackwall at the Spit where they fished every Sunday. And just a group of them would race back to the main harbour and give themselves a bit of an imaginary finishing line somewhere, and then meet up at the pub afterwards and have a schooner and have a laugh.

IM: This is a bit like the cuta boat fishermen in Bass Strait who'd go out and catch their fish, and then race each other back to get them to the market.

MvdW: That was a commercial enterprise so there was a great deal at stake there. If you were first back you sold your fish for fish and chips. If you were last back you sold it for fertilizer. So there was a lot at stake. Whereas the Amateurs was founded more on, yeah, just good fun amongst a bunch of blokes who didn't have deep pockets. They were just ordinary people sailing ordinary...what were very common boats in those days. Open fishing boat style of boat. And that's what I unpack in 'Class Warfare and Gender Politics'. That we do have our roots in a form of class warfare and even now, I mean there is a distinct egalitarian feel about our club and that's because ordinary people with ordinary lives who love sailing can get together at a club like that (in) Mosman Bay, which is a beautiful place, and go out and race their boats.

IM: But at what stage did gender politics come into it?

MvdW: Roger Gale actually...on I think the first or second gaffer's day that I took *Hoana* into, which would have been '87 or '89...he sort of buttonholed me and he gave me a potted history of the boat. Made sure that I knew who she was and what she'd done and all the rest of it. Then he said you know it's a 'coach house class' and this is actually the first time that I'd ever heard the words used. The Sydney Harbour 'coach house cruiser'. Nobody had ever told me that before that she belonged to a distinct class and it had been a very popular class. Then he said, "It's all down to the women". He remembered it clearly because he'd been an open boat sailor and, you know, the ruckus it had caused at the club. There was this push to put cabins on top of the club boats and make them more comfortable, make them more of a cruiser-racer because the women just felt that they were sailing widows. They were not getting the usage out of the boats that they wanted for them and their family, and some creature comforts could make quite a big difference. So the cruiser class was born and I believe, and this is anecdotal again, that to qualify as a cruiser class that it had to have a galley, it had to have a heads, it had to have bunks. It had to be a boat that could be used. It couldn't just be a stripped hull with a cabin on top. So that's where the gender politics comes in.

IM: This was happening in the 1920s and '30s?

MvdW: I haven't got the dates at my fingertips, but I think it was quite early in the evolution of the club. *June Bird* is 1914, but it was really the turn of the century when the first cruiser classes...

IM: But the bulk of them would have been in the '20s wouldn't they? You know, *Monsoon*, *Warana*, etc?

MvdW: Most of the early recorded races are the '10s and '20s going into the '30s and I think the First World War sort of put a kibosh on the whole thing, with returning servicemen not able to really get out on their boats, and putting their lives back together again. And there are exceptions to that. There's *Varuna*. *Varuna* was a gift to John Musgrove from his father for surviving the (Second World) War.

IM: But the impressive thing is so many of these are still sailing and in more than one case still competing at the Amateurs all these years later.

MvdW: I mean if you include the Rangers, and Rangers are a cruiser class boat. They're simply a raised deck cruiser class and (with) the cabin top style like *Hoana*. They're regularly racing on the harbour, and not only on the harbour. I mean *Maluka's* done five Hobarts now, I think.

IM: Why do they tend to gather at the Amateurs do you think?

MvdW: Well they were born at the Amateurs. You know it was an Amateurs class of boat. It was adopted by other clubs and other clubs had their cruiser class boats. But the Amateurs was at the heart and centre of the whole push to have a cruiser class. Since Bill Gale's amazing efforts in the '80s to actually rejuvenate and rebuild classic boat racing on Sydney Harbour it has always been at the Amateurs. I mean we are the only club that I

know of that has a classic division and has had a classic division I think since about '81, '82 when Bill put it together. I joined that classic division in '87. Bought the boat in late '86 I think. Pretty well straight off I was racing. Not very successfully. Had a lot to learn. And I learnt by following people like Bill around the course. You know where are they going today? You know back in those days I was head to head with *Tamaris* who currently is about 25 minutes slower than me (chuckles).

Steadily over those 35 years I've got the boat going. Bringing it back up to something like its full potential. The most recent change I've made; two different things actually. I've changed the rigging to Dyneema, which has taken a lot of weight out of the rigging. And secondly, I've gone to laminated sails. And there are a lot of people who still buttonhole me and say "The wrong thing to do. You know you've got to have a bit of elasticity in your sails so that when the gust hits all the loads don't get transferred onto your hull straight away."

IM: It's a hundred year-old boat that's a development class by the sound of it.

MvdW: (laughs) And the same thing with the Dyneema. I had people say to me, "Oh but you know steel stretches". Stainless steel stretches a little bit but Dyneema won't stretch. It's very rigid and once you've made it up, you know, increasing the shock loads on the boat".

IM: Have you noticed the differences?

MvdW: The difference are totally the opposite and, when you think about the engineering involved, you understand it. *Hoana* carries the sail area of a 40 footer. She's 37 feet overall with the bowsprit, but she carries a big main and big headsails. She carries a lot of sail area and she can get knocked down. It's harmless. She just gets knocked over. She sits at that knocked over position until the wind has glanced off the sails and she comes back up again. We shake ourselves a bit and off we go again. She doesn't have a very deep keel. She doesn't have a lot of lead down below so there's not a lot of strains on the hull when she goes over. She's easily knocked down and she comes back up quickly and shakes it off and goes.

Since I've changed both the rigging and the sails I haven't been knocked down again, because what happens now is instead of a big bulge occurring in your sails and making them twice as powerful as they should be when the gust hits, the sails stay flat and as they stay flat they're driving the boat forward and up. They're not knocking her down. It's totally apparent to me that she's actually under a lot less stress with flat sails that keep their shape than she is with sails that bag out every time you get a gust.

IM: What do you think Joe Adams would make of this?

MvdW: I think Joe would agree with me. Joe had a very engineering outlook on sailing and he would see that sails that maintain their shape as you get hit by the breeze are going to be better for the boat. I can still be on my ear, but I'm still going forward rather than wallowing...waiting for the gust to pass. Those two factors have improved her time around

the course, incrementally. You spend a lot of money for incremental gains on a boat. I can feel the way the boat responds. You come through a tack, the sails have held their shape, as soon as they're full the boat accelerates very quickly and that didn't use to happen. She holds her course, I can point up and up and up and she'll keep going. So all of these things gladden the heart of silly old buggers who own old wooden boats. 35 years of making incremental progress and you think now what's next? What can I do next? Well the next thing I'm going to do, and I might do it today actually, is I'm going to put a table back in the boat (laughs).

IM: Getting soft?

MvdW: I'm going soft in my old age. Yes, so I can actually put a cup of coffee on a table.

IM: So in the '60s Joe and Anne Adams took *Hoana* around the world. Three years, 30,000 nautical miles. Some amazing adventures including quite a few 100, 120 mile days west-about. That's history, amazing history in itself. You've nurtured the boat and sailed it with some success for 35 years. Any thoughts about going on an extended cruise?

MvdW: I don't think so. I've done some extended cruising. I get a feeling like a 10 year old in the car..."When are we getting there?"

IM: It's an interesting contradiction. You obviously have the patience and the love of owning a wooden boat and getting the most out of it. On the other hand, you've got the template of a boat that's been around the world. Is it because everybody and their brother is now going around the world or is it just a personal thing?

MvdW: Look I sometimes fantasise about taking off. I think every boat owner...one of the reasons people own boats, is because they fantasise that one day I'm going to take off. Freedom. The horizon. The whole kit and caboodle. But then I think to myself well if I was going to take off and do that, how long would it be before I started to think a little bit of headroom might be quite nice. Because I'm six foot tall. I mean Joe Adams was five foot something. So was Anne. They had headroom in *Hoana*.

For us, Susie and I, we've gone away for a lot of two, three week periods of time on Pittwater or whatever. It's a bit like going away and living under the dining room table. I don't think if I was to take off that I'd do it in *Hoana*. Mainly for that reason, not because she's got anything wrong with her as a sea boat. Quite the contrary. Every time I take her out through the heads, she just gives you this feeling that she is absolutely loving it. She loves playing with the waves. She tracks really straight and true. You can leave the helm, as Joe did. He just tied a bit of bungee on one side and led the sheet back to the other side and they didn't touch the helm for days. She's an incredibly good sea boat. But if I was to do something like that, I think I would demand a bit more comfort.

IM: Times change, people change and in the case of *Hoana*, subtly change. 35 years at the Amateurs for you, how's the club changed in your eyes?

MvdW: When I joined the club, I was 35 years old.

IM: With hippie tendencies?

MvdW: With hippie tendencies. I'm now nearly 70. I've changed, obviously. The club has changed. I mean, the times have changed. Things that were taken for granted in the '80s and '90s...sights like Peter Garrow, ex-Commodore, relaying his canvas decks in a quarter of an inch of red lead, strolling around the club covered from head to foot in red lead. You wouldn't see that these days. The fact that there were a few members who almost seemed to live at the club. That generation of sailors who were almost vagabondish in their attitude towards life and sailing. You don't really see that anymore. And there were always a few of them kicking around the club. So you don't see them anymore. I remember sitting at the club, I was working on the boat and *Defiance* sailed in. (She'd been) sailed single-handedly from Hobart with one of these vagabond characters who sailed her up single-handed from Hobart in heavy weather, pumping all the way. And he put her on a club mooring. And little vignettes like that, that you remember of those times that don't occur anymore.

IM: But there are constants as well. For example, the club not only exists, but at times thrives on its self-help volunteerism.

MvdW: That part of the club hasn't changed. I mean, the fact that it is a club of members who all feel that they actually belong to something that they have not only rights, but they also have obligations. With the Amateurs there's always been an expectation of members of "What are you going to do for the club?"

IM: You had an experience of this in 2012, as I recall, when *Hoana* was virtually wrecked by a powerboat in the Harbour, and the club wheeled in to help you. Describe what happened.

MvdW: That was a Friday afternoon and I'd been working on the boat, getting it ready for racing. Racing an old wooden boat, you have to say, I've probably used quite a few of the club's resources, more than most, simply because you have to keep a boat going, especially if you're racing an old wooden boat. And I had been working on the boat that Friday and it was a twilight (race). So I left quite early, which I always did to make sure that there was plenty of room at the pontoon for all the twilight sailors who were going to be gathering. I was heading home and I got collected from astern by a very heavy timber launch, whose operator was actually tending to a person in a wheelchair who had fallen over on his boat. So he wasn't actually at the helm and he'd let go of the helm, and his boat just behaved completely erratically and there was nothing I could do to avoid the collision except to try to make it on the best part of my boat that I could think of, which was the only place that there was a hanging knee in the whole boat. It was a big collision and the wreckage was immediate and apparent.

IM: You were taking water?

MvdW: I was in too much shock. I'd been struck literally at an arm's length away from my head as I was pulling on the helm trying to get away and I was pulling towards the strike

point and I felt that I'd had a very near miss. The cabin top was uprooted out of the deck. I'd been hit so hard the decking right alongside where I was sitting was smashed right into the boat 18 inches. Yes I did take a breath and look quickly below to see whether she was filling up full of water. But my main issue, my main thought, was to keep the motor running. I was very angry, I have to say, and I did yell some rather choice words at the operators of the other boat about how could anyone dare do this to *Hoana*? You know it was a serious affront.

IM: She was 90 years old at the time.

MvdW: Yes, she was ancient. Like hitting an old woman on the street. Anyway, the motor was still running. I checked to see that she wasn't absolutely foundering on the spot. So I was in Athol Bight, and I turned the boat back to the club and everyone in the club was just getting ready for the twilight. John Morris was the Commodore at that stage and he was in his best whites. Other members were kicking around. The guy who was running the tender at that stage was a guy called Dennis who had been doing it for quite a while, and he was a sailor. He saw me come in and he saw the damage straight away because he was taking someone out to a boat for the twilight. He basically shadowed me into the pontoon. There was no space at the pontoon. The pontoon was crammed with other boats but he put the tender in and said come alongside me. I went alongside him and it was all basically taken out of my hands. John dropped everything. The cradle fortunately was empty. There was nothing on it for that weekend. So before I knew it everyone had swung into action and *Hoana* was up high and dry. Lil, John's wife, had taken one look at my rather pale face and said you need a hot cup of tea and given me a very sweet cup of tea. Which I believe is very good for shock. There's no doubt I was in shock.

IM: But your fellow club members rose to the occasion.

MvdW: Absolutely. Trevor Cosh, he was there. He set up the blocks on (the cradle). I told him where they normally went. I was still compos (mentis) enough for that. Simon Sadubin was there. He had his boat *Etrenne* at the club at that stage. You know, he's my shipwright of choice and always has been for the boat. He used to do foredeck for three seasons when he was an apprentice, a 16 year old apprentice on *Hoana*, so he's very fond of the boat. So everyone stepped up and all through the whole process people stepped up. People stepped up with advice. I was completely out of my depth. The insurance company had written the boat off. Lots of people said, "No, just chop her up, get another one, take the money they've given you, offering you a payout for it, take the money". But, steadily, people came forward with alternatives, to send a letter of demand to the owner, go into the legal process. "It might take you three years. But at the end of the day, depending on the magistrate, you know, you might get a lot more money than what the boat's worth as well so that you can actually rebuild the boat". So I went down that path, composed a letter of demand and, yeah, the process went on from there. Finally, the insurance company decided that they would come to the party with most of it. The quote was \$70,000 or something like that. John Winning, who was the owner of the launch that hit me, he was cautious. He didn't want to be seen as a bottomless pit that, you know, everyone was going to take advantage of. He was very cautious and getting money was

not completely easy. But at the end of the day, he stumped up some money to help finish her off. I stumped up the rest of it.

IM: And *Hoana* lives on.

MvdW: *Hoana* survived to race another day.

IM: You've just become a life member of the Amateurs. How would you like to see the Amateurs develop in the years ahead?

MvdW: Part of the character of the Amateurs is a certain looseness. Is a certain wriggle room for people to be who they are. For events to unfold, which might be just a little bit eccentric. For character to form. And it has got a character and has formed over a long time. And I think corporatisation is probably the biggest risk to it.

IM: Rather like *Hoana*, which, although you've made modifications, hasn't changed a lot in a century, it seems to me that the elements of hippie and vagabond are still alive in you. Thank you for sharing some fascinating insights into a particularly important boat and into your time at the club.

MvdW: It's been a privilege to be a part of the club.