



## WOOLLACOTT ASSOCIATION

### BLUE MOON - FEATURE BOAT



Blue Moon was in my head for a long time. I liked the proportions of Dad's 'Gloaming' design - her beam to length ratio - and I wanted to build something like her at 45 feet. I met Jo, whose love of sailing provided the impetus to build my dreamboat. We designed her on our honeymoon in the Caribbean. I drafted up the lines and made up a scale model for Jo to work out the interior layout. In those days, people thought we were crazy to build so big, since there were hardly any cruisers over 40 feet. When we arrived back in New Zealand, we put up a shed in the back yard of my house, mostly from materials picked up from the Devonport tip. I lofted her full size on plywood on the floor of the shed, and used the loftings to form the deck beams and ring frames, which were laminated from  $\frac{1}{4}$ " macrocarpa. I wanted to keep her shoal draft, less than 6 feet, so I had designed her with a drop keel. The strongest way I could think of to engineer this was to build a steel center case and backbone. I had the steel cut to my specs then learned how to weld it all up. To prepare it for painting we blasted it with 2 tons of sand, and the resulting beach became our new shed floor. Later, we melted down the lead to form blocks that would fit into the frame on the center case and this was then glassed over. Ironically, we have not yet fitted her with a centerboard. Once the keel was in place and the frames were bolted on, we planked her with 3" x 1" macrocarpa. Over this we laminated a diagonal layer of  $\frac{1}{4}$ " macrocapa. Both layers required steaming to get around some of the tighter curves. I would prepare the planks in a steam box during the day, and when Jo came home from work she would hold them in place so that I could fasten them. The ends of the planks were hanging out past the transom, and we liked the way that looked so we left them like that to create a sugar scoop stern. That was before they became a popular feature in boats. Finally I put on a layer of unidirectional cloth. For this stage the whole family, and many of our friends and neighbours helped with the fiber glassing. At this point, we roughed out the interior in plywood on kahikatea framing. This was as finished as she got inside for the time being. Blue Moon is a flush deck design forward, so I put big iroko coamings on with toughened glass windows. I decked her over with ply, and put on a false cabin top to contain the services, accommodate hatches and provide ventilation and insulation. That has worked great for us in the tropics and in cold climates. She has a center cockpit, with engine room below, and an aft cabin. A second aft cockpit provides access to the aft cabin, since there is no walk through. We did this so that we could have 3 watertight bulkheads in the boat, and also to provide privacy for guests. The aft cockpit has a transom door, making it a great spot for swimming or fishing. After 4 years of laboring in the shed, we were itching to get her in the water. Nothing was actually finished. We decided that my 40th would make a good launch date and foolishly booked the transporter. We had a lot of help at the end, particularly from Dad, and our neighbor Chris Leech who did the motor installation (amongst other things) for us.

Here's Jo's list of things to do 15 days before launching: Put the windows in the coamings, Put the lead blocks on the keel, Fill and fair the skeg and keel, Make, paint and fit hatches, Put the rub rails on, Oil the coamings, Antifouling, Motor installation, Steering installation, Make and fit a rudder, Paint and assemble the cockpits, Take down the shed, Move the boat to the front yard, Put non skid on the decks, Make a cradle.

Getting her out from the back yard was a major, since there seem to have been some miscalculations along the way. We laid her down on her side and towed her out on skids with my 25-year-old VW. She got as far as the dining room before wedging between our house and the neighbor's. Jo came home to find a new window carved through our bedroom. My mum, trying to console her, told her "In Granddad's day they would just hook the boats up and pull, and there would be eaves and bits of house flying off everywhere. But they put it all back in the end." So

finally, in 1986, Blue Moon was floating. She had no toe rails, hatches, lifelines, plumbing or electrical systems, interior joinery, rig or sails. But we drove around like this for a while; with people everywhere asking us what kind of boat she was since she looked so strange. We took her to Kawau and the Coromandel, and went out to cheer on the Michael Fay's Americas cup challenge with everyone else in Auckland harbor. Blue Moon clocked up 11 knots under motor that day, being so light. One of my pet projects was rig development so she was first rigged as a freestanding schooner. The idea was a sort of giant windsurfer, with wrap around sails, pivoting on laminated oregon sampson posts. I engineered it all to work hydraulically, tilting the spars fore and aft as well as being able to pivot. The only way I could think of to fabricate the spars was to use fiberglass lampposts. We had a brilliant maiden voyage, averaging 11 knots to Te Kouma. I had purposely built the spars light, so it was not long before we broke one of the lampposts in a gust. Unfortunately, this was before carbon fiber was readily available, so they become too heavy when I added layers of glass to beef them up. It became evident that some serious money was required to continue fine tuning the concept, forcing a choice between cruising and rig design. Our original plan to go cruising won the toss. We moved from Auckland to Whangarei to finish the boat. Once again she sat in our yard, this time for 3 years while we completed the interior and rigged her as a ketch. In 1995, we set off from New Zealand for Tonga. In our first year of cruising, we sat through a cyclone in New Caledonia, blowing up onto a mud bank and back out into the anchorage as the eye passed over us, generating 120-knot winds. Then we dragged anchor onto a reef in Fiji, pounding in 6-foot seas as the tide went out. We were able to protect the hull by placing rafts of tires from the nearby marina under her as she lay over. Miraculously, we survived this night unscathed. A week later we were rammed at anchor, by a 40-foot local workboat, taking out 9 feet of our forward cabin from the deck down to the waterline. It took us 5 months to rebuild her there. Since that luckless first year, we have enjoyed looping around the Pacific in ever increasing circles, working in Australia when the cruising kitty ran low. Blue Moon has proved to be a fast and comfortable passage maker. Our best day was 196 miles. Our top speed is unknown since the Speedo only goes to 15 knots, and we topped that surfing down a wave. We passage plan on 150-mile days, and usually exceed that. Our travels have taken us to Tonga, Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Australia, Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands, Samoa, Wallis, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Louisiades, Marshall Islands, and then up through Midway to the Pacific Northwest (Canada and Alaska) then back down the California coast to Mexico. We are currently hauled out in Guaymas, in the Sea of Cortez, repainting the topsides, decks, cabin tops and antifouling. That completes our 20-year refit, which probably means it's time to start over again. People ask me what I would change if I built Blue Moon again. The answer is that we are pretty happy with her just the way she is. But secretly, I would love to build her as a 70 footer.

Rob Woollacott





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