



# the Pathfinder Pilothouse

BY PETER BRADY

## AN INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately these days terms such as world first, revolutionary, innovative and breakthrough design are proclaimed for just about every production boat model upgrade and so the words have become devalued to such an extent that it has left genuinely new and different designs very few terms left to describe them that don't sound worn out or false. Having said that, a 17.4m power catamaran that can achieve 28kts from 2 x 440hp engines, has a range of 3,000nm @ 10kts, with all the comforts of home and is genuinely trans-ocean capable is unique and different and what makes it even more so is that it is designed and built in Australia. Some would say that

just being designed and built in Australia these days alone makes the Pathfinder Pilothouse 17.4 close to unique and they are unfortunately not far from the truth, however it is its technical and lifestyle features that should make people sit up and take notice. The design is not revolutionary but it is certainly evolutionary in that it is the culmination of over 40 years of boatbuilding and 21 years of power catamaran design. Experience is the only good thing about getting older but it is worth its weight in gold when it comes to designing and building boats.

The development of the Pathfinder range began three and a half years ago with the first concept being a raised aft deck gentleman's express cruiser. This then evolved into the Pathfinder

15.9 which was more conventional in its deck layout, simpler and therefore more economical to build, featuring a slightly raised aft deck to increase torsional rigidity while retaining the original design principle of shifting the tanks and services out of the accommodation and up onto the wingdeck.

We started construction of the first 15.9 early in 2012, however the project stalled mid year when the owners business was dramatically affected by the mining downturn. We had been in discussions for some time with a previous client from W.A on the possibility of building a new vessel. Luckily, he had just sold his Brava 45 and so was in a position to take over the project and this latest development, the Pathfinder Pilothouse has literally grown





Being a designer-builder is a huge advantage when it comes to value for money building as it eliminates the conflict of interest between these two parties which can increase costs dramatically. With a one-on-one relationship between designer-builder and client, decision making can be flexible yet quick when required. Communication lines are clear and so misunderstandings are rare and as there are no third parties involved, their cost to the process is eliminated.

Strange as it may sound this approach is very much back to the future, as virtually all boatbuilding was conducted this way world wide until the 1950's. Most yards both designed and built their own unique type which was usually developed for their local climate and conditions and the relationship between the yard and the client was one-on-one with no third parties involved. This is not production boatbuilding; it is the construction of a bespoke or custom product for an individual usually

out of the 15.9. He wanted a larger boat so it was fortuitous that we had set up the moulds and hulls with a variety of sizes in mind which meant it was not too difficult to lengthen the hulls and slightly narrow the overall beam of the boat so it could fit inside his local travel lift. Having already built a boat together, it made the design and specifications so much easier to bring together as he was able to explain to me exactly what he liked about his previous boat and what he wanted to modify. There is also his level of trust in our abilities that builds up over thousands of sea miles, particularly when they include safely sitting out two days of 60kts at sea which again makes the process easier. He was also a believer in the 'form followed function' school of thought as I am, so the boat had to be practical as well as pleasing to

the eye. You would be surprised by how often this philosophy is ignored making the boat practically useless.

We looked at a number of different styles before settling on the pilothouse type as it provided the little ship feel of a bridge with trawler style side doors for access to the side decks yet provided a seamless styling transition into the upper deck area. The main reason our client is having a larger boat built is so he can spend more time up in the Kimberley and as a lot of the interesting scenery is in looking up, an upper deck is the perfect viewing platform. As he had already undertaken two trips from his home port of Mandurah up to the Kimberley, he knew what he wanted and needed and had the ability to explain these requirements clearly; we have designed a number of vessels for these

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waters before, which helped with our understanding of what was required. We both felt that the covered side and aft deck were critical to the boats comfort when cruising in the tropics and one of the greatest challenges of the design was making this work practically while keeping the lines flowing. The difficulty in doing this was not so much drawing the lines; it was developing a way to build it that was not prohibitively expensive, as our other agreed mission statement for the project was that we would keep the boat good value for money.

I have been very public in my view that the future and survival of Australian boatbuilding will be a combination of three factors:

1. Innovative, unique designs that do not have to compete with cheap imports as they haven't copied them yet.
2. Personal service, security of legal rights during the build process and resale value.
3. Value for money! By this I mean good quality materials, equipment and workmanship are not sacrificed to save money, but they are used in such a way as to maximise their value.



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**With four individual bedrooms, two day berths on the bridge plus a sun bed on the upper deck and plenty of room for camp beds, all the family and friends are well catered for**

based on a well proven platform. The economics of scale and repetition will always make so called 'world boats' cheaper to build overseas where labour costs are lower and markets are larger. The 'old way' does work however in this case as there are no production boats with these unique capabilities in the world and the client was not prepared to risk building a one off overseas, which has turned out to be a wise move given some of the problems with this situation at present.

Having decided on the style and a build process that was comfortable for both parties, we got down to the

nitty gritty's of layout. Our client used his previous power catamaran in three different ways and intended to continue in this vein, just on a grander scale.

The first is to take out quite large parties of friends to local social events such as Christmas celebrations, so the separate areas of the foredeck, upper deck and large aft deck will not only comfortably accommodate up to 70 guests, but also provide some separation if these guests are of mixed ages.

His second requirement was for a family friendly weekender that provides

all the features of a modern beach front apartment. The large aft deck with the galley just inside the back door provides alfresco dining with an ever changing waterfront setting. With four individual bedrooms, two day berths on the bridge plus a sun bed on the upper deck and plenty of room for camp beds, all the family and friends are well catered for.

His third use is that of a long-range cruiser with the ability to stay at sea for months if required. This is met by the boats range, capacity to carry the stores required, ability to make fresh water, plus its onboard facilities such as laundry and workshop.

How did we make this all fit? The story so far is as detailed as the boat itself and so will require a second part to do it justice. I hope you enjoy reading about the process as much as I am enjoying writing it.



The ultimate Australian designed and built 'big boys toy' is now for sale in the form of the Brava power catamaran, 'Tantrum'. Built in 2006 'Tantrum' is the most comprehensively equipped and customised Brava having been returned to me for a comprehensive refit in 2011 which included lengthening the hulls and enclosing the aft end with bulwarks for safer offshore fishing. Also upgraded at this time were the electronics, electrics, refrigeration, air-conditioning and new carpets.

'Tantrum's' displacing hull form means she can steam economically at the most comfortable speed for the conditions. Her top speed of 25kts allows 'Tantrum' to outrun bad weather, yet cruise at 17kts using under 50lt per hour and with her 2,800lt of fuel capacity has a range of over 1,000nm miles at 10kts

Customised with a fully enclosed stainless steel framed flybridge, larger Yanmar 315hp engines, long range fuel tanks, larger davit, more comprehensive refrigeration, powerful AC watermaker, two gensets, two anchor winches and upgraded electronics, 'Tantrum' added another level of performance and comfort to the Brava design.

Built for a dedicated offshore fisherman, 'Tantrum' also features multiple freezers and ice boxes, a high capacity ice maker, eight individual bait tanks with 12v power reel plugs, glass fronted live bait tank, bulwark cushions and 6m game poles.

Electronics could only be described as comprehensive for a boat of this size with two Furuno sounders, one with a 2kw transducer, Furuno black box, GPS chart-plotter and radar with overlay displayed on two 17" screens, back up GPS, Auto-pilot, Sat phone, VHF radio, remote spotlight, rear deck cameras, satellite TV and DVD players.

Comfort and lifestyle were not sacrificed on 'Tantrum' either with four separate air-conditioned bedrooms and a skipper's berth in the flybridge. The air-conditioned galley and saloon feature a full height pantry, large bench space, double sink, gas stove, 12v refrigerator and freezer, eutectic chest freezer and microwave along with a plush L-shaped dining and lounging area. A spacious bathroom is located at deck level along with a washer-dryer under the flybridge stairs.

The flybridge layout is first class in terms of visibility, ventilation and comfort with seating for 10 including two Navigator helm chairs, bar fridge and sink along with nav table and plenty of storage.



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