



Story of the month: May 2008

by Josephine Jaworsky



A Real Launching

It is not every day a brand spanking new yacht is launched locally on traditional greased ways though we might see pictures of these rare events in the glossy classic boat magazines. And to those who know, this was not just any boat to come out of any shed: this was Tolly Jaworsky's long awaited Herreshoff, the lovely **Gloria of Hobart**.

The reason this launch was special is that for five generations, Wilson Brother's boats have had one-way rides down to the water, for over sixty years at the present site, over 50 years at Robley's Point and over 30 at Martin's Point. Tradition has seen only stern-first uncontrolled launches, though that may change soon to allow hauling out for repairs.

Preparations by Michael Wilson and Warren Innes to construct the slipway began with pouring new concrete rails laid to the low water mark. Green timber was sawn and planed. The top-section of the timber rails was built first, fisherman's waders being clothing of choice in those months. Portable concrete slabs were readied as supports for the rails and measurements calculated for the length of the rails needed versus the depth of the water. The Wilson's better than anyone can tell you how the Cygnet bay has silted up - over the past 140 years. On calm days, Warren and Michael set off in the dinghy measuring water depth as Tolly, a man happy on or in the water, dived to lay the concrete pads at intervals. Like true boat builders, the boys always used a scrap of ply to write on, never paper. Bad weather was risky as wave action from the strong NW winds that batter the shed in spring threatened to move the structure out of alignment.



With the foundations for the slip set, the next job was to line up the boat. Q: How do you move 16 tonnes of wooden perfection about 16" to the left? A: Very slowly. Using the ancient blocks of timber that have supported many keels over their life in the shed, Michael and Warren very gently shimmied Gloria over using an tried and trusted old wool press. They worked her across by edging her a few inches at the stern, then a few at the bow and constantly adjusting the shores. Gloria quietly rumbled her way over though working inside

the boat was disconcerting as she came alive around us.

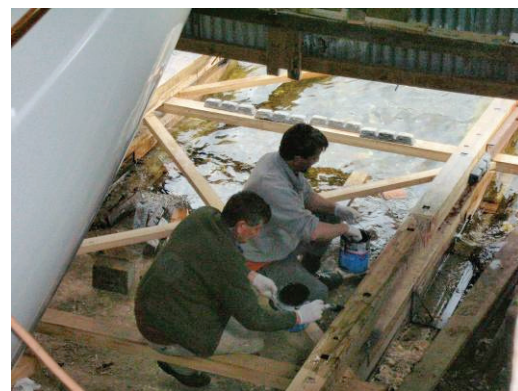
With the hull lined up, the boys bolted together the carefully-planed rails in box sections. Using crow bars they slid them out like a work gang. Out a bit, then add a bit. On and on, just like meccano. Protruding 80ft into the bay the rails naturally floated so every spare bit of lead we could lay hands on was used to weigh them down. Wooden chocks were fitted to even out the rails on the uneven river bottom.

Another major task was building the cradle for Gloria to slide out of. To do this she was lowered 2ft, again a procedure taken very slowly and gently with a couple of 20 tonne jacks. Noel Wilson, now retired, calls in every day or so to check on things both then and now. He would delight in raising Tolly's heart rate with tales of launches gone wrong at other yards; boats stuck for days, boats skewed sideways, boats whose engines failed at launching....



The next challenge was when to launch. But local tides and winds are not easy to predict given the peculiarities of an estuary when affected by low and high pressure systems. Sometimes the tide barely moved when wind-bound and other times it was so far up under the keel, Gloria could have launched herself!

However a window of opportunity arose after frustrating weeks of high winds and the massive end doors were prised open (a sure sign for locals to gather). The ways were greased with tallow; a stinky process using an old brazier on the shore. The boys know not to grease too soon as the crustaceans eat it! The last night in the shed, Tolly stayed up going through a pre-launch checklist kindly passed on by Doug Brooker of Sydney. Late that night, Tolly's best friend arrived unannounced from Queensland. We thought that a good omen.



Thursday 26th October dawned with promising conditions. The morning raced past in last minute checks as people and boats came out of the woodwork. Once Warren and Michael deemed the tide far enough in, the crew were ushered aboard. I thought it was momentous unplugging the last power lead, our lifeline and a permanent fixture until then. Nice words were said, champagne (Tasmanian of course) splashed the bow and we took our seats in the cockpit. All hands braced the wheel and the emergency tiller to prevent the rudder slewing around on impact with the water. We held our breath. Can you imagine Tolly's tension at that moment?

Loud bangs echoed under the boat as Michael and Warren knocked out the remaining chocks. And, nothing happened.

Then..... slowly..... she began to slide back until we hit the water and shot out of the shed like a champagne cork. “Woooshhh” repeat those who were there. It was such a powerful motion we almost went half way across the bay! And wouldn't you know it, the rails were so straight and so slippery, Gloria barely bounced or wobbled, sliding in surprisingly fast! The engine was started as soon the keel touched the water just in case we needed to reverse out of the cradle but of course, it was a text book launching due to the experience of Wilson Brothers. For those who love wooden boats, it was a magic event.



Then, an empty shed.....



Now for some masts but that's another story.....

Photos reproduced with permission from Mr Kelvin Aldred, Mr Kraig Carlstrom, Miss Harriet Wallis (age 10) and Mrs Josephine Jaworsky.

We would love to hear from you!

To contribute your Story of the Month, or make any suggestions for the newsletter please get in touch with Lois Ryan by email: media@australianwoodenboatfestival.com.au

Festival Office: Space 229 Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

Phone: (03) 6223 3375

www.australianwoodenboatfestival.com.au

The Australian Wooden Boat Festival is supported by the Tasmanian Government through Events Tasmania

