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The long and varied life of an old WWII patrol boat

*Words and Photos by
Linus Fleming*

I somehow lost a bet and find myself the current custodian of *Motor Launch Alert*. She's an ex-RNZ Navy 72 ft Harbour Defence Motor Launch (HDML), and not to be confused with the larger Fairmile 112Ft ML.

This particular style of vessel was designed in 1939 by W. J. Hold of the British Admiralty for use in anti-submarine duties and to protect harbours.

Alert was originally powered by two Gray Marine diesel engines and is now pushed along by two 6BD1 Isuzu engines. She's of wooden construction with bent ribs over stringers, with double diagonal planking mahogany over oak and oiled calico in between. Five (sort of) watertight double diagonal bulkheads help hold her together and keep her afloat in times of need. She is 47-ton standard weight, and while in Navy service weighed 54 ton.



Alert alongside Queens Wharf, Wellington.

Up until the end of WW II, 480 HDML vessels were built and used by most Allied navies.

The Royal New Zealand Navy acquired 16 HDMLs, built by several builders around the USA via the Lend-Lease agreements operating during the war.

The larger Fairmiles, of which we had 14, were all completed with local timbers on the kitset hull parts supplied by the British Fairmile Marine Co.

Built in Everett, Washington State, USA by Everett Marine Ways Inc. *Alert* was shipped as deck cargo on the *USS Kootenay Park* along with HDML 1187, 1188 and 1190, arriving in Wellington in April 1943.

The last year of the war was spent cruising Cook

Strait and the Marlborough Sounds.

Post-war she went through several ownerships, serving a wide range of functions from Sea Scout duties, oceanographic research in southern waters, as Fiordland base for helicopter hunting, cray fishing in Deep Water Cove.

Among her owners was Auckland mayor and long-time Squadron benefactor, Sir Ernest Davis, who kept her until his death in 1962 aged 90.

In July 2015, the then-owner put *Alert* up for sale after realising he had a serious predicament. Owning a very well-used 45-ton, mostly floating ex-Navy, Sea Scout, charter, party, heli hunting, cray fishing, Fiordland hotel is not for everyone!

A deal was struck and I took over the somewhat daunting job. My intention when acquiring *Alert* was to suck it and see. See if she was worth saving, or poke a hole in her and put her to rest.

It turns out she may not have been worth saving, but it seems that I have grown rather fond of the old girl.

Alert is currently ashore undergoing a six-month maintenance programme. It has been 31 months so far, 3500 silicone bronze screws, 5 lbs of cotton and counting. Thank you, Kopu Marine, for your awesome facilities and generous hospitality.

If you are thinking you could do with a bit more room on your classic vessel, then I can highly recommend the spacious surrounds of an HDML.

Tamariki wraps up Tasmania cruise and heads for home

Back in February, we brought you the first part of Tamariki's travels, sailing to Australia via Vanuatu and Chesterfield. In Part 2, Tamariki arrived in Tasmania in time for the Australian Wooden Boat Festival. In this final part, she wraps up the Tasmanian cruise and returns to New Zealand.

Words and photos
by Peter Mortimer

Much of the d'Entrecasteau Channel's sailing waters are bordered by national parks or large parcels of uninhabited eucalypts covering privately held land which makes for great vistas while sailing. It seems however that much land is in the hands of wood gatherers, who periodically clear fell for predominantly pulp or log production. A couple of older local boat builders were bitter at the waste of good timber such as celery top pine, huon pine, myrtle. Not sure if this was correct but it made a great beer drinking yarn.



Above: Tamariki departs Tasmania bound for NZ.

Below: The impressive crags of Cape Raoul, Tasmania.

The channel also has a well-developed farmed salmon industry, whose large holding pens are everywhere. A small local population of seals occasionally manages to break in for a feed. About 24 sites in the channel produce many thousands of tonnes per annum of Atlantic salmon. As with all industrial scale farming, there is a wide range of opinions on the impacts of salmon farms.

The evidence of early French explorers is highlighted in local place names here. Rear Admiral Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and his flagship frigate La Recherche gave names to Bruny Island,

d'Entrecasteaux Chanel and Recherche Bay. Another of his ships names the small seaside town of Dover at the channel's southern end. Captain Huon de Kermadec and his ship L'Esperance gave names to Huon river Huonville, Kermandie river, Port Esperance. French botanist Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardiere names Labillardiere Peninsula, Fleurtys Point. There are of course many English place names as well but a paucity of Aboriginal. Lack of hubris I would say.

Cockle Creek, in the southern corner of Recherche Bay is the southernmost



protected anchorage in Tasmania and it's a very special place. The notice board looking out toward the bay's entrance says: "At this point you are closer to Antarctica than Perth". Alongside is a bronze sculpture of a humpback whale calf, a testament to the wholesale slaughter of these mammals.

After Cockle Creek, I sailed the 50 miles back to Hobart to restock, mooring for three nights on the downtown public dock. While there I met a German solo sailor, Susanne, who has completed four and a half circumnavigations in her yacht Nehaj. Constructed in aluminum, it is a seriously strong, well designed expedition-offshore yacht. Sussane has weathered many a storm – her most recent voyage was a 251 day nonstop passage from Maine USA, down the Atlantic Ocean under Cape of Good Hope, Tasmania, Cape Horn, Good Hope again, finishing in Tasmania. She says it was "a journey in memorial to Moitessier's route 50 years ago."

I waited around Hobart another two weeks for a suitable weather opportunity, finally departing Tasmania for Picton on 14th of May, with Roger Mills on board. Bob MacDavitt's proposed route took us 250 miles north of a rumb line, which turned out to be a great call. Our 10 day passage was free of stress. It's been a great trip and one day I will be back to see the parts of Tasmania not yet visited. Maybe the 2021 Boat Festival, who knows!