



Mullety Melita on the road to recovery

By Penelope Carroll

L Class Mullet boat *Melita*, first launched in 1935, has temporarily swapped her Motions Creek mooring for an inner-city carpark. There she is undergoing a major refit.

Owner and skipper Nick Atkinson has stripped off the paint below the waterline, removed the mast, centreboard and garboard planks and is now ready for “the big project” – laminating Alaskan yellow cedar planks and reframing the boat.

Nick has owned and raced *Melita* (designed and built by Percy Vos) since 2010 after acquiring her from previous owners Pam Cundy and George Emtage.

The saxophonist and pianist (Nick is part of the Hopetoun Brown duo and the Love Square jazz trio) had often glimpsed their Whangateau Traditional Boat Yard on his way to and from gigs at the Leigh Sawmill pub. He’d always wanted to stop and see it, he says, and finally one day he did.

He was “blown away” by all the beautiful old boats Pam and George were keeping alive – including

Melita, which had been languishing under covers in a Matakana backyard when Pam and George acquired her three years earlier.

“She had been taken off the water for the usual repairs and languished a bit longer than she ought to have,” says Pam. But *Melita* was not a total wreck requiring a complete rebuild, says Pam; and her gaff cutter rig, sails and gear were all there.

Originally launched with a Bermudan rig, *Melita* was refitted with a gaff rig after sinking twice during early days racing on the Waitemata Harbour – on one occasion sitting on the bottom near Stanley Point for several days.

At Pam and George’s Whangateau boatyard, *Melita* was doused with salt water before going into the boat shed, where her rotten ribs were replaced, her hull recalced with cotton, and hull and decks resealed – all fairly standard for wooden boats that have been out of the water for a while.

Pam and George sailed *Melita* occasionally over the next three years, including



Nick Atkinson measuring progress on the Melita refit.

racing her in the Mahurangi Regatta (pictured below), before Nick purchased her.

Nick has sailed on and skippered many classic yachts over the years, both here and overseas. He’s become a great fan of mullet boats. “They have the grandness of a yacht, but they’re really a big sailing dinghy,” he says.

“They’re very over-

canvassed, high performance and so much fun to sail. When you’re standing in the cockpit you’re just about at sea level, so you feel like you’re standing in the water; and leaning into the hip-height tiller, it’s so nice.”

It will be a few months of hard work on dry land before *Melita* is relaunched and Nick is once more leaning into the tiller...

• Nick extends an invitation to CYA members to come and see him and check out progress on *Melita* at the 8 Hereford Street carpark. You can contact him on 021 807 789.



Welcome Back Ethel

Ethel joined the Classic Yacht Trust's fleet last year. Like all of the fleet, she has gone through many incarnations under multiple owners (in *Ethel's* case around a dozen). Built by the Logan brothers and launched in 1896 as a cutter with a cargo hold, she was converted to a yawl by her first owner, Colonel Herbert Dawson.

In 1914 the cargo hold was converted to a main cabin by third owner, W.J. Quelch – and then to a refrigerated fish hold some time after 2015 by fifth owner, Capt. F.E Willis. *Ethel* then appears to have lain in Henderson Creek for some years before becoming a fishing boat again, with her cutter rig restored,

under seventh owner, George Murphy.

Sometime in the final two decades of the 1900s, her mizzen mast was returned by eighth owner John Smith, who also carried out extensive repairs. Further repairs and a major refit under her 10th owner, Tom Leary, in the the early 2000s brought *Ethel* up to charter standard. However, by the time 11th owners, Keith Munro and Kevin Ebbitt, purchased her in 2011, she was again in a derelict state. After completely restoring her, *Ethel* was relaunched as a yawl in 2013, her current configuration.

Topher Hancock is *Ethel's* current skipper. Originally



from South Africa, Topher (now 65) arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand aboard *Drum*, a competitor in the 1986 Whitbread Round the World Race and stayed.

He has sailed and raced since he was a kid and after arriving here was soon racing Young 88s and Farr 1350s on the Waitemata every weekend. Then in 2015, 'when the kids had left home', he and wife Michele Lennan bought a Jeanneau 40 *Endless Summer*, which they

keep in the Mediterranean for cruising in the Northern summer – or did pre-Covid.

Ethel is Topher's first experience sailing a classic. "They take some sailing! You have to anticipate what could happen all the time. There are no winches, no windlasses, no autopilots, roller furling or navigation gear. *Ethel* is quite tender. I haven't had the topsail up yet, and the mizzen is a bit finnickity."

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Having her cake ... and eating it!

Winner of the CYA Round Rangitoto Launch Race on March 12 was Nathan Herbert's 36-foot launch *Pacific*, skippered by 8-year-old Eveline Dettling (all race skippers had to be female). Eveline's crew were *Pacific's* owner Nathan Herbert, her father, Darren Dettling and 6-year-old brother, Henry.

"Coming off the start line, we got dangerously close to *Lucinda*," says Darren. "I wanted to grab the wheel, but didn't. Eveline really did helm all the way."

Pacific, built for Nathan's great-great-grandfather

in 1917, has plied our local waters for 105 years – but never with such a young skipper.

It was Eveline's first experience at the helm: "It was fun, and a little bit scary. I think we were the last to start because I didn't know the race was starting...it felt good to be the first to finish!"

A youth member of the CYA along with brother Henry, Eveline also took the prize for the best presented cake, the decorations all deliciously edible – apart from the wooden model of *Pacific*.



Double winner Eveline Dettling at the helm of *Pacific* (above) and her prize cake (left).