

When the sum is greater than the parts — the Bluewater 450

AY editor, Barry Henson, takes the Bluewater 450 for a test sail on Moreton Bay and discovers a world-class Australian cruiser.



IN THIS REVIEW we take a look at a blue water cruising boat, a boat that is designed from the keel up to take you down the coast or across oceans with equal degrees of confidence—it's the Bluewater 450—and it's made in Australia by Bluewater Yachts.

The challenge with reviewing a semi-custom boat is that certain aspects of the design are determined by the client, others by the builder or designer. Trying to identify the source of features is not as easy as it sounds, so this review is of *Charlie's Dream*, an execution of the Bluewater 450, rather than of the Bluewater 450 as a concept.

The Design brief

I always review each boat against criteria relevant for the designed use. Unfortunately, many boat builders try to portray their boat as all things to all people, i.e. 'this boat will take your family safely around the world and put you first in your IRC division'. Hmmm. Will it make coffee and pay my bills as well?

Thankfully, the Bluewater 450's design brief is fairly straightforward; it's 'designed to provide its owners with an excellent offshore cruiser that could occasionally race around the buoys'. Still trying to hedge our bets a little, but there's no doubt that this is first and foremost a bluewater cruiser, so I'm going to measure it against those criteria.

When perfectionist meets perfectionist

One of the things you realise as you spend time with David Bradburn is that he's a boat-building perfectionist,



someone with an absolute passion for his work. David sees each boat he produces as an opportunity to make the best boat possible. Then one day David met his match in a client, Peter Lewis, another perfectionist—a retired forensic pathologist and experienced sailor, who doesn't do anything by halves. Having two such personalities working on this project could have doomed this partnership to failure, but they shared a common goal that united them—to create the best boat possible.



“This boat is so feature-rich with good, well-executed ideas that walking through provides a treasure-trove of ‘I’d like one of those moments’”.

This is not to say that the relationship was not without challenges. There was, for example, the day that Peter called David to tell him that instead of a sugar scoop stern, he wanted to extend the stern of the boat by 600 mm, have a classic stern with aft lockers and a hydraulic swim platform. Essentially, he wanted to turn an aft cockpit boat into a centre cockpit boat. No problem if the boat was still on the drawing board, but David was looking out his window at a finished hull just out of the mould!

Most boat builders would have said ‘sorry, mate’, but in characteristic fashion, David looked at what Peter wanted to do and he realised ‘this could actually improve the boat’, so the Bluewater 450 centre-cockpit was born!

First impressions

One of the first things you notice as you walk up to *Charlie’s Dream* is the candy red fibreglass arch over the doghouse. It stands out and it’s the first indication

you have that this is not your ‘run of the mill’ cruising boat. Little did I know as I stepped on board that this boat would have dozens of such indicators. Indeed, this boat is so feature-rich with good, well-executed ideas that walking through it provides a treasure-trove of ‘I’d like one of those on my boat’ moments.

Don’t get me wrong—this boat is not perfect. There are a number of things I’d like to change and I’ll point those things out as we go along, but there’s also a lot to admire about the Bluewater 450.

MAIN IMAGE: The Bluewater 450 is an ocean cruiser with a nice turn of speed.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Bluewater 450 is available in aft and centre cockpit versions.

“Like most cruising rigs the emphasis is on ease of sail handling and flexibility.”



Last things first

Working from the stern forward let me lead you through this boat and point out some of the features you might appreciate. As I mentioned previously Peter wanted a hydraulic swim platform. Push a button and whirrrrr, the stern door folds down to form a wide swim platform. Hidden in the centre of the platform is a spring-loaded stainless steel ladder that makes climbing in and out of the water a breeze. Inside the minimal garage you'll find a fresh water shower and storage for the two LPG gas bottles.

Also at the stern is a custom-designed set of davits with in-built seating and a roof structure that supports three solar panels and shades the stern deck. The davit design incorporates pivoting arms that swivel far enough inboard to allow

you to pick up your outboard and drop it into a purpose-built storage well in the aft locker. This is a feature popularised by Henri Amel, and here it is popping up on the Bluewater 450.

As you move forward of the aft lockers you'll notice a couple of chocks and a gas bayonet just aft of the cockpit. You're looking at the platform for an outdoor kitchen. When he's in a calm anchorage Peter sets up a proper gas barbecue facing the aft deck with its in-built, undercover seating. Not bad, eh? But wait, it gets even better. Fancy a beer to cool your thirst? Lift up the port side helm seat and the entire locker has been turned into a refrigerator, complete with 12V cooling plate and a drain at the low point. I'll take a XXXX and one of those refrigerator lockers as well, thank you!

There's so much to like about the design of this boat. The only complaint I have with the aft deck set-up is the way the twin backstays intrude on the deck area (going through the deck well inboard of the rails). My personal preferences would have been to go with a single adjustable backstay secured to a chain plate on the stern or backstay with a bridle that goes to the rails.

Ever been in the doghouse?

I don't know about you, but I seem to be constantly in the doghouse. There's one doghouse, however, that I don't mind being in and that's the 'hard overhead dodger' type that the Bluewater 450 has. It provides excellent protection



MAIN IMAGE: The bimini and davits provide shade, making the boat more pleasant and liveable.

OPPOSITE PAGE: TOP: The cork deck has excellent thermal and sound insulating qualities and is cooler than teak. The staysail is on a self-tacker.

BOTTOM: Fancy a drink? The refrigerator locker under the helmsman's seat comes complete with a drain at the low point.

from the weather whilst still providing good visibility forward. Whilst racers would eschew the windage a doghouse creates, they rate highly on any offshore cruiser's wish list.

One of the other things you notice about this cockpit is there are lockers everywhere. There are generously-sized port and aft lazarettes, two lockers under the helmsman's seat (one is the refrigerator), two self-draining line storage lockers and a small locker for things like winch handles. David half-jokes that Peter went over the plan and any unused spaces, no matter how small, were turned into storage lockers. One look at Peter confirms he wouldn't have had it any other way. "You can never have enough storage on a boat!"

All lines, with the exception of the mainsheet, mainsheet traveller and

headsail sheets, run under deck into the doghouse, through Spinlock Ronstan jammers and then into purpose-built self-draining line storage boxes. This design keeps the cockpit clear of tangled lines and slip hazards.

Charlie's Dream has seven Anderson winches, two electric 58s for the primaries, two 40s for the secondaries, two 46s on the cabin tops (one of which is electric for raising the halyard) and a 40 at the mast. Between the electric winch for the halyard and the Leisure furl boom, raising and trimming the headsail would be easy for the cruising couple.

I did find the companionway access a bit restricted. The entry to the companionway is a fair bit higher than normal to provide additional headroom in the aft cabin and prevent water

from getting below in the event a wave floods the cockpit.

All in all the cockpit layout is very good.

And the rig?

Like most cruising rigs the emphasis is on ease of sail handling and flexibility. The Bluewater 450 uses a two-spreader, masthead staysail rig with running backstays. Peter has opted for a Leisure Furl in-boom furling system, which enables him to have a fully battened main for better sailing performance. The boom is supported by a spring-loaded vang and there's a Hutton boom brake to prevent those accidental gybes. Both the headsail and self-tacking staysail are on Harken roller furlers. The 120% genoa has vertical foam pads sewn

into the luff to maintain a better shape when partially furled and the two headsails gives Peter numerous sail options, particularly downwind. As you would expect from a cruising boat the foot of the sails are cut fairly high to allow waves to travel underneath.

What about the pointy end?

As you move forward there are good handholds and generously-sized toe rails to keep you safe. The Bluewater 450 has two well-sized anchor rollers and it comes standard with a 60 lb. Mason plough anchor with 70 metres of 3/8ths inch chain on a heavy duty Lewmar anchor windlass, with a remote control in the cockpit with anchor counter. *Charlie's Dream* also has a well-designed deck wash system with selectable salt and fresh water supplies, and a spring-loaded roll-up hose canister to keep things nice and neat.

If you liked the top, you're gonna love the bottom

The interior of the Bluewater 450 has a 'yacht' feel to it and the detailing in the woodwork is impressive (more on this later). Whilst my personal preferences would have been for a lighter wood, such as the Cherry, the Tasmanian Blackwood and Oak interior on *Charlie's Dream* still works well due in large part to the amount of light streaming in from four, count them... four, salon hatches and four opening salon windows. If I seem to be overly emphasising the number of hatches and windows, believe me, I'm not. There is nothing worse than sitting in a stuffy cabin in stifling heat, and too many modern boat builders cut corners (and costs) by providing a small number of tiny hatches and fixed windows, which can make an otherwise nice cabin, untenable on a hot day.

The standard layout, which can be customised for the owner, is a forward facing nav station to starboard with a U-shaped galley to port. Aft is a centre-line, double bed owner's stateroom with an ensuite. The ensuite has two access doors, allowing the head to service the owner's stateroom and the main salon. The salon is well designed with a U-shaped lounge to port and a straight lounge/sea berth to starboard



"Her sail area/displacement ratio is reasonably high at 18.85...she has a lot of 'get-up and go' in her sail plan."

There are a number of good handholds and whilst I'm on the subject of handholds, take a look at the photos of the detail on the handholds; they've taken a practical item and with a bit more effort made it into an architectural feature. Forward of the salon is a pair of bunk beds to starboard and a second head to port. A roomy V-berth forward completes the layout.

Features galore

The nav station is well laid out for the electronic and paper-based navigator (and the chart table is large enough to take full size charts). At the base of the nav station is a pull-out file folder drawer to keep your paperwork organised.

The galley features a front and top opening refrigerator. I'm not a fan of front opening refrigerators, but this one

opens from the top as well—the idea being that you use the front door for initial loading and to reach hard to get at items, with the commonly-used items accessed from the top. The galley is large enough to be comfortable, yet small enough that you could brace yourself in when cooking at sea; it's well designed for the live-aboard cruiser.

The companionway steps lift to reveal a 75 HP Yanmar engine with easy access from the front, sides and back. Another nice feature is a storage locker built into the top companionway step, providing a convenient place to storage spare winch handles and commonly used tools.

The only things I would change below deck are the location of the mast and the headroom in the aft cabin. The Bluewater 450 has a keel stepped mast that runs through the salon. Where possible I like to see masts incorpo-



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE: The Tasmanian Blackwood and Oak interior has a 'yacht' feel to it.

The detailing in the heads show both form and function.

The nav station is well laid out and can accommodate full size charts.

The standard of the woodwork is excellent. Here they've taken a practical item, a handhold, and turned it into an architectural feature as well.

The engine is accessible from the front, sides and back—giving allround access.

To starboard there's a comfortable lounge/sea berth.



rated into bulkheads. I'd also prefer a bit more height in the aft cabin. This isn't always possible as designers need to balance headroom with the demands for space above in the cockpit.

As you walk through the Bluewater 450 you begin to get a sense of the amount of thought and effort that's gone into the design and construction of this boat. The fact that it's Australian-made makes it even better.

So how does she sail?

You may remember that the design brief included the phrase '...an excellent offshore cruiser that could also occasionally race around the buoys.' Well, *Charlie's Dream* does that and more. In addition to cruising, Peter regularly races *Charlie's Dream* in offshore regattas, including the Sydney to Hobart, the

Gladstone and Lord Howe Island Races, and the local twilights.

When you look at the numbers you'll understand how Peter's able to race the Bluewater 450. The Bluewater 450 has a displacement to length ratio of 211, which makes her a medium displacement boat. Her sail area to displacement ratio, however, is reasonably high at 18.85. In other words, she has a lot of get up and go in her sail plan. These figures are evident in her sailing performance, which is very good.

We took *Charlie's Dream* out in a 10-14 knot northerly on Moreton Bay and she averaged 6-6.5 knots on all points of sail. She points well and tacks easily. For a well equipped cruising boat, the Bluewater 450 has a nice turn of speed and the helm is responsive.

The Bluewater 450 is available in aft and centre-cockpit versions, priced

at \$1,050,000 including GST, which may sound like a lot, but that's a sail away price that includes pretty much everything you're going to need except safety equipment. **Y**

For more information call David Bradburn at Bluewater Yachts on 02 4956 8522.

Bluewater Yachts paid for the author's airfare from Sydney to Brisbane.

Boat Test Specifications

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| LOA | 13.72m |
| Beam | 4.1m |
| Draft | 1.95m |
| Displacement | 13500kg |
| Ballast | 4700kg |
| Sail area (main + head) | 100.5m ² |