



ABOVE These ten Noble boats in the fitout bay were all on their way to Chinese dealers the following week.

OPPOSITE TOP My most exciting trailerboat being launched for the first time, at Cygnet, Tasmania. A year later I was to sail it 4000 miles across the Pacific chasing William Bligh from mutiny on the *Bounty*. I lost 18kg and we all nearly died, but what fun!

OPPOSITE BELOW These new Noble boats have a strong Aussie heritage but are from a totally new operation. I was impressed!

ABOVE RIGHT The biggest in the Noble Boats International range at 12m is not exactly a trailerboat but it will still set you up for some awesome adventures.

BELOW The quality control checks were impressive and everything is now certified at Noble, even the aluminium plate is imported from Italy.

hopefully locate even more wrecks. Now I need a new 7 to 8m fast trailerboat to operate the magnetometer from. So began the new adventure of finding that boat.

You cannot buy what I need in Tonga, so I have to ship it in.

The first idea was a solid Aussie aluminium plate boat; tough, strong, dependable and hard-wearing. Internet searches revealed some great boats with top price tags. The cost of shipping from Australia to Tonga was the same as shipping from China, which got me thinking.

I have been living and working with boats from China for nine years now, and *ICE* was built in China. I started asking around the yard where I am currently building a new 24m steel trawler yacht. To my great surprise a boat brand I know well, Noble Boats International is building a complete range of aluminium plate boats (from 5 to 12m) just down the road from my apartment. The hunt was over, or so I thought.

The Noble brand has a solid reputation and long history in Australia. It was eventually taken to China where manufacturing was established. Over three years about 150 boats entered

the county.

NOBLE RISING

Now a whole, new operation has emerged there. I went to say g'day and what I discovered really impressed me. It is a new start-up organisation, in new premises and the key workers involved have moved across.

The current build is like a new boat, with detailed quality control, certified welders and materials on the same highly-regarded designs. The entire current production is only just meeting demand from the Chinese domestic market that continues to grow rapidly.

I did the numbers and started to realise that my dreams were not as strong as my budget... even from China! I needed 30kts and 250-mile range, sleeping for three or four with a galley and marine toilet, protected all-round visibility and a good cockpit. It needed oceangoing ability too and carry a tender if possible. All on a trailer! Hmm?

The trailer is mainly so that I can remove it from the water for maintenance, there are no highways in Tonga. Importantly, if a cyclone is approaching I can pull it out and tie it to a coconut tree. Cyclone Ian has just

Trailerboat adventures

ADVENTURE BOATS COME IN ALL SIZES, EVEN TRAILERBOATS, SAYS DON

Wow, a new-look magazine and a new reader demographic. If you are a trailerboat fan reading my column for the first time, hi! I get to write about anything, as long as it is connected with adventure, and some of the best I have had and continue to enjoy are on boats launched from trailers.

As I write this, I am bouncing around the Southern Ocean on the 4000-tonne ship *National Geographic Orion* bound for a summer in Antarctica. My winter will then be consumed with

blutreasure.me treasure hunting and diving in the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific. Four years into this project and it continues to grow as we make even more new and exciting discoveries.

This all began when I stumbled across "things" while I was in Tonga in 2010. I was about to set off on a 4000-mile voyage across the Pacific in a 25ft open trailerboat! During that 48-day adventure I was to relive William Bligh's epic open-boat journey of survival following the mutiny on the *Bounty*. It was tough. I lost 18kg and we all nearly died but it was also a lot of fun!



NEW TINNY

Last season, with a new focus and a ten-person dive team, we did all the things "boys" dream about: living on a tropical island, fishing, diving, exploring wreck sites looking for treasures and

hoping for the unexpected. My 15.2m steel expedition ship *ICE* supports all operations and we use 5m inflatables for diving. I have just bought a new \$32,000 towing magnetometer to help in the search and



The boat you want is now easier to find



devastated the northern Ha'apai group in Tonga, which is where we operate much of the time. All our friends are safe but their houses, all their possessions and crops are now gone. They are subsistence people living off the sea and the land, so if you want to help out you can contact your local Red Cross... or even me. Thanks!

TROPHY VENTURE

For years I have been telling people about cheap cruising yachts in America, so why not trailerboats. My new web search left a strong impression. The Bayliner Trophy 2359 was the perfect boat and shipping from America was only 25 per cent more than China. Market price for a good one is about US \$23,000 to \$30,000. Then I hit the jackpot.

Having decided that model was the boat for me, a 2006 one-owner version with just 280 hours on the engine and no trailer, popped-up on eBay in Florida, USA. With a buy-it-now price of \$US16,500, it wasn't rocket science. I hit the buy button just before Christmas. The next adventure is to buy a trailer, service everything, fit extra gear and then ship it to Tonga – all without me visiting America. It must arrive in

Nuku'alofa by May?

As I always say: "Any activity with an unknown outcome is an Adventure." And this one has just begun! I am looking forward to driving away in Tonga with this great little-big trailerboat. Watch this space.

MEDIVAC!

When you live on a remote island in Tonga, you do not dream of aluminium plate boats. You simply

dream of finding enough money to buy some pine planks, nails, putty, a few litres of resin, some paint and a 35hp two-stroke outboard. With that, you can get together with a few mates, build that dream boat, then catch bigger fish.

These boats cost a few thousand dollars in our money to build but for them it is a huge investment. Tongans are experienced seamen and watching

the weather they travel to various islands for trade and communication. They do not know what an EPIRB is, cannot afford lifejackets and it is not uncommon for boats to disappear.

Last year we left our base of operations at Nomuka for a few days and were delayed returning due to some severe weather. When we did arrive back, we were amazed to hear the story of a courageous Medivac

TOP LEFT Web image of my eBay USA purchase, a Trophy 2359 fast pilothouse boat that did not come with the trailer. I bought it sight unseen and now the new adventure begins, to ship it and set it up in Tonga!

LEFT My first look at the pilothouse Trophy online; the dinette drops to form a bunk and there are three more below, plus a toilet and galley.

ABOVE They cost about \$2000 in materials to build with a few mates in Tonga but for the subsistence islanders of the kingdom they are an important part of life.

RIGHT Not your average water ambulance but this simple two-stroke powered 22ft boat set out with a courageous crew and no safety gear on an epic ocean voyage to save a pregnant woman's life... they only just made it.



Another half mile farther to the west and they would have overshot the island, never to be seen again,
as no one knew they were coming!

undertaken by one such boat and crew.

A pregnant lady fell violently ill during the bad weather. The nurse on the island diagnosed that the unborn baby had died some time ago. The mother now had to reach hospital within 24 hours or she would die. There was only one way off the island and that was by small boat.

At 1100hrs she was placed in the bilge and with three crew set off to Pangi, 43 miles to the north. Headwinds of 30 to 35kts and high seas

slammed the boat and with its single 40hp two-stroke engine, they made little progress in the dangerous conditions.

They had no safety gear at all, just buckets and torches. No compass, flares, lifejackets... nothing. The clock was ticking. They turned downwind and headed south for Nuku'alofa on the main island of Tongatapu, now 66 miles to the south, across the open ocean with 3 to 4m seas. They calculated they had just enough fuel!

Thunderstorms dropped visibility at times to a few hundred metres. Night fell and they had to guess their course. They bailed continuously. At 2300hrs, they were running very low on fuel when, purely by chance and good luck, they made landfall on the western tip of Tongatapu. Another half mile farther to the west and they would have overshot the island, never to be seen again, as no one knew they were coming! They beached the boat, raised the alarm and a few hours

later she was in hospital and survived.

The Government made a payment of \$1500 to the boat's owner for his trouble and he motored home on a good day.

When I heard this story I stripped our boat of excess safety gear to present to the Nomuka clinic. They now have an EPIRB, lifejackets, compass, lifebuoy, sea anchor, chart, VHF radio and GPS ready to go on the next volunteer boat. Apparently, these rescues happen a few times a year. Wow! ■