

Basic Detail Report



Mercedes III

Vessel number

HV000494

Date

1966

Primary Maker

Cec Quilkey

Description

MERCEDES III was built at Cec Quilkey's yard in Taren Point NSW south of Sydney. The design came largely from Bob Miller, who later became well known as Ben Lexcen, designer of the America's cup winning 12 metre AUSTRALIA II (HV000074). Miller had established a sail making business with Craig Whitworth, but was also undertaking boat design work. Contemporary reports and other documents indicate that owner Ted Kaufmann, a Sydney engineer and well-known sailor was quite involved with the design as well, but it is understood he commissioned the lines from Miller who was then recognised for his pioneering lightweight 18-foot skiff designs such as TAIPAN (HV000054.) MERCEDES III was a lighter displacement, hard bilged concept for an ocean racer, quite different from the heavier classic designs that were standard for the era in Australia. To achieve the required strength, the hull was cold moulded in four layers of oregon, the first and fourth fore and aft and 5/16th in. (8mm) thick, the second and third were opposing diagonal layers 3/16th in. (5mm) thick. Keel, ribs, frames and floors are laminated from Queensland maple. Miller was familiar with cold moulding as he was a champion sailor in the high performance Flying Dutchman dinghy, which used this method with great success. Quilkey was also a master-craftsman for moulded timber craft, again through his work building Flying Dutchman dinghies. Richard Hammond who navigated MERCEDES III wrote the following to help clarify the design background: "LETTER FROM TED KAUFMAN: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT - I wish to clear up a few anomalies that have crept in overtime regarding MERCEDES III and KOOMOLOO. Bob Miller was a great friend of mine and he lived with me in the early '60s and we sailed together in my Star class yacht and were close friends. I had decided to build a new Admiral's Cup yacht and asked Bob what he thought about such a yacht, and also asked him to design one for me. He drew the lines for Mercedes III and the brilliance of the yacht was attributed to Bob's involvement with me, and it was known as a Kaufman/Miller designed yacht." More information came from Carl Ryves and was also quoted by Hammond. " Carl Ryves, a close friend of Bob Miller's, who shared a lot of his ideas and thoughts on boat design, says Ted Kaufman asked Miller to design an ocean racer Admiral's Cup boat. Miller was very enthusiastic as he had many pent-up ideas for larger yacht design and was very critical of the boats being developed at that time. Carl continues: "Ted specified the size of the yacht to suit his budget. Bob was keen to design a very 'fast' boat, about 38ft long, with a separate rudder and fin keel with bulb. Ted also wanted a conservative boat, like the Swanson development of the original Ward-designed Carmen." So Miller's ideas were to refine everything, straighten

waterlines forward, create a beautiful keel, low ballast, perfect streamlines, streamlined prop aperture and sharp fine trailing edges. The hull was to be a strong, lightweight, multi-skin moulded construction, which allowed more ballast for the same all-up weight. Miller had seen boats built this way in New Zealand, while the Sydney boat-builder, Cec Quilkey, was an earlier developer of this method of construction. Miller and Kaufman spoke to him about their new yacht. Quilkey's construction produced a weight-strength and stiffness advantage, with added bonuses of tight rigging, straight forestay, no leaks and a virtually indestructible yacht. Bob Miller, with help from Carl Ryves, drew Mercedes III's lines full size from his early sketches and plans at Fairland Hall in Hunters Hill, NSW. Miller then used the full sized drawings, which he modified as he went along. The final lines, plan and shape evolved during just one weekend. Cec Quilkey was present and the offsets for the frame shapes were taken from Bob Miller's lines, although Quilkey may have marginally modified these offsets during the hull lofting." The strength of this method was tested before it was launched, when it fell backwards from the trailer taking it to the water for the first time. Landing onto its side, there was damage to the planking and some of the frames. Back in the builder's shed repairs were done quickly, before it was again taken to the water and finally launched. The repairs did not compromise the strength of the hull and were barely visible after completion. Australia had come 2nd in its first attempt at the Admiral's Cup in 1965, and surprised everyone with this result in what the English had described as cruising yachts rather than racing yachts. Buoyed by how well they had done another team was prepared for the bi-annual series, always held in the UK. MERCEDES III was launched for the trials, and over its early period of it won nine out of the fourteen races it contested. It was an immediate selection for the 1967 team which included CAPRICE OF HUON and BALANDRA. CAPRICE was 15 years old, but a very competitive yacht, while BALANDRA was newly built from a recent English Camper and Nicholson design. In the UK, the four race series was strongly contested with other teams from the UK, Europe and the USA. The Australian team were very consistent throughout, and were the top placed team in each of the four races, winning the series overall by a commanding 107 points. MERCEDES III won the second race overall, the Britannia Cup, and was the highest placed yacht over the four races, followed by BALANDRA and then CAPRICE of HUON, giving Australia the most comprehensive victory ever recorded for the Admiral's Cup. Australia returned in 1969 to defend the trophy against similar strong opposition, MERCEDES III was chosen along with close sister-yacht KOOMOLOO, and Syd Fischer's first RAGAMUFFIN. The team performed well again to finish second overall to the American team. The fine performances of MERCEDES III and then KOOMOLOO led to other commissions for Lexcen, including the legendary APOLLO, which in turn took him into America's Cup design and finally the triumph with AUSTRALIA II. During the 1970s and early 1980s MERCEDES III changed ownership and was raced on Sydney Harbour, with a short period in Melbourne with the Royal Brighton Yacht Club. It also competed in many Sydney to Hobart races. The current owner bought MERCEDES III in 1986 and the yacht moved back to Melbourne. It raced again in the Sydney to Hobart race in 1995 and 1996, and has had success under the many changing ocean racing rules, including the IOR, IMS and IRC.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 12.19 m x 9.51 m x 3.43 m x 1.98 m (40 ft x 31.2 ft x 11.25 ft x 6.5 ft)