

Basic Detail Report



Ruthean

Vessel number

HV000530

Date

1952

Primary Maker

J Jones

Description

RUTHEAN was built in Triabunna Tasmania by J Jones and construction began in 1949 for Sir Claude Plowman, a well-known Sydney yachtsman. The yacht was designed in the UK by Laurent Giles and Partners, one of the senior yacht designers of the period, with many successful craft built to the RORC rating rule then used by UK and Australian authorities. It was commissioned as a successor to Plowman's 1913 Fife designed MORNA, which had been one of the best ocean racers in Australia up to this point, however modern designs were showing superiority and MORNA's time at the top was over. The new yacht, then unnamed, was carvel planked in Huon pine, 16 46 metres (54 feet) long and designed with a yawl sail plan. RUTHEAN was partially built when, for reasons not recorded, Plowman met with Vic Toll at the RPAYC Sydney clubrooms and offered the unfinished vessel to Vic Toll. Toll had been a very successful sailor in his home waters on Lake Macquarie NSW, beginning in the 16-Foot Skiff class before moving onto day sailing yachts. He was very well known on the lake, and was the founding president then commodore of the Lake Macquarie Yacht Club. His father had founded the Toll transport company, still operating in 2012, and all family members were respected businessmen and community identities on the central coast of NSW. RUTHEAN's adventures began almost immediately. Toll and his son inspected the unfinished yacht at Triabunna, and reached an agreement to have the builder complete the hull and deck, and then Toll would sail the yacht back to Newcastle to have it finished off, using only a jury rig and fitted only with internal ballast. He decided to name it RUTHEAN after the names of his children Ruth and Ian. Vic Toll, his son Ian and three others set sail aboard RUTHEAN from Triabunna in mid-January 1950, with shearers bunks tied into the hull, a 44 gallon drum for water, another for fuel and a temporary galley in the forepeak. A hand-lift pump was carried, and used for 30 minutes every hour throughout the passage north, marking the beginning of a constant pattern of leaking for decades. While the spars were made in Sydney by Hayes, and sails in Tasmania by Rex, a shipwright fitted out the hull at Newcastle. Casting the lead keel was another Vic Toll inspired do-it-yourself process. The foundry had wanted a 50% margin for wastage in the amount of lead required, so Toll decided to cast it himself with no more than the required amount as it was an expensive material, and it taken a while to acquire in small batches. Pinching mould sand from the foundry (which was adjacent to the Toll's paddock), grabbing a mechanic who had once served time as moulder to take charge, and using out-door practices that would alarm the specialists Toll's team successfully cast RUTHEAN's keel themselves. It was fitted at the Stockton Slipways, then RUTHEAN was

taken to Sydney to step the masts. RUTHEAN's initial races were sailed on Sydney Harbour and Pittwater, and finally the long planned Sydney to Hobart race in the 1952 event, where they finished 4th over the line and 12th on handicap. The next saga was getting RUTHEAN onto Lake Macquarie and its home club where it could be their flagship. Its deep draught was at odds with the shallow depth of the Swansea Channel. In classic Toll style he took advantage of a lack of inspectors or other authorities watching the entrance, and hired a barge with a sand pump, lashed the barge to the yacht and then gradually pumped a channel through the bar, until deep water was reached on the other side. RUTHEAN was the largest yacht in the fleet and became a 'landmark' on the lake for almost two decades, leaving occasionally to race offshore, including six Sydney to Hobart events, the last one being in 1963. Many sailors in the region managed to crew aboard RUTHEAN at one time or another, Toll was generous with the use of the boat, and its social sailing was as important as any racing events. RUTHEAN was known as the "Lady of the Lake' and that title became a headline banner across a newspaper report when RUTHEAN was sold to a Sydney buyer in 1973, the report noted RUTHEAN's departure marked' the passing of a graceful and exciting era in local yachting". It was brought alongside the club's wharf for people to pay their respects to the graceful RUTHY as it had become known, before sailing south. Under subsequent owners in Sydney, Adelaide and Queensland the name and graceful looks were maintained throughout, but parts of the layout and structure were modified or repaired, a taller mast and shorter boom were added to improve windward speed, and a skeg rudder put on as another modernisation that also helped it sail better. Throughout its entire life it leaked, despite attempts to strengthen the hull to keel joint with stronger floors, and one of the later owners controlled the constant inflow with automatic bilge pumps. A Queensland owner sailed RUTHEAN on a world circumnavigation lasting seven years before returning to Townsville. The yacht is now in Victorian waters owned by a shipwright, and in 2012 he and his wife are giving RUTHEAN a thorough overhaul so that it can continue to make offshore passages as a cruising yacht.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 16.46 m x 3.66 m x 2.44 m (54 ft x 12 ft x 8 ft)