

Basic Detail Report



Gretel

Vessel number

HV000471

Date

1962

Primary Maker

Lars Halvorsen Sons Pty Ltd

Description

GRETEL was built for an Australian syndicate headed by Sydney based media baron Frank Packer, (later Sir Frank), challenging through the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron. Packer was a very competent sailor and skipper of his own yachts on Sydney Harbour. He was keen to put Australian yachting on the international stage, and the America's Cup was the pinnacle for the sport. After the dismal British challenge in 1959, he put in a challenge through the RSYS. This was an historic step at the time; previously the Cup had only been raced between the USA and British challengers, with the exception of an early Canadian one in the late 1800s. Packer understood the task ahead and chartered the 12 Metre class yacht VIM from America to be a trial horse and training yacht. He chose key members for the sailing team, and confirmed that Alan Payne would be the designer. Payne had quietly risen to the top of Australian yacht design during the 1950s, largely through his designs for ocean racing yachts that competed in the Sydney to Hobart race with distinction. Two key staff members assisted Payne throughout the project, naval architect Warwick Hood and talented draughtsman Alf Lean. Other staff were hired and the team designed the yacht, its rig and custom fittings for almost every detail. The rules for the cup expected the materials, design and construction for every part of the challenging vessel would come from the country challenging, however the Americans gave some concessions to the Australian syndicate. A key consideration was their approval for Payne to test models in the American Stevens Institute of Technology's testing tank in Washington DC, as there were no equivalent facilities in Australia. Halvorsen's leading shipwright Trevor Gowland commanded a team of builders dedicated to the same ideal of producing the highest quality yacht they could. The hull was double planked in mahogany on Australian hardwood frames, while the deck was triple planked in light western red cedar, then finished in fibreglass to achieve the required strength, but at a lighter overall weight. The lead keel was cast at Cockatoo Dockyard, while Clyde Engineering fabricated fittings including the Australian designed coffee-grinder style primary winches. Launched early in 1962 and skippered by Jock Sturrock from Melbourne GRETEL was named after Sir Frank Packer's late wife, Lady Gretel Packer. The yacht trialed against VIM in Sydney before being shipped to Newport Rhode Island for the series. Changes were made to the setup and fittings all the time as they sought to improve GRETEL's performance. The series was attracting major attention as it drew near, and huge crowds went out in pleasure craft to watch when the time came. The American President John F Kennedy was a keen sailor and attended the first race viewing it from a US Navy destroyer. Race one did not go well for the

Australians, the crew was unsettled and they had made a poor choice for the mainsail used. The second race was held in stronger wind conditions that suited GRETEL. It was behind after the start, but then gained on WEATHERLY in a tacking duel through its novel cross-linked primary winches which allowed GRETEL to use four crew on the winches instead of two. Holding a narrow lead at the final mark WEATHERLY ran under spinnaker toward the finish line defending its lead with GRETEL again coming closer. In a dramatic scene about halfway down the course, GRETEL surfed past WEATHERLY and went on to win the race. The series was then tied at one all, an unexpected outcome and the news went worldwide. In Australia it grabbed the headlines and gave hope to a country already watching with interest and pride. The crew celebrated their historic situation, and raced with more confidence. WEATHERLY's crew drew on their extensive racing experience to control the subsequent races with better tactics. GRETEL still managed to create history with two close finishes including one of only 12 seconds, one of the closest finishes in Cup history at that point. Although beaten they had still shown that Australia could compete at the top level of the sport. Australia challenged again for the contest in 1967. The DAME PATTIE syndicate built a new yacht of that name, while Packer decided not to build a new boat; instead he chose to modify GRETEL and the syndicate went ahead with a series of very significant changes. Payne prepared the new design changes and gave the drafting tasks to Trygve Halvorsen. The stern, rudder, underbody below the bilge, topsides, ballast and rig position were all changed, and a virtually new, single planked hull was returned to the water from a shed in Berrys Bay where the work was done. Unfortunately the changes did not give a significant improvement. DAME PATTIE won virtually all the trial races and went alone to the USA for the final series. DAME PATTIE lost the 1967 series and Packer then challenged again. He recruited Alan Payne to design a new yacht, GRETEL II and retained GRETEL as a trail horse. GRETEL II lost that series, and Packer considered a third challenge but passed away, leaving Alan Bond as the sole challenger from Australia. Bond bought both GRETELS as trial horses for his new Bob Miller design SOUTHERN CROSS. It raced unsuccessfully in the 1974 series. Bond then sold GRETEL and it was bought by developer Bernard Lewis in Sydney. Lewis converted GRETEL to an ocean racer, and it turned out to be a good change of direction for GRETEL. With an age allowance improving its rating or handicap GRETEL returned many good results and was often the first boat across the line. Its best moment was a close second on handicap in the 1980 Sydney to Hobart race. Lewis sold GRETEL shortly after and the yacht became a charter boat, operating largely in the Whitsunday Islands. In 2002 it was sold out of Australia to a syndicate that included the well known American yacht designer Doug Peterson. The yacht was shipped to Italy, rigged and sailed a few times before being stored away ready for a rebuild so it could sail in classic International 12 metre class yacht racing events in Europe. However the work did not proceed in Italy, and in 2011 a new owner from Germany has shipped GRETEL to his own yard with plans to rebuild the yacht there for events on the Baltic Sea and elsewhere.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 21.03 m x 14.02 m x 3.66 m, 26.42 tonnes (69 ft x 46 ft x 12 ft, 26 tons)