

Basic Detail Report



Seabee homebuilt runabout

Vessel number

HV000522

Date

1960s

Description

The SEABEE runabout is 3.380 metres long, made from aluminium and painted a salmon colour on the hull. It was made from the forward section of the main fuselage of a Republic Seabee amphibious aircraft that had been destroyed in hangar fire at Bankstown Airport (NSW) on 17 January, 1958.. The shell of the hull has a simple plywood deck and transom built onto it, with three cockpits. The aluminium bulkheads and framework that was already part of the aircraft structure were retained in the boat. The forward cockpit has basic timber seating and a cane covered steering wheel. It was powered by an outboard engine, which is no longer extant, but the steering cables remain, still connected to the wheel. The builder was Les Hodge, an ex-RAAF engineer who had a panel beating business near Bankstown. The runabout was purchased c1961 by Jack Dowling, a supervisor at Goodyear Tyres, Rosehill and he used it in the Sydney area before moving to Watts Rd, Callala Beach on the NSW South Coast in the mid-1960s. Originally the boat had a 14½ horsepower McCulloch engine (American). In the mid-1970s Dowling's step son, Len Harrison installed a 20hp Johnson Seahorse outboard and added a keel for better stability. Dowling's widow, Edna Jane Dowling donated the boat to the Fleet Air Arm Museum (Nowra) in the early 1990s but no details were recorded. In 2003 the museum deaccessioned the runabout and it was 'adopted' by a group of volunteers from the museum and eventually offered to the Lady Denman Maritime Museum in 2008. It is an excellent example of improvised boatbuilding, a theme that is popular in regional Australia where a variety of items are made by adapting something that has often been discarded, making it available at no cost. There are craft in many other places around the country that have been built on the same concept. Characteristically the builder has taken something out of context to create a vessel that has the elements of its intended type, but clearly shows its other, original use. In this instance, the hull shape is remarkably similar to hulls that have been designed as powercraft. It has a single chine, and a concave forward section that leads into a veed hull shape from the middle of the hull aft to the transom, forming a quite conventional style of hull shape. The Republic Seabee was a popular North American single engine, amphibious aircraft. The fuselage became a hull, supported by two floats on the wings to give it stability at rest in the water. Four Seebees are understood to have been imported into Australia in the late 1950s, early 1960s. The SEABEE runabout is in good condition, and in 2012 is on display at Lady Denman Heritage Complex, at Huskisson NSW on the shores of Jervis Bay.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 3.38 m x 2.13 m (11.09 ft x 7 ft)