

# Basic Detail Report

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## Liba One

**Vessel number**

HV000555

**Date**

1964

**Primary Maker**

Ian Showell

### Description

LIBA ONE was the second houseboat built by the Liba Liba Houseboat hire operation run by Mr Ian Showell in Renmark South Australia which he began in the early 1960s. LIBA ONE was launched in October 1964 from the banks of the Murray River in Renmark. It measured approximately 58ft x 21ft and was built with all timber cabin and deck joists. It was one of only two houseboats with cabins built completely in timber. It had foam filled open topped pontoons which were eventually replaced with welded and sealed steel pontoons. Initially it had side mounted rear paddles but was converted to the between pontoon style rear paddles in line with the rest of the fleet when the pontoons were changed. Ian Showell named the houseboat LIBA LIBA 1 "Queen of the Fleet" since it was much larger than the first boat and deserved to be the flagship, and the older, smaller craft was then renamed LIBA LIBA 2. Ian Showell the designer and builder came from Renmark. Returning from RAAF service in World War II he was fascinated by the catamaran style boats which plied the River Nile and sketched some ideas for a twin-hulled houseboat based on the catamaran design. Back in Renmark, Ian developed his own very successful business making ladders and bulk bins for the fruit growing industry. In 1960 a friend Michael Kempe described a wonderful holiday his family had travelling down the Murray River in a boat, but he was concerned with the safety of the single-hulled boats in the shallow waters of the Murray. This prompted Ian to bring out his old sketches of the twin-hulled, catamaran style of houseboat. After discussing his ideas with Michael they decided to build a houseboat together. This became LIBA LIBA the first houseboat in the Liba Liba fleet, and it worked for many years before being destroyed by fire in 1988. The first boat, LIBA LIBA had used a complete Ferguson tractor drive train for propulsion, while LIBA ONE was fitted with a tractor engine mounted in front of a tractor transmission and final drive. These two original houseboats were both fitted with side mounted paddle systems driven directly from shafts mounted to the tractor wheels. Subsequent craft used Holden car motors driving a Farmall 2 tractor final drive on which the rear paddle system was mounted. These later houseboats always used Holden Red engines which were first sold with the famous EH model. LIBA ONE was converted to the rear mount paddle system using the Holden engine at a later date. The engine in place now is a 173 c.i. in-line six cylinder from a 1973 Holden Torana. These first two boats originally had paddles mounted on the outside of the pontoons at the stern with covers over the assembly. The paddle wheels were eight timber planks bolted to the perimeters of steel framed wheels which were welded around steel shafts. The two shafts were bearing mounted and connected to the tractor hubs on

either side. The paddle diameter was relatively small and that, combined with the flat blades, tended to slap and thrash the water. These evolved in later boats to a slower revolving, larger diameter format with shaped steel blades to cut through the water rather than slap. From LIBA 3, the paddle location was shifted to a central mount at the stern between the pontoons in conjunction with the change to the complete Farmall tractor drive trains with paddles mounted round the tractor rims. The assembly was then centrally located between the pontoons with rudders behind. Eventually as new houseboats entered the hire market, they elected to use a more modern system with outboard motors, and only the original Liba Liba fleet craft used the paddlewheels. LIBA ONE still retains a Holden motor and central arrangement of paddle blades, and the current Liba Liba houseboats still in operation continue to use this configuration. LIBA ONE was almost destroyed in the mid 1960s during a time of high-river when it was squeezed sideways and then submerged under the Paringa Bridge with only a narrow gap underneath to the river floor. It eventually emerged on the other side and was recovered. The LIBA ONE has had four owners in its time since it was launched. The original owner and builder was the company owned by Ian Showell, Paddle Cat Pty Ltd, but the fleet was advertised under the Liba Liba name, taken from a local aboriginal word meaning 'canoe', and they were based in Renmark. LIBA ONE served in the Liba Liba houseboat hire fleet for a total of 28 years during which it experienced many changes and revisions, including a new name LIBA 33. This was due to the market perception that a boat with a higher number was a newer boat. As the LIBA ONE had been newly renovated it was decided to change the number to reflect that. The houseboat was sold to Keith and Charmaine Halloran in 1993. It was selected by them for its modern open plan design and they operated it as a hire boat for a period of 15 years until it was sold in 2008 as part of the Baseby House Bed & Breakfast at Mannum. Keith and Charmaine also made a number of improvements and modifications to the LIBA ONE during their ownership of the boat and renamed the craft LIBA T. The next owner, Greg Hicks, owned the boat for 2 years during which time he spent a large sum of money making further modifications and upgrades to the LIBA ONE. After Greg Hicks purchased a much newer, more modern and luxurious spa houseboat, he decided to sell the LIBA ONE in 2010. The current owners continue to maintain the LIBA ONE as a family houseboat and as a weekend and holiday retreat for their family and friends. LIBA LIBA 1 now named LIBA ONE (so as to not be identified with the current Liba Liba hire fleet) is the surviving boat of the original two Liba Libas designed and built by Ian Showell and his team. Originally designated, the "Queen of the Fleet" by Ian Showell the LIBA ONE continues to provide much enjoyment on the river for the current owners, their family and friends.

## **Dimensions**

Vessel Dimensions: 17.68 m x 3.66 m (58 ft x 12 ft)