

Basic Detail Report



Australia

Vessel number

HV000518

Date

1977

Primary Maker

Steve Ward

Description

Australia is one of the later aluminium 12 metre class yachts, a construction method that was first introduced in the 1974 series. It was built for the Sun City Yacht Club syndicate (based in Yanchep WA) which was headed by flamboyant businessman and sailor Alan Bond, who had challenged previously in 1974 with SOUTHERN CROSS, an aluminium hull designed by Bob Miller. This had been an

unconventional design, but Bond was a great supporter of the talented Miller. He decided to combine Miller's lateral thinking with the experience of Dutch born Johan Valentijn, who had been an employee of the American team's yacht designers, Sparkman and Stephens, and had worked on the design of the successful 1974 defender COURAGEOUS. Australia was the result of months of test tank work at Delft in Holland, and combined a 'veed' hull shape similar to COURAGEOUS with lower freeboard and other detail differences. It was built in WA by Steve Ward and launched early in 1977. Australia easily out performed SOUTHERN CROSS in trials off Yanchep WA, and went to America to face opposition from challenges by the French, Swedish and another Australian syndicate sailing a modified GRETEL II (HV000437). In the challenger elimination series Australia was undefeated against FRANCE 1 and then SVERIGE in the final series. It then raced COURAGEOUS, which had surprised the defenders by beating the fancied Lowell North skippered ENTERPRISE, the latest Sparkman and Stephens design. In the races for the America's Cup in September 1977, COURAGEOUS was handled without fault by Ted Turner and his crew. It won four races to nil, but the margins were not large, only around one and two minutes. The American's sails were considered better, along with their tactics, but Australia had given a much improved performance against COURAGEOUS compared to SOUTHERN CROSS. Bond decided to challenge again, but chose to allow Miller, (now known as Ben Lexcen after changing his name) the opportunity to modify Australia, while Valentijn went to work with the French syndicate on the design of FRANCE III. Miller made extensive changes to the keel, rudder and aft hull sections of Australia, as well as designing a new mast. Skippered by Sir James Hardy, Australia now represented the Royal Perth Yacht Club and again faced multiple challengers. This time the English syndicate's yacht LIONHEART provided stiff competition in the semi-final races, helped by a novel fibreglass tipped mast that bent considerably and exploited a sail measurement, allowing the

yacht to carry more sail area than a conventional mast's rig plan. Behind the scenes Lexcen and his team copied the concept and produced their own bendy mast and sails to match, all the time denying that they thought it was a breakthrough idea. They easily beat the French yacht FRANCE III in the finals and then trialled their new mast, catching the American's by surprise. When the final series began with the defender FREEDOM skippered by Dennis Conner, his methodical approach was now matched against the Australian team's unconventional modifications, and the first three races showed the Australians that they were very close to matching and beating the US defenders. The first race was won by FREEDOM by about two minutes, and then they lost the second race by 28 seconds as the new rig on Australia gave it an edge. The next race went to the US boat by less than a minute, and by then the Australians could see that when they got close, the Americans were not used to the situation and could become rattled. The final two races were sailing in stronger winds, and FREEDOM was considerably better in those conditions, finally winning the series four races to one. Despite this loss, the syndicate could now see that the US were not unbeatable, but as well as adopting a methodical approach, Bond and Lexcen thought the series also showed they needed something extra as a design edge. Using Australia's hull shape as the basis to develop the next design, Lexcen began his experiments with endplates and then wings on the keel which finally became the design for the America's Cup winning Australia II in 1983. After the 1980 event Bond sold Australia to the English Victory syndicate who renamed it TEMERAIRE and sailed the yacht as a trial horse against their two new yachts. After 1983 it was sold to Syd Fisher in Australia, who changed its name back to Australia and used it as a trial horse and training boat for his new Peter Cole design STEAK 'N KIDNEY during the 1987 Australian defence series. The yacht remained with Fisher after the series and in 2004 was refitted for charter work, and then put up for sale in 2005, eventually changing hands in 2011. It is currently still fitted out for charter work, which includes guardrails and life rafts, and sails in association with STEAK 'N KIDNEY at corporate sailing days and other events

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 19.66 m x 13.71 m x 3.73 m x 2.7 m, 24.85 tonnes (64.5 ft x 44.98 ft x 12.24 ft x 8.86 ft, 24.45 tons)