

Basic Detail Report



Oimara

Vessel number

HV000056

Date

1903

Primary Maker

EA Jack

Description

OIMARA was designed and built by AE 'Ned' Jack in Launceston, Tasmania in 1903. Originally named MAUD, the shallow draft, Huon pine gaff rigged ketch had a centreboard and was ideal for sailing on the Tamar River. Over the years the yacht changed hands and at one point it was carrying apples down the Huon River. One owner removed the centreboard, and another changed the name to YMA. In 1923 it was bought and renamed OIMARA (Gaelic for Sea Maiden) by Frank 'Doc' Bennell, and then sailed back to Port Phillip Bay to join the register of the St Kilda Yacht Club. Much of the yacht's cruising over subsequent years was around Bass Strait and Westernport Bay, and OIMARA often took messages from the lighthouse keepers back to the mainland. During the Depression years Bennell fitted a dentist's chair in the saloon and went around Bass Strait to service the island communities. Extractions were sometimes performed with spectators looking on through the skylight. The November 1933 issue of The Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly reported part of this trip noting OIMARA had visited Ulverstone on October 28th 1933, and " Captain Bennell, owner of the vessel, said he was making a coastal cruise of Tasmanian ports." Another report, from March 1933 notes its arrival in Sydney from Melbourne and amongst the highlights on the passage, the report tells of two crew who " while rowing ashore in their dinghy, were attacked by a large shark. The monster charged fiercely at the boat, but made off after several futile attempts to upset it". OIMARA made a name for itself in ocean racing as one of the first yachts to regularly take part in races. 'Doc' Bennell decided to revive the Bass Strait race for the Rudder Cup in 1927, and the five boats that took part suffered another race as hazardous as the previous inaugural event held in 1907. Sailing in typical Bass Strait gale conditions, boats were swept off course, hove to and damaged, but OIMARA continued sailing right through the foul weather to win the race. In 1931 'Doc' Bennell proposed a Trans Tasman race, but it was considered foolhardy by many yachtsmen. No other boats in Australia showed any interest, so he left for Wellington. There was no interest there either, but in Auckland, Erling Tambs from Norway entered his cruising yacht TEDDY, along with a local yacht RANGI. All three were sturdy craft, and the race was run by the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron, with some peculiar rules. The yachts were allowed unlimited extra sails, and OIMARA was permitted to use its engine. It did so at the start, a ragged affair with RANGI finally crossing the line off Auckland's North Head in a casual manner, 30 minutes after the other two. OIMARA won line honours, taking 10 & 1/2 days to sail the course to Sydney, but TEDDY won the event, it had been given a handicap of 4 days, and only finished 36 hours behind OIMARA.

Meanwhile RANGI took 19 days including a stopover at Lord Howe Island. OIMARA cruised to the Great Barrier Reef in 1939, but during the war it was kept out of the water. 'Doc' Bennell's son 'Bushy' had now taken over the boat, and it was moored at St Kilda. He retired to Sydney in 1970, leaving OIMARA in Melbourne in the care of its crew. In 1979 the boat was sold to the son of one of the early crew members, who had himself been a regular crew member as well, thus maintaining the close links to OIMARA's early ocean racing and cruising exploits. In 2013 it had changed hands and a two shipwrights were giving OIMARA an overhaul and restoring items needing attention before putting it back on the water.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 12.8 m x 10.97 m x 3.28 m x 1.68 m, 15.75 tonnes (42 ft. x 36 ft x 10.75 ft x 5.5 ft, 16 tons) Registered Dimensions: 9.66 tons