

The hull truth

WHEN IT COMES TO BUYING YOUR YACHT IT PAYS TO BE THOROUGHLY PREPARED WITH JUST THE FACTS.

CHRIS DANGER



IN December 2018, we took the momentous decision to buy a new, to us, catamaran: a 52ft Crowther called *Anui*. It took us a year to find a successor to our beloved *Take It Easy*.

It was not a quick nor easy process. We were not unhappy with what we had, but having lived onboard for a year and a half and contemplating many years of life afloat, we wanted more.

When we reflect on the path we followed to find the boat of our dream, there are a few learnings that other people might find useful. So here are our thoughts on 'the hull truth' about buying a boat.

DEFINE WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

We are not shipwrights or boatbuilders, nor have we got the inclination to do a lot of work ourselves. We sail to have fun and want immediate gratification!

We did not have the cash for a brand new catamaran. So we were looking for a well set up secondhand boat, one we could confidently live on and go cruising with straight away, without a mountain of work beforehand.

We were also looking for the difficult combination of strong sailing

performance and the aesthetics that make the boat a pleasing, comfortable home for us. Many boats cater for one or the other. There are lots of race horses with spartan interiors and there are many production boats that are floating apartments with luxurious fit-outs but which will not be performance cruisers.

We wanted the best of both worlds.

When you look for your ideal boat, making the list of what is important to you will help you scan through the hundreds of ads on online boat sales sites. It will also help a broker understand what you are after and show you those boats that meet your requirements.

Be crystal clear on the 'musts', the non-negotiables that will lead you to walk away even if everything else you see is wonderful. No boat is perfect and you may well find yourself looking at a few boats at once, each with different pluses and minuses. Being clear in your own mind as to what is most important to you will help you come to a decision as to which to pursue.

For us, our must-have list for our catamaran included: a sailer, not a motor cruiser; a minimum of 13 metres for suitable payload capacity and space;

high bridge deck clearance to avoid slamming; bigger engines than our 9.9hp outboards on *Take It Easy*; wood trims inside, rather than a white high gloss finish; a shower cubicle separate from the toilet and basin, one we could walk away from without having to wipe the walls and surrounding features dry; plenty of storage space for provisions, toys, tools and spares.

With regard to the owners' bedroom, we required an athwartship island bed. These are more comfortable in a roly anchorage, you do not have to climb over each other at night to get up and there is space on either side, so it is relatively easy to make the bed. A tunnel bed with the mattress right against two bulkheads or even a bed against a bulkhead on one side would not pass muster!

Next down the list was the 'nice to have's': good cockpit protection and shades for the tropics; an oven in the galley; a second shower/toilet for guests; water maker; washing machine; decent size dinghy with a good size outboard, with the whole lot lifted on davits.

If push came to shove, we would compromise some performance for internal comfort, but only some!



This list of requirements significantly cut down the number of prospects, as you can imagine. But we were not in a hurry, with *Take It Easy* being a perfectly decent catamaran we could wait. We were only prepared to make the jump if we found the boat that ticked our boxes.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Once clear on what you are looking for, it is time to do some reading about different boat models that might fit the bill. There is a wealth of information on the internet, with most production models providing full specifications and typical floor plans.

You want to get a shortlist of boats that have a good chance of meeting your requirements. In our case, after doing some research we felt a custom boat was the most probable path we would take.

A Schionning, a Crowther or a Grainger were the most likely contenders as they were generally performance boats and offered the type of layout we were looking for. Among the production boats, we had narrowed things down to Privileges, although not as performing as the formers.

The Outremer is a beautiful ocean cat, but without our layout preferences.



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN:
Ready to go for a sea trial.

Enjoying the first sail.

Out of water survey done,
now it's time for a splash!



Custom boats are often a little cheaper than production boats and they may not hold their value as well but, in the end, we focussed on what suited us now, not what might happen at the other end when we decide we do not want to sail anymore!

ENLIST THE HELP OF BROKERS

Having your details with multiple yacht brokers is useful. Only half of the boats for sale actually get advertised online. Brokers can match-make sellers and buyers even before the boat is advertised.

Between November and March, many yachts come on the market because it is the end of the tropical cruising season and some people decide to give up, upgrade or move on to another phase in their life. Another interesting fact is that overseas boats end up in Australia from the United States in particular at this time of year, as the prospect of continuing around the world is not attractive to the owners who end up selling their boat here and flying home!

So there are more opportunities during those summer months.

Brokers can only sell you the boats they have and sometimes they can be pushy. But, once in a while, you find someone who is very helpful. One yacht broker, Andrew Crawford from Multihull Central in Manly Queensland, asked lots of questions and really focussed on understanding us.

He also had a few pearls of wisdom. He said something that really made sense to us: “when you step on a boat, you want to feel a bit of spark and excitement.

If you don’t, then it probably is not the boat for you.”

We saw a number of boats that just about ticked all the boxes, but left us cold or indifferent. The same broker also said to us “when it comes to selling your boat, the first offer is often the best one.” In the end Andrew did not have the boat that fitted our needs but we appreciated his advice.

DETERMINE WHETHER THIS REALLY IS THE BOAT

Buying a used boat can be fraught with danger. You have no way of knowing how hard the original owner ran the boat, how well it was cared for or how well it was maintained.

But when you look at a boat with critical eyes, there are clues. A boat with obvious signs of wear such as chipped teak decking, ragged sails, perishing clears, worn sheets, rusty deck gear, worn upholstery, will tell you the boat was not well loved.

A red flag can also be the odour as you step inside. The sniff test can tell you a lot about the state of the bilges and black water system.

Things that do not work anymore and have been left as is, also tells you maintenance was not a high priority. If you get that impression when you walk on board, unless you particularly want a ‘renovator’s delight’, walk away.

On the other hand, nice bright paint work, spotless upholstery, clean uncluttered presentation, sails and halyards in good condition, tidy engine

compartments will tell you the boat has been looked after and is someone’s pride and joy.

Anui was in the latter league, with top of the line instrumentation, superb high gloss cedar fit-out, recent paintwork, sails in good condition, recently changed rigging, new electrics and gas fittings, to name a few. Everything about the vessel said quality and attention to detail: our kind of boat.

Okay, now you have seen the boat you lust after. It is time for a survey and sea trial.

For brokerage sales as well as for a purchase directly from a private owner, these final checks should only go ahead once an offer price is agreed upon and a deposit has been paid by the potential buyer. This is to deter time-wasters and joy-riders. The deposit should be fully refundable if the survey or sea trial results are not satisfactory, but you are signing a contract, so read the fine print.

So let’s talk about this all-important next stage!

SURVEY SAYS

Having a marine surveyor go over the boat with a fine toothcomb and with a clear understanding of your intended use is extremely useful.

There are very different requirements depending on whether you intend to go world cruising versus weekend cruising. A professional survey is also necessary for insurance purposes.

There are obvious aspects you can see, but it is what you do not see or don’t know about that cause the biggest problems.



For this investigative work you want to enlist the help of a professional. We called on Geoff Cruse, a recommended multihull specialist based in Manly.

A surveyor will look at the following: hulls, floor and deck using a moisture meter to identify issues such as osmosis, delamination, or rot; transom, battery, fuel tanks, engine instrumentation, general lighting, bilge pump operations, electronics, radio, doors and latches, corrosion damage, fuel lines and filters, navigation lights, wiring and fuses, anchor, chain and shackles, electric winch operation, sea cocks and valves, mooring lines and cleats; and safety gear including flares, distress beacon, fire extinguishers, life jackets.

“A CHANGE OF THIS MAGNITUDE COMES WITH ITS CHALLENGES.”

Motor inclusions in a surveyor's review will include engine condition, gearbox operation, starting mechanism, engine mount, engine cooling system, engine battery cables, switches and terminals, gear oil condition, engine oil visual, charging system, anode condition, fuel filters and propeller condition.

Although marine surveyors are typically not qualified mechanics, they can take a sample of the engine oil and send it to be tested. This will tell you a lot more than just looking at the state of cleanliness of the engines and the hours.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Our two blueys together, the unenviable status of owning two boats!

Repair to delamination near the daggerboard.

The one bit of wood on deck that is rotted. New anchor hatch frame coming up.

The boat sales yard at the Boat Works in Queensland.





TOP TO BOTTOM: The other cat in our life has, naturally, found the guest cabin rather comfy!

Spacious saloon showing a beautiful cedar fitout.

The all-important main bathroom with full home comforts.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Anui sailing off Yamba.



Here are some of the details the analysis provides:

- viscosity: measurement of the thickness of the oil or its resistance to flow
- flashpoint: changes in the flashpoint or ignition temperature of the oil can indicate dilution by another fluid, usually fuel, which may indicate potentially serious internal leakages
- water: its presence within the lubricating oil can be indicative of component failure or wear and can lead to serious failure if not checked
- total base number (TBN): indicates the alkalinity of the oil and its ability to neutralise acidic compounds, usually the products of combustion
- insoluble particles: e.g. carbon, usually products of combustion and can be indicative of engine wear
- acidity: a test of how much an oil has deteriorated in service due to the detection of the weak organic acids which form over time as the oil oxidises
- initial PH: linked to the TBN and/or acidity, it is a measure of the acidity or alkali concentration of the oil
- spectographic analysis: the accurate measure of elements which are virtually soluble in oil. This can determine if there has been oil contamination.

It is a rare for a survey to give a 100 per cent clean bill of health to a secondhand boat. But it will be clear whether you should proceed to sea trial or pull out of the sale and get your deposit back.

SEA TRIAL

It is important to understand that the sea trial is not an opportunity to check out whether the boat is one that suits your needs. Instead it is for a surveyor and/or marine engineer to check all aspects of the boat that cannot be properly assessed while tied to the dock; plus for you to get a run down on how the boat handles.

It is also important not to fall into the temptation of sitting back and just enjoying the sail. You will have a limited amount of time to gain an impression as to whether the boat will behave as expected and suit your requirements when underway. All the time you will be accompanied by an experienced salesman whose commission depends on reassuring you the boat is exactly what you want.

So you need to be clear on the list of items you want to check, while it is possibly the only time you will have the owner with you showing you the ropes!

In our case, because we were looking at purchasing a 16m catamaran, we wanted to see how manageable it would be for us as a couple to run the boat. We also wanted to check how the boat behaved at all sail points, whether it slammed under the bridge deck when going hard into wind, how responsive the steering was, how fast the boat sailed, how high into the wind it pointed, how noisy the engines were.

We wanted to see all the sails up, including the spinnaker, to check the condition and how the lines were set up. It is only through actually tacking, reefing, launching the screecher and spinnaker, easing the mainsheet for a gust or to bear away around an obstruction, that you will get a feel for how well the boat is set up.

As a general rule, following are some of the questions the sea trial should answer

Is the deck gear laid out so that it is easy to operate in key manoeuvres? Is the cockpit comfortable and would you feel safe and secure there on a rough day?

What about the helm position? Do you have a good view forward when steering, or is it badly compromised by an overly large spray hood or genoa? Can you manoeuvre the boat into a jetty or marina pen with good visibility?

You should have already identified that the general layout suits your needs, but it is important to get an impression of how well the interior works at sea. A disappointingly large number of boats lack enough decent hand-holds in the interior: can you and your family get around safely when the boat is heeled or bouncing over waves? A large cabin looks great at boat shows and in a marina, but it is not so good if there is no way to brace yourself at sea.

For us, the sea trial on *Anui* was the final step in a long selection process: a run-down on how everything worked, its ease of handling. We hoped to remember everything, knowing there were many cheat sheets to refer to when our memory fails!

One thing we were very grateful for was that Scott Armstrong, builder and previous owner of *Anui*, was very thorough with documenting all instructions and reference manuals. "You will remember only ten per cent of what I tell you, so when in doubt, read the instruction sheets."



"WHEN YOU STEP ON A BOAT, YOU WANT TO FEEL A BIT OF SPARK AND EXCITEMENT."

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The other aspect we were impressed with was the amount of remote controls on board: remote for the auto-helm, remote for the anchor winch, remote for the dinghy davits and remote for the power winch at the mast. So you could handle the boat single handed if you have to.

ATTEND TO MINOR ADJUSTMENTS OR REPAIRS

So now you have made the final commitment and the balance in your bank account is about to get an awful lot lower. But wait, there are a few more expenses.

The marine survey may have identified a few issues that need attention and may provide useful suggestions on improvements you could make to the set up. You have paid for professional advice, now it is time to implement it.

If the surveyor has found some faults, these will be pointed out to the owner. You may then be in a position to negotiate for these to be attended to as part of the purchase price, or have the costs of the repairs taken into account in the final settlement.

There may also be some changes you want to implement. The question is then: when? In our experience it is best to live with the boat, as is, for a while before making significant and costly changes. But for minor adjustments, you may choose to do these straight away.

In our case, the previous owner of *Anui* was very reasonable and generous and took care of everything the surveyor identified; such as new slimline solar panels to replace the old ones; mending a rotten anchor locker hatch frame; repairs to an area of delamination and blisters in the paint work; plus supply of a new mainsail batten to replace a broken one.

We also chose to make minor additions, such as the installation of sun film on the hatches, blinds in the bedrooms and stainless steel chafe guards for the docking lines.

On a friend's suggestion we also made a very useful purchase: the Sena SPH10 'marriage saver' headphones/intercom to be able to calmly communicate between us when manoeuvring or anchoring. There is nothing worse than trying to scream instructions to each



Yes, it is a big boat, but she handles well.

"HAVING LIVED ONBOARD FOR A YEAR AND A HALF AND CONTEMPLATING MANY YEARS AFLOAT, WE WANTED MORE."

other over wind and engine noise on a big boat with an audience watching your every move and listening to your soothing, dulcet tones.

SAIL AWAY

Having done all that, we sailed away in mid-January on the boat of our dreams. We are thrilled with our purchase and are now learning everything there is to know about *Anui's* systems.

We are thoroughly enjoying her and are very proud of being the next caretakers of this exquisitely crafted vessel.

The only comprise we have made is in the bedroom, we would have preferred a queen bed but we have a double. Plus the roof line is low on one side in both our room and the guests' cabin, Wade has volunteered to sleep on that side of the bed!

We may be able to do something about our bed by getting one custom made in two halves as the space is there for a wider mattress, but we will see how things develop.

We would also have liked more bench space in the galley, but not a big issue.

Overall, *Anui* is a great mix of sailing performance, aesthetics and liveability.

It is rare to find a boat that lifts your spirits. *Anui* might be an 18 year old catamaran, but she has an energy, power and feel that invigorates us. Our thanks go to Scott Armstrong who put his heart and soul into building this amazing boat.

Anui excites us and makes our heart beat faster. A change of this magnitude in fitout, performance and size is a little daunting and comes with its challenges. You have to trust your own experience, capacity to keep learning and adapting. You have to be a bit audacious.

But what a thrill and what a fantastic new beginning for us. ≈



CHRIS DANGER

Chris and her partner Wade Bishop have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for about 20 years, cruising Bass Strait, Tasmanian waters and Australia's east coast. In July 2017, they finally retired and became sea wanderers. After spending many years on *Take It Easy*, they acquired their 'last' catamaran, *Anui*, a 52ft Crowther and enjoy the added speed and comfort. Follow their adventures on www.sv-anui.com.