



Hunter at dusk.

# a life of adventure



# the Derwent Hunter

I'M STANDING ON THE SUN DRENCHED FOREDECK of one of Australia's maritime treasures as she gently raises her bow to the swell. Beyond the massive bowsprit stretches a 3D postcard of azure sea studded with rich green islands ... It's a timeless panorama, one viewed by thousands of Australia's earliest sailors and now being experienced by just as many modern day adventurers aboard *The Derwent Hunter*.

With 60 years working under sail behind her, the 90ft Walter Wilson designed schooner was the last foreign going sailing vessel to operate out of Australian ports. Her decades of adventuring cover everything from fishing and trading, oceanographic research, movie roles and even the odd spot of gun smuggling with her many voyages just as varied. From the Sub Arctic, the notorious Bass Strait and the Tasman and Coral Seas, the *Derwent Hunter* has proved her pedigree countless times over. There are few vessels today that would have logged as many miles under the keel as this classic beauty. And today the legend continues as she makes her mark as one of the nations most lauded charter vessels in the marine tourism industry.

Tallships Adventures is an innovative charter company offering award winning three day Eco Sailing Adventures on board two of Australia's most remarkable vessels, the *Derwent Hunter* and the *Alexander Stewart*. The successful concept is borne of a true love of both the Whitsunday islands and Australia's maritime history.

Founder and Company Director, Warren Ladd is a dedicated owner operator with an intrinsic love for his vessels and enthusiasm for his company's concept.

"Our Eco Sailing Safaris are the real deal," he says "Our guests enjoy a voyage of discovery where the rich heritage of Australian seafaring is experienced, along with soft exploration of one of the worlds most magnificent island chains."

His attitude is reflected in the ship's crew who not only sail the boats but lovingly maintain and even help restore them. "These vessels become a part of your soul," he says. "After spending time aboard, they simply endear themselves to you ..."

Seafaring runs in Warren's blood. He is a direct descendant of Captain Henry James Ford who sailed a tallship to Australia in the 1800s carrying the precious cargo of our first Governor General of Victoria. After years plying Australian waters on tallship trading vessels, the captain went on to build and man the Cape Ottway Light House for three decades. "And during this time, the light never once failed," Warren recounts proudly.

Warren's father, Hedley, also immersed himself in a lifetime of seafaring, owning over 40 vessels during his lifetime and inspiring an awe of sailing in his young son from a very early age. "One of my earliest memories is sitting on the counter of a magnificent thoroughbred, pounding to weather in a 30kt Port Phillip chop – a great training ground!"

Sailing together on Port Phillip Bay at the age of five, Warren's job would be to hold the yacht into the wind while Dad raised the sails. "My father was a gifted sailor who lived and played hard. He also had some 'interesting' training techniques! Our safety training consisted of being tied to the mast so we couldn't fall overboard and then being tossed off

▼ by Jo Djubal



**At work. (above left)**

**Hauling the sails. (above right)**

the boat half a mile from the mooring and made to swim home!"

But Dad's tactics worked well and by 10 years of age, Warren was racing cadet dinghies and by 16 had decided his fate was sealed. "I decided my future would be in timber boats, not the 'plastic fantastics' that most of my friends were attracted to. I was involved in the early stages of the Couta



boat revival in Port Phillip Bay and became more and more fascinated by Australian timber craft designed to work under sail. Their history, construction and design became a passion and led to my later participation in the restoration of many timber boats from 26 to 130ft."

It was during this time Warren came across a photo of a classic schooner called *The Derwent Hunter*, in a history book of early Australian vessels. "I'm going to own that boat one day" he remarked to a friend ... Over 20 years later he found the boat of his dreams sitting tied to a jetty in Southport, Queensland.

"For two years I dreamt of realising my dream," Warren says. She teased me every day on my way to work until eventually I

began negotiating to purchase her. Ironically, although I purchased her, I think she has actually owned me ever since!

Warren immediately recognised that the future for his boat was in marine tourism, where her inspiring history could be shared with others.

"The adventure concept came easily," he says. "To me, it is the ultimate adventure to set sail on a tallship like this on the voyage of a lifetime."

After a 13 month refit, Warren set sail in 1993 for the Whitsundays and never looked back.

It was aboard *The Derwent Hunter* that Warren met his wife, Jo in 1996. "I said I'd make her the 'Princess of the Coral Sea' – what a pick up line!"

But it worked and Jo has been helping the business alongside him ever since.

The couple say that despite its glamorous appeal, the charter industry is a 24/7 job. "Keeping traditional vessels working in a charter fleet means keeping them in seaworthy condition and up to current Government safety codes," adds Warren. "This enables them to keep working and maintain the cash flow that keeps them alive."

"The industry has grown up to be one of the most regulated in Australia with 17 different Government Departments wanting their share of the prize!" says Jo.

And what a 'prize' *The Derwent Hunter* is ...

Designed and built in Tasmania in 1946 by revered shipwright, Walter Wilson, *The Hunter* is a prime example of excellence in design. Blue Gum, Tassie Oak, Celery Top and Huon Pine were cut and dragged by bullock train to the slipway at Port Cygnet where they were worked by hand by a team of just four shipwrights over a period of 18 months. The result was one of finest sailing trade vessels ever to be launched in Australia, her life story a fascinating tale of intrigue and adventure ...

*The Hunter* plied the rugged Tasmanian coast after her launch in 1946 when her savvy owner, fearing his ship may be commandeered for use by the armed forces, refitted her for lobster fishing and set sail for the remote harbour of Port Davey in Southern Tasmania. As fishing vessels were exempt from recruitment, the *Hunter* was spared the fate that befell an entire maritime heritage before her ...

In 1950, the *Hunter* came to the attention of the CSIRO, her fine seakeeping abilities and strong construction making her the perfect choice for the role of Australia's first oceanographic research vessel.

After a refit in Sydney, she set sail for 10 years of adventure under sail, roving from Antarctic waters in the Southern Ocean and as far north as Noumea and the outer Pacific Basin.

Her oceanographic discoveries were many, *The Derwent Hunter Sea Mount* and *The Derwent Hunter Trench* located 125nm East of Coffs Harbour just a few of her lasting legacies. Her ocean prowess – and that of her crew – was truly tested

during her decade of research work, twice losing her rudder in fierce storms but successfully piloting back to port under sail.

In 1960, it was time for a reprieve from the hard work of her earlier years – and a stint in the movies! Paramount Studios purchased the photogenic vessel renaming her *Pacific Lady* and giving her the starring role in the long running TV series called *The Rovers*.

Her glamorous sojourn eventually came to an end and she sailed north running passengers from Darwin to Timor and the Philippines, her voyages reputedly involving the odd bit of gun running and some intrigue ...



**Bow at sunset.**



**At the dock. (above)  
Ever onwards to adventure. (left)**



By 1977, the future was looking bleak as the boat lay neglected and deteriorating in a mud berth in Cairns. But thanks to the intervention of marine enthusiast Bern Cuthbertson who purchased and rescued her, a new lease of life was just around the corner. Bern sailed her back to her home waters of Tassie where a painstaking refit ensued before she ventured back into fishing under sail.

Her next chapter involved a refit to commercial survey enabling her to carry cargo and passengers to Lord Howe Island.

After being sold some time later, she circumnavigated Australia and also represented Australia in the Bi Centennial Hobart to Sydney Tallships race, outperforming many of the hundred strong fleet.

After being chartered in Perth for the Americas Cup, she was then sold to a Gold Coast development company with a view to sail training. But the recession hit and *The Derwent Hunter* became a victim, left to deteriorate at the jetty – until spotted by Warren Ladd in 1991.

The first of numerous refits ensued with the latest affected just this year – as *Derwent Hunter's* \$400,000 60th birthday

present! Massive replanking was carried out along with new wiring and plumbing and general upgrading of facilities.

A mammoth project involving a team of the nations best shipwrights and timber specialists, the refit was carried out using traditional wooden ship building methods of hammers, chisels, saws, oakum, corking tools, stopping and steamer. “The art of such work amazed the crew,” says Warren. “How simple but skilful the process of handling, shaping and bevelling the planks to fit actually was ...”

When she arrived in 1993, *The Derwent Hunter* was the largest traditional timber sailing vessel in the Whitsundays and is still arguably, the ‘Queen of the Fleet’. Warren skippered the boat himself six days a week for the first five years. “As I explored the islands, I began to expand my knowledge and appreciation of the unique ecology of the area. I wanted to combine Eco Tourism with Adventure Tourism to give everyone the chance to not only experience the boats beauty but also to gain a greater appreciation of the magnificent World Heritage Marine Park which I called my backyard.”

Warren’s approach has since evolved and the company is now recognised as leaders in the field of Eco Tourism, winning numerous awards, including scooping the Eco Tourism Award three years in a row and recently being inducted into the Eco Tourism Hall of Fame as a result.

Australia’s Eco Certification Program is a world first and involves rigorous ongoing assessments to ensure a company’s contribution to sustainable tourism. Other Eco Certified businesses include everything from Island Resorts to Aviation businesses and Kayaking companies.

“The best aspect of winning these awards is being recognised by your peers and passengers for the great job you do. It means we’re heading in the right direction. It’s also a fantastic reward for the hard work and dedication of our crew. Winning the Hall of Fame for Eco Tourism is especially exciting as it

shows we're leading the way in this area and proving that a respect and regard for the environment is paramount to the future of our World Heritage Park. If we don't continue to develop the Eco Tourism concept, our fragile area of operation will be in danger. It is simply a must."

Sailing the Whitsunday's along side *The Derwent Hunter*, is the 65ft, ketch *The Alexander Stewart*. An impeccably built and finished cold moulded timber ketch, she is believed to be the biggest built in the Southern hemisphere. Painstakingly constructed over 17 years by three generations of the one family, the *Stewart* definitely lives up to its romantic reputation with a magnificent interior and Slocum-like charm. The classic timber yacht built along the lines of a spray design which was made famous by the explorer and adventurer Joshua Slocum. Seventeen years in the making this vessel is considered a work of art among wooden boat enthusiasts.

Tallships Adventures is achieving something special in the annals of Australian Maritime History. Their endeavours are succeeding in preserving two of Australia's maritime treasures by keeping them alive and working in paradise.

"We want our guests to have an appreciation of sailing on a fine piece of Australian Maritime History along with a greater knowledge of just how special this World Heritage Marine and National Park is ... Hopefully, through this experience, they may tread a little lighter on their own part of the planet and develop a deeper respect for our unique maritime history ..."

**Underway in the Whitsundays. (right)**

**Derwent Hunter at Blue Pearl Bay – Whitsundays. (below)**

