

# THE BIGGER THE BETTER

WORDS JORDAN KRISTIAN

**B**OATS ARE GETTING BIGGER. THERE ARE MORE of them, and demand for marina berths in South Australia is booming – a potent symbol of new prosperity in this State. Big boats had always been associated with the famous harbour cities – Sydney or Auckland – or idyllic tropical resort destinations such as the Whitsunday islands or Port Douglas. Now South Australians are making bold new statements about their affluence by investing heavily in big, luxurious craft.

Such extravagance has seen prices surge for the biggest berths at Holdfast Promenade, Glenelg. Berths that sold in October 2004 for \$330,000 sold again in January 2007 for \$550,000; another that fetched \$125,000 in 2004 sold for \$465,000 in April 2007. The Real Estate Institute of South Australia estimates that the value of many marina berths has tripled in the past three years.

To meet demand, a hub of new marine activity is developing in and around Port Adelaide. The \$1.5 billion Newport Quays development will have up to 560 new berths, mostly for residents' pleasure craft, in front of waterfront apartments when the project is completed. Also in the Port River at Largs North, Marina Adelaide is a new \$60 million split purpose facility – 175 wet berths and a possible 380 dry stack boat storage berths, servicing commercial and recreational craft, and a precinct of boat building and marine businesses. This is also the new home of the Port Adelaide Sailing Club, which moved from its previous location, and has been absorbed into Newport Quays.

Marina Adelaide marketing manager Jason Day says the swift uptake of berths through the first stage of this development has had an immediate effect on sales of bigger boats. "Boat retailers had been restricted only by the number of berths that were available in Adelaide," Jason says, "and that is changing in a hurry."

Marina West is a new \$16 million expansion of the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia at North Haven, to house the State's largest recreational boats. Scheduled for completion in late 2008, Marina West will feature 73 marina berths, from 11m to 35m. Since

sales began in August, investors have spent \$8 million to secure half of the berths, which cost from \$100,000 to \$500,000 each. Club general manager Craig Evans says the expansion was necessary because "people keep wanting bigger and bigger boats, but there have been so few places to stow them".

This new capacity for big moorings has triggered another phenomenon – demand for coastal marinas that serve as a second berth for big vessels cruising the State's waters. The Cruising Yacht Club also operates the Port Vincent Marina on Yorke Peninsula, which recently added 20 new berths to accommodate rising numbers of 18m and 24m boats. "The big boats only take one hour to go across the gulf," explains Craig. "People are going over there for lunch and then coming back to the city. Jumping from marina to marina is a very new phenomenon here; it's pretty luxurious."

An addition to this luxurious lifestyle choice is purchasing coastal property, which is why new marina developments such as Cape Jaffa Anchorage in the South-East, and Wakefield Waters at Port Wakefield are causing a stir. Cape Jaffa has a mix of 570 residential and commercial land parcels and 120 moorings in its plan for an entirely new town development, which has found an interested market even before its limestone walled marina is flooded in early March.

Wakefield Waters is a similarly ambitious venture – a \$1.5 billion plan to create a new "Mediterranean style village" with 2700 waterfront homes and 200 boat berths, that is expected to take shape and start selling later this year. "Port Wakefield is a sleeping giant," says developer Andrew Chapman, whose family also established Marina Hindmarsh Island, which has now completed eight of its planned 11 stages of development.

Why has this happened, in a State that has historically not been noted for big boat extravagance? Craig Evans points to the creation of Gulf Point Marina at North Haven in the early 1980s as the start of a dynamic new era in South Australian boating. "Before then, it wasn't possible to berth a big boat in this State," he says. "With the creation of North Haven, people went straight from having boats on trailers to a much bigger berthing boat. The change was immediate, and it has kept growing ever since."



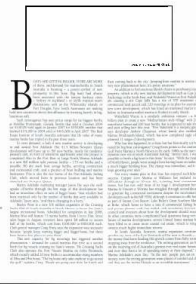
Not every marina plan in this State has enjoyed such tulsome success. Copper Cove Marina at Wallaroo has endured many difficulties through its 10-year life, including land contamination issues, but has now sold most of its Stage 1 development berths. Marina St Vincent at Wirrina has struggled through several decades to generate big commercial excitement, despite the involvement of developers such as Birchill VDM, although it continues to offer berths as part of Sunset Cove Resort. Lake Butler's Great Southern Marina at Robe, which hopes to have a mix of commercial fishing boats and private pleasure craft, has stalled, with uncertainty between the council and investors about how the development should proceed. In other countries, more complicated fiscal questions hang over the

future of marina developments; several United States marinas have been filled in to create more coastal real estate, which is bringing owners much higher immediate returns.

In South Australia, however, marina expansion continues – pundits say areas of the Eyre Peninsula will be next to flourish – and the money that keeps funding this growth comes from baby boomers stepping away from the workforce. “The retiring generation has been on the receiving end of Australia’s greatest ever real estate bonanza – and now they have a lot of spending money at their disposal,” says Marina Adelaide’s Jason Day. “In the past, people just sat on this money; now the retiring generation wants places of comfort and class, and they see the marina lifestyle as an incredible investment.”



OPENING DAY AT THE CRUISING YACHT CLUB OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S MARINA AT NORTH HAVEN.



## WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR BOAT – Power versus Sail

The eternal issue among boaties is the question of what type of craft is best – powered by engine or under sail – and why they are attracted to one form over the other.

**R**ay Brown (*above*), former president of the Powerboat Association of South Australia, has been a sailmaker since he left school and has worked with every type of marine craft – but still puts powerboats a fathom ahead of yachts for comfort and enjoyment. “The edge that powerboats have is their simplicity,” he says. “They promote a very different culture that is much more relaxed and social. Cruising boat people tend to enjoy their time on the water with their partners and loved ones; a powerboat is a different animal altogether. It’s not about the journey, it’s about the destination, and there’s a lot of male bonding that goes on. I’ve been going out with a bunch of mates on my boat (a 16-year-old, 12m Riviera) every Friday night for the past 15 years. It’s the perfect recreation outlet for people whose time is of the utmost value to them.” Engine power also has something to do with the appeal. “Oh yeah,” says Ray, with a chuckle, “the faster the better.”

**F**or Matt Gyst (*below*), event coordinator of the 2008 Bluewater Classic yacht race from Adelaide to Port Lincoln (with a fleet of about 100 yachts leaving Adelaide on February 22), sailing represents more than just the romantic notion of pitting oneself against nature; it’s also the challenge of learning the complex craft of controlling a vessel. “It’s a continual learning process. It’s about trying to control an uncontrollable environment,” he says. “It’s such an old tradition. There are layers of mystery and mystique attached to it that you try to unlock. Even now, in this age of great technology, people are still trying to figure out how to build the perfect sailing boat. I’m not just completely prejudiced about yachts – I think powerboats are great for fishing or recreational fun – but there’s something compelling about sailing. It’s that challenge of trying to harness the elements. It gets you hooked.”

