

# Yachting had its characters

## beat my best . . .'

DOOLEY Wilson has seen great changes in yachting.

"Yachting was very low profile till it became an Olympic sport," he said. "Sponsorship has done a lot to promote yachting. As far as the sport goes here it has become more social than sporting. The yachts are competing in such a lollipop way apart from a few like Bill Mitchinson.

"But the worst of today could beat the best of my day because the gear is so much better.

"Proportionately there are not the seamen around today, those who know how to cope with everything at sea."

Dooley says the days are past when a gifted skipper can win with limited resources, as for example Tauranga's Jim Gilpin did when he twice won the national Moth title.

"This would not happen today in any class," he said. "For example a P-class today costs \$3000 to \$4000 new — I sold my first one for £2.10 (\$5).

"In economy yachting the only chance is the strictly one design classes where the cost can be limited.

"They are still trying to do this with the P-class, keeping fancy gadgets out so everyone is on an even footing.

"To a certain extent it keeps it on the

plane of yachting rather than technology.

"It is not possible to do today what we did on a shoestring and win races."

Leda, the Wilsons' great racewinner, spent some of her early career as a shell with no interior fittings and even by the time of her Tasman win she had not been fitted with a toilet.

Dooley says technology makes it easier for the modern home boatbuilder and it is possible for them to produce winning boats, and they have to have money to do it.

Modern life with its many other attractions tends to discourage home boatbuilding, he says.

However, today wages are proportionately higher than when he started, so it is easier to get a "shop bought" boat.

Wilson says though he ended boatbuilding, and enjoyed it, his career nearly went other ways.

He was a keen photographer, worked at that part-time, and came out of the air force as a trained radio technician at a time they were in demand.

Another legacy of the air force is the ability to play jazz clarinet. He learned the instrument there and played in the air force dance band.

DOOLEY'S building business in the commercial and private

sector grew till it had a staff of 20 but became overextended and went into receivership.

Tony James, for whom Dooley was building a house, showed him an article about trimarans by American designer Arthur Piver.

Dooley liked the idea of the relatively cheap, high performance yachts and asked old friend Jim Young to design one.

Dooley had met Young while working for Lidgards. He had helped with Leda, had never designed a trimaran but said he would give it a go.

Piver's tris had V-shaped sections and were light displacement. They used outboards for auxiliary engines and interior fittings were kept to a minimum.

Young designed a big, powerful yacht, with hard chine hull and floats, an inboard motor and big fuel and water tanks. Though it was not realised at the time the size of its

big windows was to prove its only fault.

Ron Elliot built the hull and floats and Dooley finished off the yacht, called Atria, on the beach outside his home.

Atria proved a good fast load carrier. She planned at 10 knots and her best speed logged was 20 knots.

Her seaworthiness was proved on two trips to Wellington, the second after she had been sold.

On the first crossing of Hawke's Bay she struck a gale, but was still able to get to windward reefed right down. Later Dooley found a seagoing monohull yacht in the same area had been rolled over twice and blown out to sea.

The second trip hit trouble off East Cape when Atria nosedived while the splinker was being taken down. The big cabin windows smashed in and she filled with water to bunk level.

Atria was bucketed out — the pumps could not cope with the amount of water — and

taken in to Hicks Bay for repairs.

By the time Atria reached Palliser Bay it was gusting 100 kilometres an hour. They tried to get the mainsail down, but the wind jammed it and it had to be cut free, immediately flying to ribbons.

After drifting a day, they tried to sail out under headsail but the backsay broke.

Drifting out on Cook Strait, with no sails, no engine and an estimated landfall in Antarctica, Dooley for the first time in his sailing career raddled for help.

Atria was wrecked in the Wahine storm, drifting ashore complete with her mooting and being pounded to pieces on the sea wall.

Dooley returned to boatbuilding, setting up a P-class kitsetting business on the Strand extension.

Even in that quieter backwater adventure came calling.

A Rotorua buyer ordered a Tornado catamaran, the Olympic two-man class in which the crew swings on a trapeze to balance the boat.

The buyer pulled out part way through and Dooley tried to sell the boat, but ended racing it with Dave Peet skippering.

Though Dooley had no trapeze experience they got on the team to the world championship in Hawaii, ending as top New Zealand boat.

Two projects Dooley became involved in were the four metre yacht intended by the NZ Yachting Federation as a step up from the P-class and the development of the Wet Epoxy Saturation Technique (WEST) system.

The four-metre was designed by Jim Young and while Dooley built a number they never caught on.

He blames Young's own prototype, which he says was too heavy, did not perform and gave the class a bad reputation.

The lighter Dooley boats could outperform the quick Cherubs, but came too late, he says.

One visitor to his workshop was Arnie Duckworth, who was developing resins to introduce the American WEST system to New

Zealand.

Dooley did the field testing for the different resins. He also evolved his own system of construction, using a foam core with stringers set into and timber each side.

First boats used veneer skinning on each side of the foam, but Dooley later used ply.

One advantage, apart from strength, was that it gave the boats a very clean interior.

Duckworth also introduced Dooley to hang gliding, sending a very dubious trainee pilot off the top of a local hill.

Dooley says it was only months later he found trainees should practise on the lower slopes first, but by then he was hooked and had his own glider.

Duckworth's measure of a sport was its fun to grief ratio. Dooley found some sports like skiing had more grief than fun.

"Yachting was fun all the way," he said. "Even the grief is fun."

With the latter he tried tricks such as five man pyramids and in company with Eric Diggelmann and Morrie Bayer single sided from 5th Avenue to Mayor Island.

Another visitor to the Strand workshop was Doug Brown, just in from Hawaii in what Dooley describes as "a very amateur built trimaran" needing a crew for a trip to the Islands.

Dooley says the trip up was good, apart from running aground on a whale, but on the way back caught in a storm he thought his end had come.

It was only when they reached Russell he found that the bulk carrier on which Nick was first officer had been holed in the same area off North Cape.

Brown settled for a while at Omokoroa. Several years back, with a woman companion, he set off to sail an outrigger canoe to the Islands. The wreckage was found, but no sign of the occupants.

The boatbuilding business expanded into premises in Glasgow Street, producing a number of keelers and a small line of foam-plywood power boats.

Dooley had started a Jim Young trimaran Blaydon Racer for Nick when business pressure, nudged along by Muldoon's boat tax which wiped out three of every four boatbuilders, became too much.

Dooley went into hospital for a triple bypass heart operation, and even there came a yachting connection.

Dooley says there was some doubt whether he would get the operation till he told one of the doctors his big regret was being unable to finish his son's trimaran.

That did the trick. The doctor was a yachtie who later crewed in the Whitbread with Digby Taylor.

Dooley finished Blaydon Racer and opted for a quiet life in retirement, though he has since crewed deep water.

Within hours of this interview he was on board Blaydon Racer, with Nick — now first officer on the coastal tanker Amokura — and his family for a trip to Mayor Island.



KIT and Dooley Wilson . . . made sailing a family affair