

tionally strongly constructed. Her hull was double-skinned kauri, a half-inch outer over a one-inch inner, fastened every 14 ins to steam-bent ribs. Her deck was also double skinned. Leda is a magnificent example of wooden boatbuilding of a type that is virtually extinct. Price, a shortage of skilled tradesmen and the non-availability of top grade heart kauri are the reasons.

Amongst the workmen bustling around her, all eager to catch the high tide at noon in order to minimise the floating crane's lift, were her two proud owners, the brothers C.G. and W.A. Wilson, better known to all as Sandy and Dooley.

In the best tradition of New Zealand amateur boatbuilding they constructed Leda over a period of two years and four months in the backyard of their North Shore house — some three miles from the waters of the Waitemata Harbour. The Wilsons did have some expert assistance, from a then youthful Jim Young who, in later years, designed and built so many fast and innovative yachts and whose place in New Zealand's yachting history has not been fully appreciated.

By noon on that sunny October day, very nearly 40 years ago, all was ready for the big lift. Watched by hundreds of interested spectators of all ages, the steam-driven crane on the Hikinui huffed and wheezed as only steam cranes can, and slowly the 13 tons of Leda was hoisted into the air to be swung around and gently lowered into the waters of Auckland Harbour.

As the keel kissed the salt water for the first time a spontaneous cheer broke out from those watching. Very soon Leda was floating just above her marks and was made ready for the stepping of her 70ft mast.

The crowd now started to disperse and we Stanley Bay school children were hustled away to catch the 1pm ferry back to Auckland and then to Devonport and the anti-climax of the classroom. That visit to watch the laun-

ching of Leda, for which I am grateful to the school authorities of the day, left on my mind a lasting impression. To me, Leda will always be special.

In those heady days which followed the dark years of the Second World War a spate of fine, large yachts were launched in Auckland which, although not often publicly stated, were out to beat the Queen of the Waitemata — the Tercel brothers' champion, Ranger.

Leda was the first of the post war launchings followed by Defiant, built at Kawau Island by Fred Lidgard, Tara and Erewhon at Stanley Bay by Colin Wild, Kahurangi by Percy Vos at St Mary's Bay, West Wind by George McKendrick and Fidelis, built at Bayswater by Vic Speight.

Not one of these fine A Class keelers managed to dethrone Ranger but one, the enigmatic Erewhon, certainly had the ability to do so. However, her somewhat eccentric owner, G.R. Canavan, although entering his fine yacht in races against Ranger, never actually started. The only time the two almost identical cutters met was in a slog up Auckland Harbour and eye witnesses of the day declared that Erewhon "walked away" from Ranger — but it was not a race and we will never know if Erewhon was a Ranger beater.

For many years Erewhon lay on the hard at Okahu Bay, Canavan refusing all offers to buy her until one day she was gone, shipped to Sydney where he was then living. Where she is today is a mystery. Perhaps some Australian reader can provide the answer. Some years ago I was told that she was stored in a boat shed somewhere in the upper reaches of Sydney Harbour.

Leda's first race was in the Centenary Auckland Regatta of 1950 when she was given a handicap allowance of 13 minutes over the scratch yachts, Ranger and Erewhon. Needless to say, Erewhon did not start, but was out sailing on the day. Leda did not beat Ran-

ger — and never did so. But she did prove a fast, easily-handled yacht, more suited to heavier conditions, no doubt due to her heavy displacement.

The Wilson brothers were very keen to try Leda under bluewater conditions and, on January 27, 1951 she was sailed over the startline at Auckland bound for Sydney in the second trans-Tasman race held after the war — the first being in 1948 and won by Peer Gynt, owned by the legendary Halvorsen brothers of Sydney. The 1951 race attracted eight entries — Leda, Tara, White Squall, Hope, Rangi and Sea Wolf from New Zealand with Southern Maid and Solveig from Australia.

The race was sailed in light conditions not really suited to Leda, but she was still the first to finish on February 7, the handicap winner being Solveig, owned by the Halvorsens.

This 1951 race was notable for several reasons. Leda carried two female crew members, Kit and Erica Wilson, wives of the Wilson brothers. At the prizegiving, held at the men-only Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, they became the first females, apart from staff, to enter the clubhouse for more than 50 years. This was also the only ocean race where passing planes dropped daily newspapers to contestants.

The paper drop first occurred on the third day out when Leda's navigator, Terry Hammond, made radio contact with a passing TEAL (later Air New Zealand) flying boat, whose pilot asked if they needed anything. Hammond, a bit of a wag, replied: "Yes, a bottle opener and a Herald."

The next morning the big flying boat circled Leda and neatly dropped a waterproof packet alongside which contained the opener and newspaper. For the next six mornings the daily newspaper was dropped to Leda. Never again will a commercial passenger airliner drop newspapers to yachts competing in ocean races. At around 35,000 ft, the planes are a trifle high for such an exercise.

This trans-Tasman race gave the Wilson brothers the taste for ocean cruising and, early in 1953, Leda left Auckland with the Wilson families aboard for the Pacific Islands and then North America.

Later that year Leda sailed under the famous Golden Gate Bridge and into San Francisco Harbour. She never returned to New Zealand, the same fate sadly awaiting one of her owners, Sandy Wilson. He was drowned whilst racing aboard an American yacht which was run down at night by a ship off the Californian coast.

Leda was sold in the United States and her fate was unknown until I noticed her "For Sale" advertisement in the American magazine.

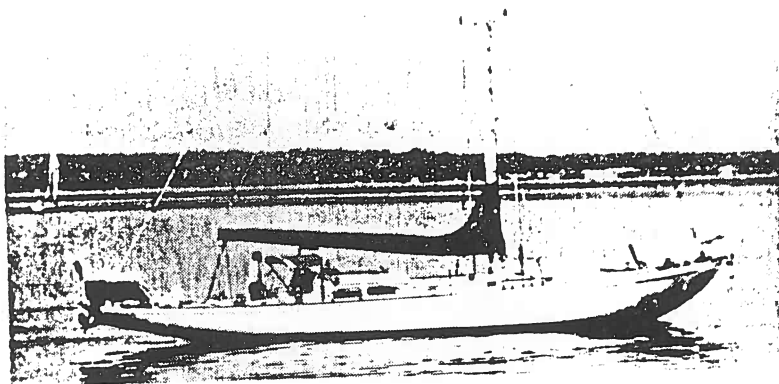
From the small photograph included in the advertisement, it appears that over the 36 years since Leda left her home waters her American owners have maintained her well. She looks as good as the day she was launched 40 years ago, except that her varnished teak coamings have been painted white and her lofty spruce mast has been replaced with an alloy spar.

Will we ever see Leda back in her home waters? Would it not be a marvellous sight to see her, together with Kahurangi, now understood to be rebuilt after being wrecked in the West Indies, Erewhon and Fidelis, still in Auckland, in a race against the champion of them all — Ranger

A dream, perhaps, but sometimes dreams do come true.

# TATOOSH MARINE

## "LEDA"



This spectacular vessel was designed by Knud Reimers and built in New Zealand in 1950. "LEDA" is heavily constructed of double-planked kauri wood over laminated mango frames, fastened with copper rivets. Unbeatable in her early racing days, she recently provided her owners with a safe, comfortable, and fast South Pacific cruise. This classic beauty is irreplaceable, offshore equipped, and seriously for sale in the Northwest. Asking \$95,000

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