

Across the Pacific with the Leda

# STUCK ON THE REEF

From SANDY WILSON

**L**EDA went up on the Suva reef in the darkness of a moonless Sunday night. She struck about 200 yards out from the southern light outside the entrance to Suva Harbour.

We put the helm hard over to starboard in an effort to jibe her and sail her off, at the same time starting the engine.

*We didn't allow . . . there was no warning*

**D**ISTANCES at night are deceptive and we had not allowed for the wide bank, strewn with coral boulders, extending from the southern lighthouse out to sea.

It was only an hour before full tide and the seas were slight. That's why we had received no warning from breaking surf.

Two heavy anchor warps, one manila and one coir, were lying ready to hand on the coach roof. Believing that the water would be too deep to seaward for an anchor to reach bottom we ran one out from the stern inshore with the dinghy, hoping to pull Leda's stern round with it so that her bow faced the rollers.

We then hoped that with sails re-hoisted Leda would lean, thus reducing her draught, and, with

We hailed the A class yacht Tamatea, following us 50 yards astern, warning her to go about immediately.

Tamatea was warned in time but Leda was stuck hard and fast.

Each succeeding comb sweep her further up on the reef. The engine was powerless to help her.

We stopped the engine, dropped the sails and launched the dinghy. Tamatea, which has no engine, called that she was going in to Suva to get the pilot launch.

We had been returning from a short cruise, which had included visits to the islands of Nukulau, Makaluva, Mbengga (the Fire Walkers' Island) and Storm Island.

engine going too, she might come off. But right from the start it was hopeless.

The bow was already high out of the water and it was quite impossible to pull her stern round. Hastily we rowed the second anchor seaward from the bow and found, to our relief, that it reached bottom.

Then it was that we blessed the anchor winch and the labour we had put into it to make it work.

With two people on the handles and another tailing off the rope as it came in we began to haul Leda's head round.

The strain on the manila warp was immense, the anchor dragged and caught again, each time making us think the line had parted, but slowly her head came round.

*The surf growled . . . the lighthouse winked*

**T**HE growl of the surf was loud in our ears, almost over our heads the lighthouse flashed mockingly. Fortunately, the wind had dropped away to little more than a breath just before we struck.

The grinding of Leda's keel down in the coral was sickening to hear. Every now and then she lifted on a roller and crashed with terrible violence down again on the reef.

Suddenly there came a call from below. "She's leaking!"

"Pump her out," we answered, grunting over the anchor winch.

Sure enough, 10 strokes of the handle emptied her and it was found that she wasn't leaking at all.

By this time Leda was facing the open sea. Her bow was sunk low in the water but her stern was perched high on the coral. The frightful rolling had almost stopped.

But we had pulled the anchor to within a few feet of the boat and it was now useless to pull her off any further.

The first anchor, lying out astern, had to be picked up again and relaid out ahead. We transferred the warps on the anchor winch and started winding again.

Each time Leda dipped her nose or rolled we would try to take an inch or two on the winch. The strain, as the seas pushed her 14-ton weight against the rope, was terrific and we had to judge when to ease it slightly or break the rope.

Inch by inch we wound the warp in. The sails were hoisted.

HAVING A LOOK



• After the reef encounter . . . a native diver in a helmet goes down to tack new copper sheathing on the bottom of Leda's keel.



• At Suva dockyard . . . Sandy Wilson putting on a diving helmet.