

Second GTS43 Walawala2 gets ready for Kings Cup

Seen on Sail-World by Crosbie Lorimer



Steve Manning at the wheel of his new GTS43, Walawala II with fellow crew member Peter toasting the new boat.

Like all the top regatta's around the world, the Phuket King's Cup is a deadline for the delivery of new boats.

Barely three weeks after delivery of his new GTS43 Walawala 2 (the second boat of this new Jason Ker designed production yacht from Sydney Yachts), Steve Manning is preparing to give his new yacht its first hit-out at the 25th anniversary running of the Phuket King's Cup.

UK born Manning, who has lived in Asia for the last twenty years, owned a Beneteau First 44.7 of the same name with which he enjoyed some success in both inshore and offshore racing, with a first in class in the China Sea Race and a number of wins in club racing from his Hong Kong base.

But the introduction of the new generation IRC optimised boats was making podium finishes ever harder. After the loss of that boat in the storm at the end of Phuket King's Cup 2010 he decided that the mantra, 'if

you can't beat 'em, join 'em', had merit and Manning went on the hunt for a new boat.

'Like all new owners I did an extensive search before landing on the GTS43. I'd generated software models based on typical SE Asian conditions, venues and race formats and put each boat through this analysis. There were also some fundamental performance needs such as in light airs' he said this week.

'I was close to buying proven 40 footers new and second hand, but at heart felt most design concepts of winning boats would give me a pretty much also ran, with little new wow factor.

The GTS43 came on the scene almost at the last minute, and it immediately grabbed my attention. I think there's always something to be said for style and looks regardless of anything else, and the GTS has oodles of this' he added.

Having decided that this was a line well worth pursuing, it was then a case of



speaking to the designer himself, 'I basically then bought into Jason Ker's view on being able to have a fast IRC racer, but be able to race on a competitive TCC. We met during his trip through Asia marketing the Ker 40, so I'd already discussed the format at length' said Manning.

The nature of sailing was clearly going to be very different from Steve Manning's Beneteau experiences.

'Moving to a higher power versus drag formula, which will really get up and go off the wind might be a risky bet, but it's going to be enjoyable racing against a typical displacement type boat.'



The brand new Walawala2 in Singapore

Given that the GTS43 is described as a racer cruiser, the spacious interior of the yacht was also of appeal to the Manning family who are clearly from lofty stock,

'My family usually participates in deliveries around the region, and once I saw the internal volume and layout it was a shoe horn in. Darren Williams of Sydney Yachts will also remember me asking him to provide details of the headroom in the cabin.

With a family of 6'2" people it was imperative to have something that wouldn't knock you out putting on the wet weather gear mid ocean. That said we've kept to very basic internal specifications for simplicity which is another factor on the list.'

Dropping a few feet in boat length with the

new purchase does not seem to phase Manning unduly, who sees that a lesser waterline length will be more than compensated for in performance.

'A 40 foot boat was just on the edge size-wise. Having had a 45' boat I didn't want to trade down significantly. Ultimately the volume of the GTS is massive compared to the old boat, and the loss of 2' is negligible.

The other important factor is a good balance between high performance against being able to make it perform with an average club racing crew. The symmetric spinnaker pole had to go, not just for crew management, but also for apparent sailing in light airs.'

Deck simplicity and a hull form and fin that will allow slightly more generosity to stay in the groove are all important' adds Manning.

The tight schedule to get the boat completed, shipped to Singapore by mid-November and sailed to the Phuket King's Cup regatta venue on Phuket Island was going to require some very slick work from Sydney Yachts. Judging by Manning's accolades, the Sydney Yachts team has delivered on all fronts, and in a very collaborative fashion.

'The experience with Darren Williams and Jason Rowed at Sydney Yachts has been nothing less than superb. Also the pedigree of Mark's team was a strong pull factor for the GTS. In talking personally with a number of the individuals who built the boat, it is clear the depth of their experience and the benefits of working with real craftsmen was obvious too.

I still point to the deck protectors under the spinnaker turning blocks. When I asked for some protection in that area of the deck I thought of simple pads, however they've done a beautiful job with moulded carbon pads.

We made a number of changes, but in every case I could confidently let the team go away and design something that was fit for purpose, and also to push back if they didn't believe in certain requests. This is one of the benefits of working in a semi-custom environment.



Walawala 2 interior

Time was extremely tight getting the boat up to Langkawi positioned ready for Phuket this week. I liken our participation in the Phuket King's Cup as just pulling off the cellophane seat covers on the way out of the dealers shop on the way to the start line.

The completion, shipping and commissioning in Singapore went 100% according to plan, possibly one of the fastest turn-arounds they've seen in Raffles' added Manning with enthusiasm.

Manning's background in sailing goes back to club dinghy racing in the Irish Sea as a youngster, followed by yacht racing in the Solent and RORC races in later teenager years.

His working life had him travelling extensively, so windsurfing was the next best option before he settled in SE Asia, where he spent a number of years as a tactician with Singapore based boats, whilst also racing a Laser.

Eventually Manning decided it was time to buy his own yacht,

'Walawala 1 was my first big boat in 2005, and was based in Hong Kong. We extensively campaigned around the circuit including the King's Cup a number of times, and all China Sea races during this period.' Manning is keen to get some good results from the Phuket King's Cup regatta with Walawala 2, but is modest about his expectations,

'We've got a strong team together, but to be completely realistic, we have a short learning curve against seasoned and well-honed outfits such as Blondie, Ichiban, Kuckerchu and Katsu.'

Of his plans for the future with the new boat Manning describes a busy schedule,

'the plan is to work around the SE Asia circuit this season, including the Straits and the Thailand events through to June. We'll look at some of the Hong Kong events possibly later in the year, or early 2012.'

Darren Williams' team back in Sydney will clearly be keen to follow Walawala 2's fortunes in the King's Cup, with the boat also having more connections with Australia than simply its country of origin, as Manning explains.

'Walawala is an Aboriginal Sun Goddess, so it's quite apt for a Sydney birth.'