

TAKIN' IT EASY

with Peter and Anne Snell



“RIDING ELEPHANTS IN THAILAND, BACK SOON” —

WHEN I CONTACTED PETER AND ANNE SNELL REGARDING THIS STORY, I WAS HAPPILY DELIGHTED WITH THEIR ABOVE EMAIL RESPONSE. IT SEEMED TO ENCAPSULATE THE PAIRS’ HAPPY, RELAXED APPROACH TO LIFE. ALTHOUGH NOTHING TO DO WITH BOATS AND THE WATER, RIDING ELEPHANTS IN THAILAND (AND CUDDLING TIGERS, ANNE LATER ADDED) ALSO REVEALS A LITTLE OF THE SUCCESS BEHIND THEIR COMPANY, EASY CATAMARANS — NAMELY ENJOYING WHAT THEY DO AND ‘TAKING IT EASY.’

by JO DJUBAL

NOT ONES FOR SELF promotion or chest beating, the Snells prefer to let their boats speak for themselves and just get on with it. Although their designs are recognised by anyone with an eye for multihulls, little is known about the couple themselves or how Easy Catamarans came to be. With 15 years in business behind them, the 100th Easy about to hit the water and hundreds more underway, Peter and Anne decided to share some of their story ... how they embarked on such a fulfilling and highly successful business which has revolutionised the market for the amateur builder.

The business began almost by accident as Anne explained.

“We sold our big cat (a one off cold moulded design by Pete which was never repeated because the construction process was too complicated) and spent most of the money on the property we live in now. We wanted to find a nice little boat we could build cheaply and the Easy 32 was born. Once it hit the water, people badgered Peter for plans so he sat down and converted the few scratchings on the shed wall into boat plans.”

The foundations for the first Easy and Peter and Anne’s love of sailing were laid decades before as the couple enjoyed myriad boatbuilding and cruising experiences. The couple have known each other since the sixth grade in Brisbane and Anne remembers sailing in Peter’s dinghy as her first sailing experience. “I told his father I knew how to sail so he wouldn’t worry! We sailed under the Bribie Bridge once in a trailer sailer. I asked Pete if our mast would fit and was told to stop fussing. We hit the bridge and went under on our side ... but I guess he was right — we did fit — one way or another!”

The couples’ first cruising boat was a Piver Nimble “My then very handsome husband sold my Fiat 850 Sports (which I loved) and bought a pile of ply. He built the boat in his dad’s backyard in Aspley, causing all kinds of anxiety for his dad!”

Anne remembers another early highlight aboard this Piver Nimble on their first cruise. “We devoured all of

Arthur Piver's books, especially the one about the first 30ft Nimble of course which contained a quote I'll never forget – "The Nimble laughs at storms for speed is safety." Well our first leg on our first cruise was from Mooloolabah to Wide Bay in a strong wind warning. This developed into a gale that blew for four days. I never heard the boat laugh once! And it took a week to get my fingernails out of the cockpit bulkhead. Then we crossed the Bar – Oh My God!"

However the good times cruising have far outweighed any dramas in Anne's opinion. "We have had some 'moments', but fortunately I have a really bad memory!"

And racing? "The only racing I've done is to the showers after a few days at sea!" she said. "There's some great stuff going

on in top end racing multis, the speeds achieved are awesome but we'll just puddle along 'doin' it easy."

Pete also prefers cruising to competitive sailing, having spent just four years racing a Graduate dinghy when he was a youngster. His love of sailing began at age 12 and evolved from then on as he and Anne enjoyed some wonderful cruising experiences.

Liberty – first 10.5, 1997.



55ft cruising catamaran



SCOTT JUTSON IS WELL KNOWN FOR his designs for cruising and racing yachts and his work with multihulls, both power and sail. Although now based in Vancouver, he has continued his long association with stylist David Bentley in Sydney, for the design of this 55ft cruising catamaran.

The Hull form is an extension of the design created by Scott for the Seawind 850 and the 55ft fast cruising catamaran, 'Prime Mover' built by Ramtech industries in Murwillumbah, NSW in 2001. The Core-Cell/E Glass sandwich shell with predominantly carbon fibre cross beam structure creates a strong performer in light conditions but is also very safe and predictable in higher winds.

The layout features four double cabins, each with ensembles. The bridge deck features spacious salon with lounge and separate dining areas and galley. Raised central helm station and lounge area on the aft deck.

The luxurious interior fitout will also feature lightweight construction techniques ensuring a pleasant cruising experience.

LOA	16.76m
Beam	8.5m
Draft	0.92m

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"My father bought me an eight foot Sabot dinghy and the 12ft Graduate dinghy a year or so later. My schoolmate, Mark Pescott, learnt to sail on this boat. At 19 I started to build our first boat, the 30ft Piver Nimble. Building was a huge adventure and great fun – a big achievement for a 19-year-old boy!"

Less than a year later, when the boat neared completion, Anne and Pete got married. "After living on the boat for a year, and the day after Anne graduated from teacher's college, we set off cruising north. Our entire electrical system consisted of a fluorescent light hooked to a car battery that I took to a garage to be charged. For navigation we had a compass, a few charts and two rulers – a piece of bent copper wire were our dividers. We spent three years cruising in the dry season and I did boat repairs and alterations in the wet. In 1980 we set off for New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Whilst in Morovo Lagoon viewing war wreckage, we sailed onto a bit of steel pipe coming up from a wreck. The pipe tore a hole 300mm wide and a metre long in the main hull. We sailed our stricken boat to the nearest beach where I was able to nail a temporary patch on and we bailed her dry whilst waiting for the tide to drop. An islander passing in a canoe then told us that there was no tidal range in the lagoon – that's why the jungle grows down to the water's edge! Luckily for us he rounded up his mates, about 10 young blokes, to help "Peter and Mrs Peter".

Within the hour they had cut a slot in the jungle and lined the ground with saplings for rollers. Then with Anne, I and a dozen strong young islanders pulling on an anchor rope attached to our 4:1 mainsheet, our little ship lurched up out the sea onto our own private slipway. I had resin, glass and ply on board, a generator and power tools. In a day the hole was permanently repaired and antifouled.

As the following day was the village Sabbath, our friends weren't able to work, so Anne and I, along with John and Jenny off the yacht *Murniong* hauled the boat back into the water on our own. Five yachts hit reefs in the Solomons that year. (It was long before GPS) We were the only ones to sail home."

When the Snells returned to Oz, they sold their Nimble and began building their next boat. "With Anne working two jobs and me boatbuilding every hour of daylight we completed our new trimaran, a Piver AA36 named *Tern Turtle* in five months and launched it on Christmas Eve 1981. For the next two years we cruised up and down the coast."

Anne remembers the years fondly, especially the arrival of their daughter, Sarah.

(left from above)

First *Easy* comes out of yard – 1995.

Snells with Mark Pescott at the launch of Ross Blair's *Command 10*, *Ricochet* – 1983.

Naluk and *Sea Gypsy*, *Louisiades* – 1980.

Repairing hole, *Marovo Lagoon* – 1980.

Sarah launches *Sarah* at *Caboolture River* – March 2009.

"We sailed to the Kimberley in 1984 for Peter's brother's wedding in Wyndham, which was a real highlight, as well as dodging crocs at the meatworks blood drain, where we were anchored! We also discovered I was pregnant that year, resulting in a 15 day non stop sail from Darwin to Cairns – with lots of tacking and vomiting from morning sickness! We ended up in Mooloolaba that year and Sarah was born in May 1985. We set sail up the coast with her when she was just six weeks old. *Tern Turtle* was sold in 1987."

The year before had seen Pete and Anne build a cedar strip Kelsall cat and in 1990, a 12m cold moulded ply cat. This was followed by a single chine ply cat in 1992. "The Kelsall cat and the single ply chine cat were built for old cruising friends, so they could have the boats they wanted and we could eat!" Pete explained.

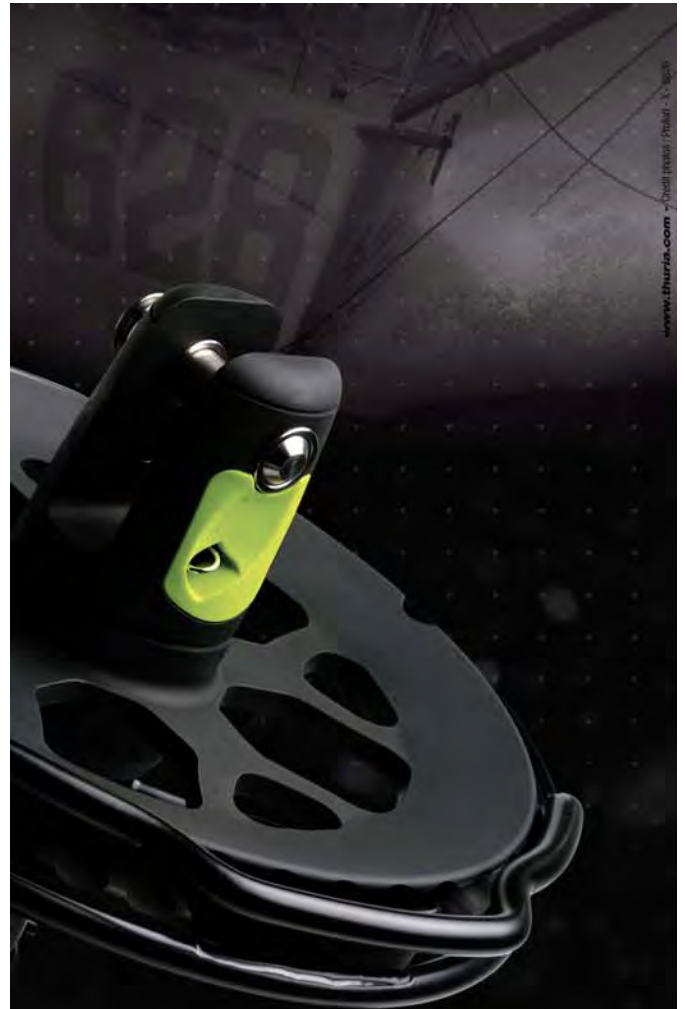
And in 1994 came the first Easy ...

Pete has been inspired by many designers. "I still love reading about multihull greats such as Arthur Piver, Jim Brown, Dick Newick and Derek Kelsall. (Who I was honoured to meet a couple of years ago.) Local designers, Mark Pescott (who we just visited in Thailand) and Peter Kerr are old friends. Between these two men you can account for a large percentage of Australian catamarans. They are old and dear friends who have a long history of sailing together and their combined body of work proves that there really is more than one way to skin a cat!"

And so what drives Easy Catamarans? How have Peter and Anne Snell ensured such immense satisfaction within their clientele and continue to build on and enjoy what they do?

"We've been so lucky to meet so many great people." Anne said. "Watching a man launching his dream – that he built with his own hands – never loses its magic." Anne attributes the

Tern Turtle – 1982.



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Kelsall cat – 1986.

company's success to three factors –“Keeping it real, coming back to basics and keeping it simple” she said. “We also make sure to provide support, encouragement and empathy to our clients. We’re always there for our builders. We understand that some days boatbuilding can be hard. You need to

“It’s roomy and fast and, as the name implies easy to build”

break big jobs into little bits and keep going. The end result is well worth it.”

Easy builder Mike Hawkins verifies the Easy support network.

“When I decided to build a cat I checked out designers and designs, then talked to every cat owner I could find. Every Snell Easy owner I met said that it is a top boat without vices. It’s roomy and fast and, as the name implies easy to build. Another big win is the fact that I’m a musician not a boat builder, but if I do have a problem Peter is only a phone call away, unlike some other designers I have been told of.”

The company also helps clients source quality materials at reasonable prices. “The component specials you find are a bonus to our meagre budget,” say James and Mary-Anne Coomer in their Easy website testimonial. The Easy website is well worth perusing and full of interesting, easy to read info. Networking amongst builders is actively encouraged by Pete and Anne and the ‘Easy Cruising’

Easy Designs

by Peter Snell

plans for the amateur builder

designs from 10m to 13m

Currently aboard Sarah

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link on the website is a fantastic spot for Easy builders to share building tips, cruising tales or simply have a chat.

With so many Easys now on the water and many more to come, the Snell's approach is obviously working. Along with friendly and sincere service, one of the foremost aspects to the Snell's success is their 'hands on' testing of all of their designs.

"I attribute the popularity of our boats to the fact that we build and extensively cruise the first boat of all our stock designs ourselves," Pete said. "Although for the last 10 years (all the current designs) the boats have been designed on the computer, it's during the building that they really develop their character. This is when we streamline building techniques and try new materials and gear. It is during the cruising of the boats that ideas for the next design are hatched. I've come to love the design and building of a new boat as much as the sailing and these activities go well together. Because the supply of well priced building materials is a large part of the service we provide, we concentrate on builders from Australia and New Zealand."

And the price for a set of Easy plans? "We sell our plans for one percent of the resale value of a well built boat of that design," Pete said.

I asked Pete where the Easy design names originated and each has a special inspiration, along with a functional role, as he explained. "The designs are given names to help the buyers of secondhand boats work out exactly what they are getting. If you extended an Easy 32 by five foot you would have a 37ft

Easy – but you would not have an Easy 37! The Jessica is named after my grand niece who died in a car accident aged four. The Sarah is named after our daughter and the Tracey was designed for Ray and Tracey Rahn. Tommy is one of my great nephews."

A topic currently creating undue stress for the Snell's is the 'pirating' and unauthorised modifications of their designs.

"People who try to copy the plans end up paying a horrible price at resale time, losing much more than the cost of the plans. My greatest concerns are the three boats that have been widened from the plans against my explicit advice. These horrors are a ticking time bomb waiting to give our boats a bad name. When something untoward happens to

them there'll always be some waterfront, know nothing guru ready to denigrate the whole design," Pete said. "If you think you must change anything, please discuss it with the designer and if he starts cursing or mocking you, it's probably a bad idea! You will be trusting your designer with your life and that of your crew so reflect on this seriously ... Keep it light, keep it simple, make it strong and – For Pete's sake – follow the bloody plans!"

Along with the above pearls of wisdom, Pete offers the following advice for would be builders ...

"Be realistic about what sort of boat you want, don't build a racing boat to go cruising, or a cruising boat to go racing. Don't build an ocean greyhound if you only have weekends off.

Talk to lots of other people who have built that design and check the resale value of older boats.

Don't think that what you see at glamour boat shows truly reflect the needs of a cruising sailer.

Use good quality materials but don't overspend.

And finally ... enjoy the experience!"

Peter and Anne Snell have provided something special for amateur builders, an affordable and easy way to go cruising. Their down to earth approach has demystified much of the building process and enabled hundreds to experience the joy of building their own catamaran – and letting 'the adventure begin'.



Building the first Jessica for John and Heather Brander – 2006. (above left)
Whirlpool – built 1991. (left)