

CAPRICE A43 – 1900 JACKYARD TOPSAIL GAFF CUTTER

BY TONY PFEIFFER



Above: Original Gaff photo – 1928

Below: Caprice on hardstand at Noakes.

When David Edwards approached me on the hardstand about writing an article on *Caprice*, I was not sure what to cover that may be of interest to Members. On reflection, I decided to focus on a little of her history, but mostly about the project of re-rigging her to the 1900 sail plan.

I am sure many Members would have noticed this ‘out of character’ old yacht tied up in the Pond with a couple of ‘oldies’ working on her – an occurrence not frequently seen at the Squadron. During the months of work, I was forever amazed at the level of interest in *Caprice* and the questions asked from Members, crews and guests whenever we were in the Pond.

Caprice was built in 1900 in Tasmania by Charlie Lucas at Battery Point and was designed by William Fife, with alterations to cabin and rig by a well-known Tasmanian designer, Alfred Blore. At that time the Derwent Sailing Club (now Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania) was exploring the introduction of a 21 foot waterline one design.

Caprice’s hull, deck and cockpit are Huon pine, all of which is original today. Her dimensions are length on deck 32’6”, length overall 41’, beam 8’6” and draft 6’.

In 1927 my Grandfather purchased *Caprice* for his sons, Harry and Jack Pfeiffer, from Arthur Stone who had been racing her at the SASC since around 1920. At that stage she was rigged with a new Marconi main and jib (one of the first to have a Marconi rig on the Harbour). The purchase

agreement resulted in the Marconi rig not being included and the gaff rig being re-stepped. It was not until 1929 that a new Marconi rig was fitted.

Caprice was sailed by my father, Harry Pfeiffer, from 1927 through to 1962. Whilst racing with the SASC, she won the SASC Gold Cup in 1932-33, 34-35 and 1968, the Hoana Trophy in 1934/35/36, was outright winner of the Jubilee Cup in seasons 1932-33, 34-35, and won the SASC Division 1 point score in 1962.

During this time a number of Sydney’s leading yachtsmen started their racing life on *Caprice*, including such notable sailors as Michael York and John (Choc) Winning.

In 2014, after finding the original 1900 sail plan in the attic and some nudging from close friends, we decided to explore converting *Caprice* back to the original Fife gaff jackyard topsail sail plan.

The word about the re-rig spread amazingly fast around the Sydney waterfront, with expectations that it was a forgone conclusion, and soon I was approached by a number of enthusiasts who provided advice and great counsel. The re-rig required the mast to be shortened from 47’ to 32’ above the deck, the boom lengthened from 16’ to 24’ and the bowsprit outboard lengthened from 4’6” to 7’. No changes were required re mast position as the CE (centre of effort) remained virtually the same as the original 1900 plan.

The re-rig commenced seriously in 2015 following a chat with, and much advice from, Bill Gale and





Left: Tony and Pat Pfeiffer

Below left: At the RSYS Pond with flags.



Sean Langman, both strong advocates of classic yachts. I was fortunate that virtually nothing needed to be done to the hull, planking, deck or coachhouse (apart from some new teak trim around the coachhouse and coaming.) The extent of the main project focused on spars, rigging and sheets and lines, fittings and sails.

My early task related to sourcing fittings appropriate to yachts from the early 1900s but which are practical and effective today. This included bronze sheet winches (Harken), bronze turnbuckles (Wilmex, Poland), wooden ash blocks, bronze shackles, bronze furlers, vents, cleats, halyards, sheets (UK & Holland), sails from Victoria, swivels from Germany, oak mast hoops from the US and tailored aluminium bronze mast bands from Sydney.

Sean Langman managed the complete re-rig project in a most professional and caring manner which included cutting down and refurbishing the existing solid oregon mast stepped in 1929, shaping the boom (a 100 year old oregon flag pole acquired from North Sydney Oval,) shaping and modifying the gaff (from *Ranger*, A1 made originally by Cliff Gale) as well as all the standing rigging, splicing, swaging, assembly and stepping.

Preparation of the hull, deck and coachhouse related only to sanding, priming and painting/ varnishing which was all done by my family – wife Pat and sons Robert and Mathew.

In the '50s and '60s I had many great experiences during school holidays cruising on *Caprice* on Broken Bay, Coal & Candle Creek and Cowan Creek with close school friends. These great times continued for many years thereafter and hopefully will occur again.

Caprice moves towards the fourth family generation of care and has been for the past 90 years a most important aspect of our family life.

We hope to be part of Club events on the water in days to come and that she will still be around in another 116 years.

We think, and I hope Members agree, that she looks quite a picture. ⚓

