

# FOLLOWING THE DREAM

BY KEITH INGRAM



ABOVE: Island Escape's helicopter flies in to join the ship with new guests while in Fitzroy, Great Barrier Island

BELOW: The gamefishing chair ready for when the ship might snag a marlin. It looks good and is a popular place to gather



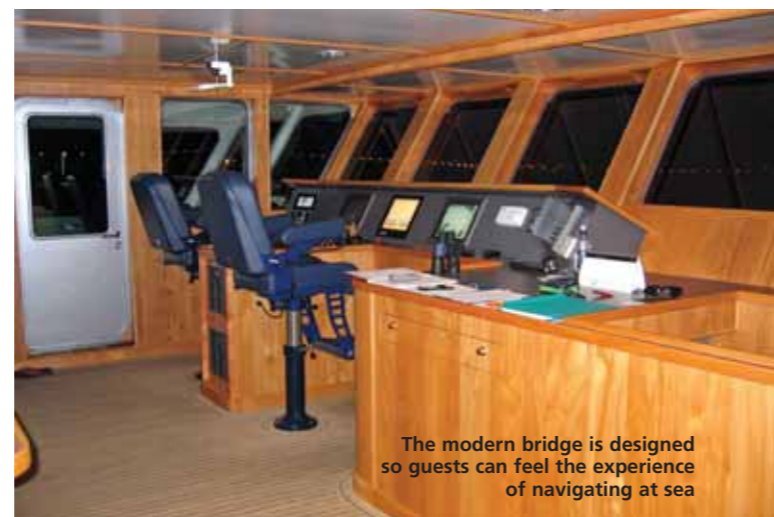
Kiwis by nature are dreamers, schemers and doers. And the level of one's personal achievement depends on the level of will do, can do or don't give a stuff.

New Zealand businessman Peter Bissett is one of the doers. An ex-Mt Albert Grammar boy, he appreciated very early in life the benefits of harnessing entrepreneurial business skills at an early age. He started his career in the used car imports and shipping, and started Kiwi Car Carriers delivering new and used cars to New Zealand and other parts of the world.

In the late 1990s, Peter returned home for a visit, fell in love with the Hauraki Gulf and renewed his love of New Zealand in general. After purchasing a peninsula property above Sandy Bay on Rakino Island and building a lovely home, he transferred the operation of Kiwi Car Carriers to New Zealand. The company was later sold to European interests.

During this shipping stage of his career, he often toyed with the idea of a luxury cruise ship or specialist tourist adventure cruising vessel. Now based in New Zealand, he looked at the options of what was available, including the potential conversion of a 50m former fishing deep-sea trawler. At this stage, after exhausting all the current vessel options, the shipbroker introduced Peter to Challenge Marine, based in Nelson, where he was basically told that he was crazy.

However, engineering manager Chris Helps of Challenge Marine was aware of a large catamaran hull that had been lying in Suva for some years which was similar in design and size to the vehicular ferry *Eco Islander* servicing Great Barrier Island



The modern bridge is designed so guests can feel the experience of navigating at sea

in the Hauraki Gulf.

Challenge Marine went to Suva to inspect the hull and negotiate a suitable price, which was accepted.

Nigel Jolly of the *Braveheart* was contracted to tow her home from Suva to Nelson, where she was hauled on the slip in preparation for Challenge Marine to start initial replating and vessel construction.

The hull steel was originally pre-cut in Australia in the same yard where the *Island Navigator (Eco Islander)* was built and

shipped to a Suva shipyard where it was assembled and welded together.

For a variety of reasons, the vessel never got further than the hulls and main deck stage, and the engines, shafts and running gear were still sitting in boxes.

These Kelvin CAS C8 450hp diesel engines were 12 years old. The English suppliers were in the practice of selling the whole package, which meant the engine came complete with the gearbox, shaft, propellers and other components.

Naval architect Richard McBride was commissioned to develop the design and drawings, which would meet both Maritime New Zealand and Australian survey requirements.

The first hiccup was revealed when the initial drawings were produced. The ship would be bigger than first thought, and the hull was of such a capacity that the completed vessel would be greater than 500 tonnes, the demarcation line she had to remain under for manning and operational purposes. Challenge Marine had to cut 5m out of the middle of the vessel to bring her under the 500 tonne limit.

At this time all the hull plating was tested and some steel deterioration and corrosion was present that would require remedial replating. This included replacing about 214sq m of hull plating, installing new fire boundary watertight bulkheads and reconstruction of the stern area. In many cases this required specialist engineering and welding skills that can only be found in the larger black steel shipbuilding yards.

Around this time some big decisions were made about the

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