

# WOOD IS STILL GOOD FOR 13M TRAWLER

BY KEITH INGRAM

Recently we saw the launch of what has to be one of the smartest looking fishing boats we have seen in a long while. Not only was she made of wood, she was designed and built as a trawler in the Stark Bros Lyttelton ship building facility for Ocean Fisheries Ltd. Ocean Fisheries is an associated company of some 40 plus years standing. Always an intentional “spec project”, this vessel has in many ways already fulfilled a useful purpose, even before she went into service says Andrew Stark, chief executive of Stark Bros.

The keel was laid in 1998, on what would be a fill-in project to smooth the workflow between other commercial vessel building projects and major dry docking contracts. It has also allowed for the training of apprentices which is important because today, there are very few opportunities to learn planked wooden boat skills in a trade where few timber vessels of this size are now built.

For us, the very fact that a wooden trawler was under construction was something to keep an eye on because sooner or later she would see the light of day. That

day came on March 20, 2009 when the guests and friends who gathered, witnessed Vicky Caldwell, on behalf Stark Bros Ltd, christen and launch their latest creation, *Nessie J*.

The day was one of mixed emotions for the company and especially for the Stark family, their staff and friends. This was the first boat launched by the company since Frank Stark passed away, just 11 months ago – shortly after the launch of *Jubilee*. Frank’s mark is firmly stamped on the boat from the time he spent with the apprentices who grew up and developed into tradesmen, the discussions, the planning, the dreams and the realities. It was Frank’s commitment and dedicated passion that was the driving force behind Stark’s launching three new trawlers over the last five years, a rarity in this industry where most of the inshore trawler fleet is aging vessels of 30 or more years.

This, of course, raises an obvious question. If Stark’s and Ocean Fisheries can do it, why is it that we have such an aging, deteriorating, inefficient fleet of vessels around our ports with many of them languishing and waiting to die? Surely, given the price of fish to the consumer, the seafood industry is making the



The masters main command and fishing station. Note no ship's wheel

returns and should be in a prime position to maintain a structured vessel replacement programme for the inshore fleet. But no, it would appear that only the quota holders are making the money and the small contract fishermen is being squeezed so tight he no longer has room to fart. The sad part of all this is until we can upgrade our fleet with new, efficient, small inshore vessels, then high repair costs and inefficient running causing higher fuel costs can only add to the erosion of potential profits and increase the end cost to the consumer.

*Nessie J* was named after Andrew’s grandparents Nessie and James Stark who were responsible for raising the Stark bothers, Frank, Ralph and Dave, the founders of the company. *Nessie J* is built as a traditional inshore fishing vessel and will fish the inshore waters from Lyttelton and around Banks Peninsula. Like her larger sisters in the fleet, *Frontier* and *Jubilee*, *Nessie J* has been commissioned to run on bio-fuel. *Nessie J* runs on B60, that is 60 percent bio-fuel with 40 percent petroleum diesel. The *FV Frontier* runs a B60 blend and the *FV Jubilee* is on 100 percent bio-diesel or B100 – the first commercial vessel in New Zealand to do so.

“It is through the use of these fuels that Ocean Fisheries are seeing their greatest savings and improved performance,” said Andrew. This vessel will fish five days a week with a skipper and one crewman. She will target flounder and New Zealand sole as well as gurnard, elephant fish, red cod, and a multitude of other inshore species. Most of the fish will end up in restaurants and fresh fish shops via United Fisheries.

The *Nessie J* is the 10th fishing boat Starks have designed, built and commissioned to fish for their own fishing company. We understand the policy of building these spec boats to smooth the workshop workload will continue into the future. After all, they have the knowledge and expertise, the experience and to date the motivation to succeed.

Sadly we don’t see a lot of other fishing companies making this commitment to the inshore fishery. On the plus side Stark’s will always have a ready market to move these quality trawlers on as was demonstrated with the *Cressy* when the *Jubilee* was launched. And, if you were to take a sneaky peek inside the wooden part of the workshop, you might just see the keel for the next timber boat waiting to be laid. So in asking the question, when will this boat be finished? Andrew replied with his quiet smile. “Well lets just say that one day you might receive an invitation in the post – but don’t hold your breath as hopefully it will be some years away.”

Yes you guessed it. Already the timber stored around the factory is ear-marked for the next wooden boat as part of ▶



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