

## A TALE OF TWO BANDITS

### Stuart and Anne Letton

*(Stuart contributed The Seven Year Itch to Flying Fish 2018/2, admitting that a new lady had replaced his faithful Time Bandit I in his affections. That article ended with the words: 'Come back next issue and find out!' Okay, so it's been three issues instead of one, but much better late than never!*

*Follow Stuart and Anne's blog at [www.TimeBandit.co.uk](http://www.TimeBandit.co.uk).)*

"Gone to the Dark Side?" "Bought a square boat then?" "Nice trainer hull." These comments and many more were directed our way by our monohull friends. "You're going to love it" and similar came from our multihull friends.

To transition from mono to multi, one really needs an excuse. Mine is that I started my racing career in a catamaran ... albeit aged eleven. Fast forward a good number of years – Fireball, 505, Contender, marriage, kids, work and all that stuff – and we were finally free, and for the last ten years have been drawing a spider's web of tracks around various oceans on, as a yachting journalist once unkindly called her, a 'beige battleship', our Island Packet 45, *Time Bandit*. Well-named as it happens, as on more than one occasion we really appreciated having a solid, directionally stable platform under our boot soles. Lurking in the DNA, however, was the catamaran demon that had to be exorcised...

We did our homework, reading up on the brands, their strengths and weaknesses, and conducted numerous brief interviews with cat owners. We'd dinghy up to anchored cats, my wife Anne cringing in the front of the dinghy, saying "Please, not again, this is so embarrassing". Ignoring her protestations I'd knock on the hull and ask two questions. First was, "Before you bought this boat, did you sail a monohull?". The answer was always "Yes". Next I'd ask, "Would you go back to a monohull?". At this point the cat owner would look down indulgently and politely say, "Is your nurse nearby?" ... or words to that effect.

So, almost on a whim, "just to test the market, darling", we started the process of selling the 'beige battleship'. Somewhat to our surprise this went really fast – so fast that six weeks later we ended up beside Sydney Harbour, clutching our belongings, standing amongst a pile of cardboard boxes, homeless. I'd already made up my mind that we – well, I – wanted a boat at the top end of the performance scale. Anne was a reluctant follower. With some experience and knowledge of the Outremer range, we invited ourselves to the Outremer Cup in southern France to hitch rides in boats of various sizes. Fast forward to October 2018 and we flew to New Caledonia to complete the purchase of the new *Time Bandit*, an Outremer 51, and sail her down to Sydney and Tasmania, out of the cyclone zone.

A week later we sailed out of the flat waters of the New Caledonia lagoon into the big wide Pacific, taking our first steps up what was a pretty steep learning curve. Since then we've covered over 3500 miles of ocean, coastal water and creek, in flat calm to 40+ knots, and we're still learning.

So what have we learned? Well, on our crossing to Australia it did go through my mind that I might just be the first catamaran owner ever to go back to a monohull. It



*Time Bandit II off the east coast of Tasmania*

was the motion. Have you ever seen one of those circus clown cars where each wheel's hub is off centre and it hops and jumps around the ring? Well, that's what it felt like. Compared to the super-smooth ride of our long-keel 'beige battleship' it was wild and jerky. And when you were just getting ... WHAM!! ... what the heck was that? ... used to it, a wave would slam between the hulls or under the bridge deck and you'd jump out of your skin. Man, this was different.

*The chair and tiller steering are optional extras ... best seat in the house*



What was also different was standing at the helm, self-steering switched to OFF. In the last few months I've probably hand-steered for longer than in the previous few years. With a half turn of the finger-light helm we can peel the boat off, catch a wave, and start a surf that takes us up from cruising speed of 8 or 10 knots to 15 or 16 knots as we enjoyed the sleigh-ride east. *Time Bandit II* is a joy to sail. You even get a tiller to play with. At night, rather than be shivering outside in a *Beige Bandit* cockpit, we could be in the saloon at 'the bridge' where, with pretty much all-round visibility, we could sit in warmth and comfort while hissing and roaring along.

A couple of months later we were out in 40 knots, making a run down the west coast of Tasmania to see how we got along in a bit of a blow. The forecast had said 25 to 30 but the Bureau of Meteorology must have thought they'd give us a challenge. Under furlled Solent\* we were moving at 8 to 10 knots – and Anne was sitting in the lounge ('lounge' as in the saloon, as opposed to the 'patio' or cockpit) reading the paper. In *Beige Bandit* she'd either have been Stuger on'd, or comatose, or both. One thing we were glad to leave in monohull-land was seasickness.



*Showing off...*

Lovely as Australian cruising is, sheltered anchorages are few and far between – those that are sheltered from the wind invariably suffer from swell. One evening in Manly, inside Sydney Heads, we were entertaining our cruising buddy for the night, enjoying sundowners and some nosh until it got later than we'd planned. I was running a taxi service and took our friend back to his Moody 54, to find it rolling like a dog to the extent that getting on board was an exercise in timing the downswing of the gunwale to the

\* A term used by the French to describe a 100% jib, generally set on a dedicated stay running some 9–15in inside the headstay.

*Anne reading at (half) the saloon table*







The chart table is small, but takes a chart folded in four. Coastal cruising we're electronic, but on passage we put an ocean chart on the saloon table and plot daily on that, just so we can actually see progress!

upswing of the leg – and at his age that was a challenge! On board *Time Bandit II* for the previous three or four hours we'd been totally oblivious to the swell. We'd really forgotten what having to sleep spread-eagled, hanging on to the mattress, was like in rolly anchorages. In the open roadstead Tasmanian anchorages our



cruising buddies in their monohulls were walking around bleary-eyed, complaining about the nightmare rolling of the previous night. We hadn't even noticed.

Catamaran motion underway does take some getting used to, unless you're a circus clown, but after three months in a wide variety of conditions we were definitely being converted. The Outremer is at the performance end of the scale of cruising catamarans. Winning that performance potential – for potential is what it is, as you only need to be sensible and de-power – comes at a price, and that's measured in square metres of living space, both horizontally and vertically. The wider, more commodious hulls of, say, a Lagoon offer walk-around beds, larger saloons and second patios outside the front door, but performance takes a hit. As with all boats, you pay your money ...

I can't speak for the majority of the cruising cats out there – 'condomaran's is, I believe, the collective slur – but the Outremer certainly delivers on performance. However, to quote Spider-Man, "with great power comes great responsibility". Going upwind, perhaps close-reaching, or downwind and broad-reaching, if you get hit by a gust or, if you've allowed the adrenaline of a fast ride to make you leave reefing longer than you should have, you can luff up or bear off and de-power the boat. However, between say 80° and 150° you're operating in what I understand multihull people call the 'death zone' (I really do think they need to work on their marketing skills). You see, if you get hit by a really strong gust with the wind abeam and round up to spill wind you might, well, tip over. If instead you decide to bear off and go for speed to kill the apparent wind strength you accelerate, fast, and with the extra loads and speed you might, well, tip over. It's actually just like the Shearwater catamaran days of my youth!

Most cruising cats are under-powered and these scenarios are highly unlikely, or so I've read. On the other hand, *Time Bandit II* is at the performance end of the scale and for us, the extra power dictates we stay on top of things. Which was, after all, one of the reasons we, or rather I, decided to make the change. The Island Packet was just too forgiving ... and I'm still young!



Anyway, the reality is that while the potential exists for getting a really big fright – perhaps one that involves swimming – these scenarios are really only in extreme circumstances, perhaps a 70 knot katabatic blast from out of nowhere or suchlike. Otherwise a prudent sailor ought to be able to stay on top of things. And, as a friend remarked, "Without fear, there's no excitement".

So, after logging a few thousand miles, flat calms to 40 knots and around 80 nights at anchor, what are our thoughts as ex-racers and long-term liveaboard cruisers?

***That OCC house flag has seen good service!***

I've got over the motion and noise and now it's second nature. We've satisfied the primary goal of getting a boat that is comfortable, fast, responsive, fun and rewarding to sail. What we didn't expect was to so much appreciate 'upstairs' living with a walk-out 'patio', 360° visibility, interior helm position and sailing, living and sleeping ... all of it flat. My normal pose downwind on *Beige Bandit* was to sit at the wheel, one hand on each of the backstays, braced against the rolling. Now we walk around without holding on while Coke and coffees sit on the table, unmoved. I will surely miss being heeled over, powering along on a fast reach, lee rail awash. What I won't miss is the rolling.

Really, it's like taking your living room for a fast, thrilling, comfortable and rewarding sail, albeit with the occasional earthquake!

