Ice queen

Our latest Our Boats contributor tells his story

Peter Watson's FPB 64 Grey Wolf nestled up to an ice shelf during a cruise to Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago located between mainland Norway and the North Pole. Grey Wolf holds the current FPB record for venturing the furthest north and - how's this for a shake down cruise - Peter's maiden voyage on the boat was to take her from the yard in New Zealand back to her home port in Guernsey (MB December 2014). Now though, he has bought his second FPB 70, and with her launch imminent, you can read the full story in the Our Boats section on p10.
OUROURBOTS
Top tips from real boat owners in the MBY fleet

MBY’S FLEET

PRESTIGE 680

ARTEMISIA
MARK WEISS, Marina d’Arechi, Italy

PRINCESS 67

JINNYWREN
MIKE ROTHERY, Sant Carles Marina, Spain

DUCHY 27

ALCHEMY
PHYLIS ROCK, Yarmouth, UK

FAIRLINE SQUADRON 78

MATCH II
JOHN WOLF, Antibes, France

FLEMING 65

VENTURE II
PHYLIS ROCK, Yarmouth, UK

STEELER PANORAMA FF53

SYMPHONY
PETER CHESTER, the Netherlands

FPB 78

GREY WOLF II
PETER WATSON,
Guernsey, Channel Islands

CORVETTE 320

FALCONEET
DAVID MORRISON, Chichester Harbour, UK

PRESTIGE 500S

BREAKING BAD
NIGEL PICKIN, Port Hamble, UK

JEANNEAU NC14

DIANA
JOHN BRUNVATNE, Port Solent Marina, UK

KARCIN BLUEWATER 2250

BOHEMIAN GIRL
HUGO ANDREAE, Poole, UK

DALE NELSON CLASSIC 45

ARLETTE
HARRY HORNBY, Badachro, Scotland

PRINCESS 61

BATEAU 3
HARRY METCALFE,
Port Saint Jean, France

NORDHAVN 46

ENJOY
LAURIE CRANFIELD, the Med

FLEMING 55

PLAYDEAU
PIERS DU PRE, Guernsey, Channel Islands

PRINCESS 43

SAPPHIRE
GORDON CHRISTIE, Loch Lomond, UK

BÉNÉTEAU SWIFT TRAWLER 34

BLUE’S AWAY
JACK HAINES, Portimão, Portugal

FPB 78

Not-so-lone wolf

Peter flew to the other side of the world to buy the boat of his dreams but got more than he bargained for when he cruised home on another, strangely familiar yacht.

When I was asked to write about why I was building my FPB 78 Grey Wolf II to replace my FPB 64 Grey Wolf, I smiled, as the purchase of my small FPB fleet actually came about almost the other way around! Let me explain...

I have always been a mad keen yachtman and I love to go places. I live in the Channel Islands, and my original trusty Bolina Targa has taken me to Norway and many places in between. She is still in the fleet and is definitely a keeper, as so is great for the treacherous waters of the Channel Islands and far excursions to France for lunch or our holiday house, and for trips back to the UK as well.

During the planning for the sale of my business, I looked hard at the market to see what we might buy as a family to take us further afield. My non-boatying wife Judith is game to join in but the Targa lacks anything more than the basics below decks, and maritime camping is quite sensibly not her thing. We also wanted space for friends and a yacht on which I could cross oceans.

I had looked at all the usual suspects and then came across the FPB Programme, built in New Zealand by Circa Marine, and designed by the legend of blue-water sail and power cruising, Steve Dashew.

A FLYING START

I was keen to know more, and after many conversations with Sue Grant at FPB’s global marketing agent Berthon, and Steve Dashew himself, it became clear to me that an FPB could offer me the ability to cross oceans, experience high-latitude cruising and do so quickly, safely and economically in comfort. The more that I talked and read, the more it looked as if this could be the yacht for Judith and I.

I also wanted a yacht that I could charter commercially to Category 0, and once John Fearnley at Mcal and the FPB team had chatted, it looked as if the FPB 78 could measure up to this demanding set of rules too. She also had the volume and capabilities that I needed.

However, with no FPBs in Europe, it was really hard to take the next steps, so Berthon suggested the only way to decide was to hop on a plane to New Zealand and see the FPB Programme in the flesh. Steve and Linda Dashew already had the first ever FPB 78 in build, and the number two slot was available – maybe she could be ours! Maybe we could even have our name on her!

So an exhausting 40 hours later, I was in Whanganui in North Island and meeting Bruce Farrand MD of Circa Marine and his team at the yard.

ONE FOR LUCK

From that moment on, I was sure that FPB 78 number two was my yacht. Circa Marine are a terrific bunch and only care about building the best yachts possible. There are no frills at Circa – don’t expect great coffee or grand offices – it’s all about the yachts. The CAD machines may be new, but the chairs are not and the carpets have definitely seen better days! But to make up for the carpets, you get a warm Kiwi welcome from a straightforward MD who spends more time on the shop floor making
sure that every detail of the boat is right than in his office.

The possibility of choosing FPB 78 number two gave me a very difficult two-year problem, as it was clear that it would take at least this long to build her. With my business now sold, I wanted to go boating! Berthon helped me look at all the possibilities for an inter in yacht – Selene, Fleming, Nordhavn and the rest. I still wanted to do long-distance cruising while my big Wolf was in build. I also wanted to gain experience so that I could be sure that the call that I made on speciﬁcation and layout were going to be right.

As luck would have it, in the marina close to Circa was a nearly new FPB 64 whose owners had just decided to sell her as their plans had changed. What about buying this smaller FPB so that I could learn the ropes and be totally prepared for my new 78?

Very highly speciﬁed – as all FPBs are as standard – this 64 looked fantastic. Down below, she was good as new, and she and I most deﬁnitely bonded.

LITTLE FLEET

I am, so far, the only FPB owner who has agreed to buy two FPBs on the very same day! I signed the sale and purchase contract for the 64 and the build contract for the 78 at the same time, and stood by as the surveyor, who would later work with me signing off the build milestones on the 78, went through little Wolf and gave her his seal of approval.

A very exciting time, and another trip saw me getting to grips with my 64, as well as planning my 78 at Circa. They were brilliant at going through the 64 and Steve was on hand to do circuits and bumps with me. Nonetheless, these are complicated yachts and it was a steep learning curve to become friends with the 64 and to feel conﬁdent about systems and handling.

I was also introduced to the rest of the FPB family, of which we are now proud members. A number of FPBs are based in North Island, from where they leave for serious cruising. Their owners are all fountains of knowledge about the boats and I was given endless information and help in getting to know Grey Wolf. This has continued, and we’re now all firm friends.

So with a fleet of FPBs, I decided that it was time for some serious product testing. I had been told that the Bay of Islands was super and that I would enjoy Fiji and beyond. There was also talk of shipping the FPB 64 back to Europe so that we could spend time aboard her as a family and enjoy her closer to home.

TEST DRIVES

I felt that we could do better than that and decided to cruise her all the back from New Zealand to Guernsey. So after a lovely local cruise with Judith, Grey Wolf returned to Whangarei to prepare for the long voyage home.

We left in February 2014 together with two charms – one an engineer and the other a naval architect – and apprentices from Berthon and Circa We learned so much on the long voyage home, and this has helped enormously with identifying what we wanted aboard our big Wolf.

Of course we didn’t stop there. Next it was down to the Med with Judith for a glorious late summer cruise. The following season took us up to Swalland – Grey Wolf holds the record for the most northerly placed FPB – but I have a feeling that with Steve and Linda’s new FPB 78 Coelis now on the water and headed that way this summer, we may not hold on to that record too much longer!

FPB 64 Grey Wolf is now with Berthon at Lyme Regis, waiting for her new owner to take her places. If her new family have half as much fun as we have had aboard her, they will have an absolute ball. I am now in Whangarei waiting for big Wolf to be born – and the contractions are getting shorter! 

Peter Watson

Captain Trevor takes the helm during a memorable cruise to Norway in 2011.