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“Bill Ebsary has gone over to the dark side” was the word going around the bar at the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club (RPAYC) at Pittwater on Sydney’s North Shore early last year. Bill had committed the ultimate sin in a club that very much took pride in being one of Australia’s dedicated keelboat racing clubs – he had traded his Beneteau 44.7 for – a powerboat!

But Bill had been such a stalwart of the club and had made such a name for himself over many years of racing yachts that he was forgiven, and instead of moving up the road to the Royal Motor Yacht Club, his Fleming 55 motor cruiser is one of the few powerboats in a marina dominated by towering yacht masts.

His wife Elaine still doesn’t believe it. At one stage she thought Bill was having a mid-life crisis as Bill comes from a dyed-in-the-wool sailing family. His dad, Viv, sailed 18-footers in the 1920’s and 30’s in the days when the iconic sailing craft carried so much sail that they needed the best part of a rugby team aboard just to keep them upright, while the bailing boy would be working overtime to get rid

JUST THE TICKET

AS OLDER SALTS FIND HAULING THE SAILS AND LINES A BIT BEYOND THEM, SOME ARE MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM SAIL TO POWER. KEVAN WOLFE CHATS WITH ONE OF THE CONVERTS TO MOTOR YACHTING, SUBSTITUTING RACING SAILS AND HEELING FOR THE EASE OF PURRING MOTORS AND THE LUXURY OF A FLAT-FLOORED SALOON IN THEIR GOLDEN YEARS.

of the water pouring on board as they charged up and down Sydney Harbour. When the wind dropped off the excess bodies would leap over the side and swim to a channel mark or one of the “Wedding Cake” channel lights to later be picked up by a club boat.

So it’s no wonder that at the tender age of four or five years, the intrepid young Bill first set out on Middle

WHERE’S THE MAST? The Fleming 55 that shook-up a sailor’s world.

Harbour in a rowing boat, rigged with a square sheet as a sail. Living at Roseville in those early years it was just a stone’s throw to the Northbridge Sailing Club where he excelled sailing in Flying Ants and Cherubs.

During Bill’s high school days at North Sydney he reminisces, “Swimming was my sport and sailing was my passion”, he says, “I can relax on the water quite happily on a boat even if it’s just sitting on an anchor somewhere.”

When Bill and Elaine moved to Palm Beach at the tip of Sydney’s northern beaches, it was a given that he would join the ‘Alfreds’ on Pittwater. Over many decades of membership Bill made the annual Pittwater to Coffs Harbour ocean race – and the associated four-race regatta off Coffs – his own, racing his yachts in the 226 nm race 26 times and winning the overall regatta on four occasions. He was also part of the three-boat team that took out the overall teams’ prize for the Alfreds on five separate occasions.

At the club Bill first sailed a Peter Cole half-tonner that he called *Spoon Bill*. This was followed by a J35, then a Beneteau 40.7, and his most

successful yacht a Beneteau 44.7, all having *Bill* somewhere in their names. The Beneteaus were called *Le Billet*, which is derived from the French and literally means a displaced sailor’s quarters aboard ship – or more literally “The Ticket”. He often says all his boats have been “The Ticket” and he has been a great advocate of the Beneteaus he has owned.

Bill has enjoyed much success competing at the Alfreds and is quick to point out that he has never had any real dramas or dropped a rig in his many miles of ocean racing. Although, he has never pointed his boats south to Hobart, he says because “Christmas time is the busiest time of the year for my engineering company” (which his father started) and is called Ebsray Pumps, which inevitably causes confusion with his name when people first meet Bill.

“Consequently, I don’t have the time to put in the preparation required for a Hobart race, so the Coffs race suits me. It only takes a couple of days and Elaine and the family can drive up to the finish.”

Bill raced with a crew of 12 on the 44.7: “They were a great group of

blokes and we had a great camaraderie, some were young but most of us were in our 60’s. After one had a hip replacement and there were a couple of dodgy knees and one had had a heart attack it was starting to get harder and becoming a risk in the sport. I also had less and less time to race.

“In the last Coffs race in 2010 we spent the time self-tacking our wheel chairs,” he joked.

Bill and his mates’ agility was starting to become a problem, and with the writing on the wall it was time to change gears.

“My racing has exceeded all expectations. It has been unbelievably interesting and a surreal experience,” Bill confessed. Deciding to move on from racing, he had the chance of buying a cruising yacht, but he knew it wouldn’t do what he wanted it to do. So he started to look around at cruising powerboats. Being an engineer, he cast a critical eye over what was available in the cruiser scene and kept coming back to the Fleming 55.

“It was classical with a traditional design but ultra-modern in its systems,” he said. “The kids were taken along for the ride on the keel

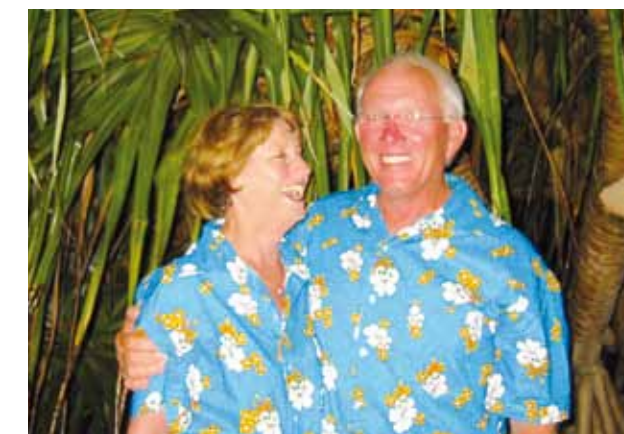
WIND-POWERED
Below from left to right: Bill’s sailing boats *Spoon Bill* and *The Bill*. Below right: Bill Ebsary, pictured with his wife Elaine.

boats, but the Fleming is just great for the grandkids.”

Bill says his family are now more interested in boating and can now go places they couldn’t before in a yacht, such as under the bridges at Brooklyn and explore the upper reaches of the nearby Hawkesbury river.

He also has plans in the pipeline to explore Tasmania, and make the trek around the “top end” to the Kimberley’s. The Fleming 55 is just the boat to do it with a long cruising range and all the comforts of a luxury home afloat. While the boat has vast live-aboard space when compared to his previous sailing yachts, it is of a manageable size that both he and Elaine can handle without the extra crew a sailing yacht demands.

Bill chose the Fleming 55 because it is a well-proven, raised-pilothouse motor yacht designed for the serious cruising he has in mind. A semi-displacement hull gives great flexibility in performance, with the boat capable of cruising 2,000 nautical miles at 8 knots, yet with her standard



070 | SAIL TO POWER

twin Cummins QSC 500 hp common rail engines she can attain a top speed of around 20 knots if needed. A maximum sustained cruising speed of around 17 knots is possible, where her moderate deadrise provides a comfortable ride unlike boats for which speed is the main design criteria and whose high speed, planing hulls require flatter sections making for a hard ride and the need to slow down in a seaway. On long passages, Fleming owners typically prefer a more leisurely and economical cruising speed of around 10 knots, where the typical fuel burn is slightly more than 40 litres per hour.

The Fleming also has a deep keel providing protection for the running gear and stability in following seas. Because noise and vibration contribute to fatigue, Fleming has also paid special attention to producing a boat that has become a standard in the industry for its whisper-quiet, smooth ride, particularly due to their use of Aquadrive anti-vibration drive systems.

It's interesting that almost without exception, yachties who decide to change from living on an angle to the more stable, level motion of a motor cruiser opt for traditional displacement or semi-displacement hulls. Although they may have enjoyed the thrill of sailing a yacht downwind at 12 to 15 knots or more under a spinnaker or Code Zero, they don't want to be charging around the ocean in a planing powerboat at



20 to 30 knots; so the slower, more traditional trawler motor yacht appears to be their style. Although Bill's Fleming 55 is fitted with twin-engines, these days many trawler (or passage maker) motor yachts come equipped with just one engine (and a back-up auxiliary) for long-range cruising efficiency. So for yachties the transition to a cruising motor yacht is not too hard as they are used to close quarters maneuvering with only the one engine of a sailing yacht. This gives sailing skippers the docking skills that most motor yachtsmen used to driving a boat



MOTOR MAN
Le Billet – Bill's Fleming 55 had enough features to feed his salt-water addiction in a different style.

with two engines don't experience, especially when getting into and out of a tight spot. For skippers know that steering a yacht with only one engine in and out of a marina berth, particularly with a stiff crosswind blowing, is an art mastered over many a year. For racing yachts this can be particularly difficult especially if fitted with a drag-reducing folding prop that doesn't have the grip of a fixed blade propeller. But in the world of motor yachts equipped with twin-engines, and often with bow and stern thrusters, it's easier to maneuver a large motor yacht than many a much smaller sailing yacht has ever been.

So, take heart, there is still life after sailing! Although racing yachts on the open ocean may forever be the salt in your blood, when the time comes to hang up the wet weather gear, Bill's experience is one of many yachties who are finding that cruising the waterways in the level-riding comforts of home, is a new challenge of the seas. ⚓



There is life after sail.



The Fleming 55



Every new Fleming now comes with an Apple iPad "eFIT" (Fleming Information Tablet) preloaded with an owner's manual, schematics, parts lists, Navionics charts, VENTURER magazine and more.

It's a fact that around half of our customers used to own sailing yachts, indeed many are still keenly involved in sailing activities of all kinds. But now they also possess what many boating journalists & Fleming Owners around the world believe to be the ultimate cruising motor yacht. If you've ever considered it might be time for a change, visit us at www.flemingyachts.com and see how we can help you enjoy the best of both worlds.

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