

Port Phillip Sea Pilots

A Brief History

In 1839 George Tobin was granted the first Pilots license. Camped on the beach under Shortland Bluff, the Pilots were the first white men to inhabit this area. With only whale boats, crewed usually by five convicts to put to sea in, the Pilots were not required to board ships outside the heads, if wind and tide permitted they usually did so. In bad weather it was their practice to signal the ships from inside the heads and guide them on a safe course.

Many ships came to grief in the Rip, only the pilots and their crews were available to give immediate assistance. Incredible feats were performed, on the occasion of the wreck of the *Isabella*, George Tobin swam through the surf to fix a line to the ship which allowed the passengers to reach the safety of the shore.

A larger vessel was needed to allow the Pilots to be stationed outside the heads. In 1852 the Brigantine *Boomerang* was purchased, however a square rigged vessel proved to be unhandy in bad weather. In early 1853 she was replaced by the *Corsair*: a celebrated cutter of the Royal Yacht Squadron. Built on the Isle of Wight she was 63'6" x 18'9" x 9'6" 51 tons she became Cruising Pilot Cutter for No 1 company.

The schooner *Rip* was built for £4,528 in 1861 at Cedar Point, St Johns, New Brunswick, Canada based on the New York Pilot Schooners, said to be the only exact sister ship to the famous Schooner *America* designed by George Steers. Fine ended with long over hangs, the counter stern was shortened by 8' to prevent the slamming when hove to outside. In service for 40 years, on July 15th 1873 *Rip* was swamped by huge seas in a south westerly gale off Point Nepean, with the loss of four lives and tales of heroism the vessel survived after drifting dismasted, back through the heads. *Corsair* in similar circumstances on May 2nd 1874 was not so lucky becoming a total wreck missing stays whilst tacking out.

Wyuna Purpose built by Ferguson Bros, Glasgow, UK in 1953 is a twin screw diesel electric ship. The Pilot vessel on station would employ two crews each serving one week about and the change taking place between 9.00am & 11.00 am every Monday. The last cruising Pilot Cutter to be used at Queenscliff, she stayed in service until 1978 when she was sold to the Australian Maritime College for use as a training vessel.

The tenders of *Wyuna* and her predecessors were used to transfer the pilots from the cruising pilot cutters to the waiting ships. These small plucky work boats often had to operate in severe conditions. One account in the Herald in the early 60s was of a breakdown with *Wyuna*, unable to pick up her launch in heavy weather, the launch ran fair wind in 35 knots of WSW for the safety of Western Port Bay, by the time the *Wyuna* caught up, the launch was abeam of Cape Shcank.

These functional launches were an evolving design dating back to the earliest days of the cruising pilot cutters. Rowed by two oarsmen or with fair wind, sailed with a dipping lug rig. The launch was lowered away to weather of the waiting ship and then picked up to leeward.

The shape of the launches, changed to facilitate the operation of petrol Simplex engines in the early 40's, and later Yanmar diesel engines in the early 60's.

The 18-ft Port Phillip Pilot Launch design by W.B.S mirrors these later boats. The lines were lifted from *Betsy*, one of the last launches built by master shipwright Jack Beazley who worked for the service from 1945 for over 50 years. Jack generally built one boat per year, on inspecting the new WBS launch *Wyuna*, upon completion, he stated "*she's a dinki di pilot boat, if ya saw her steaming around you'd think shes just dropped of the ship*"

Resource The Port Phillip Sea Pilots by M Carolyn
The First Of Port Phillip Pilots Darren Baillieu
129 Hotham Road Sorrento, Vic 3943
Ph: 61 3 59 844 333 Fax: 61 3 59 844 570
wbs@woodenboatshop.com.au
woodenboatshop.com.au

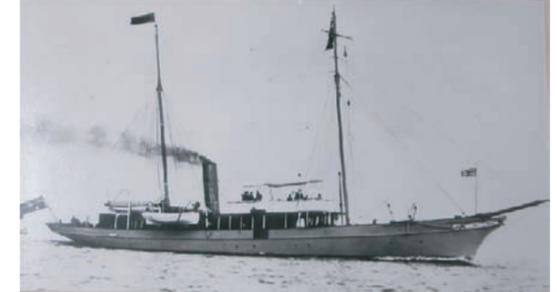


Wyuna

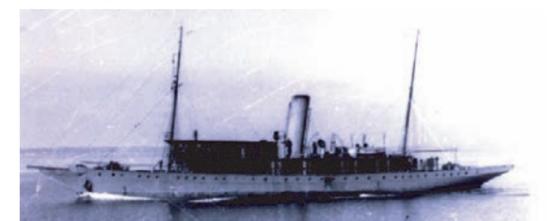
W.B.S 18' Port Phillip Pilot Launch



Painting by G. Gregory of the *Corsair* with pilots boarding the clipper ship *Lightning*



Alvin 138'x 20.2'x 12'6" 333 tons built at Southampton 1891 note the launch in the davits, 1903-1925



Akana, ex *Komet*, armed yacht for the German Administration, New Guinea. A 1914 war prize 1925-1954 Photo Credit T Ryan



Wyuna 1953 1979 209'x 39'x 15' she carried 4 launches, seen here preparing for lowering.



An original launch circa 1900 mast can be seen in the boat



A modern fast pilot launch as used today



Wyuna

W.B.S 18 Port Phillip Pilot Launch

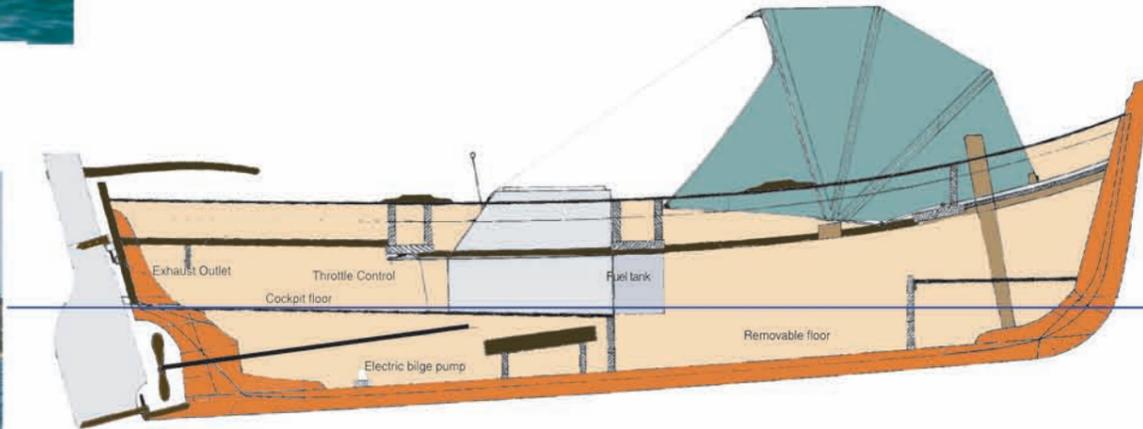


Wyuna (clear & peaceful waters) surfing at six knots.

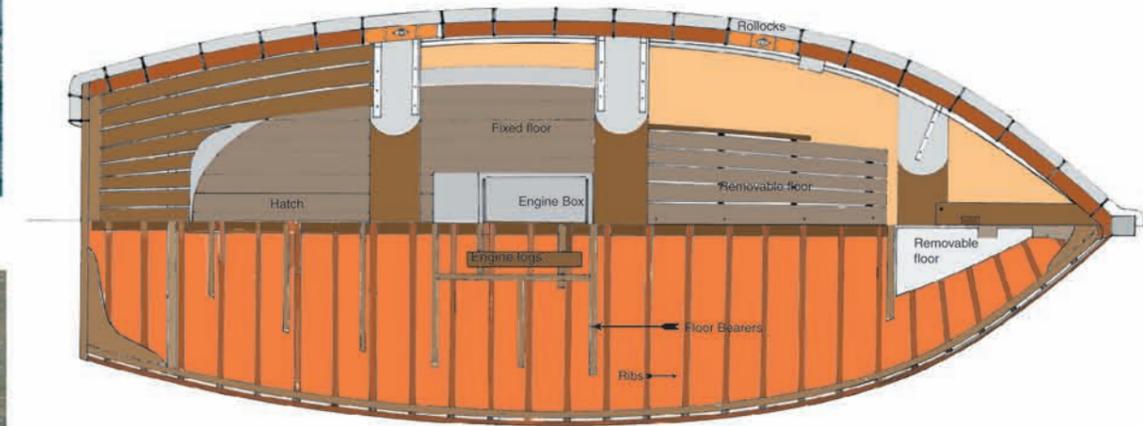
Comfortable seating for up to 8 adults makes her the ideal crew tender.



As a day boat or a tender *Wyuna* cuts a striking image.



Simple gear and throttle controls make her highly manouverable & easy to handle



The sturdy spray dodger gives instant protection from the elements. Traditional soft fendering is practical around the marina or when alongside another vessel.



Clinker construction with steam bent ribs and grown knees.



An evolutionary work boat, designed by the pilots as suitable for the conditions at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay.