

Footloose and FANCY-FREE

A jumbo pilot-cum-yachtie 'cuts loose and kicks off the Sunday shoes' with his new Bluewater 420 Centre Cockpit. And his masterplan — no plan at all!

"This is a yacht you can take anywhere in the world," explains Sel Parlane cradling a mug of hot coffee as he prepares for his maiden voyage from Sydney to sunny Queensland.

"But really my plan is to have no plan at all. Which is a good plan because you can always stick to it."

You can understand Parlane's desire for liberation. The 54-year-old flies jumbos for Qantas and Air New Zealand. As such, he has to stick to tight schedules, camp in busy cities like tumultuous Taipei, and rent out his Newcastle property because, well, there's no time to maintain the jungle... I mean garden.

But ask the jetsetter where home is and he'll point you to his new yacht.

After five years of careful planning — and a 12-month gestation period in Bluewater's Lake Macquarie factory — *Footloose II* has finally been launched.

Indeed, when I stepped aboard the yacht a proud Parlane and his crew, Jeff and Kym Martin, were well prepared for their first big passage north.

Not one to leap into the unknown, Parlane did a lot of planning before buying his first serious cruising yacht. The jumbo pilot searched high and low for what he considers the perfect liveaboard boat. He contemplated importing an overseas marke before discovering Bluewater Yachts at Cardiff in NSW. It has a tradition for making yachts that rarely stay chained to port. Indeed, many of its boats are out cruising the Pacific as we speak.

But of the models that boutique yachtbuilder makes, the centre cockpit version of the 420 answered Parlane best. He wanted a home away from home, a floating office, and a cost-effective mode of transport rolled into one.

As with many serious cruising sailors, Parlane prefers the centre-cockpit design for safety — it's virtually impossible for a wave to dump aboard.

When you get talking to Parlane, he wastes no time pointing out his boat's strengths. Among the

other things that swayed his judgement were the yacht's huge aft cabin with 2.05m of headroom and commodious queen-size bed, the giant navigation station, the party-size dinette, the workbench, and so on.

OUT OF THE BLUE

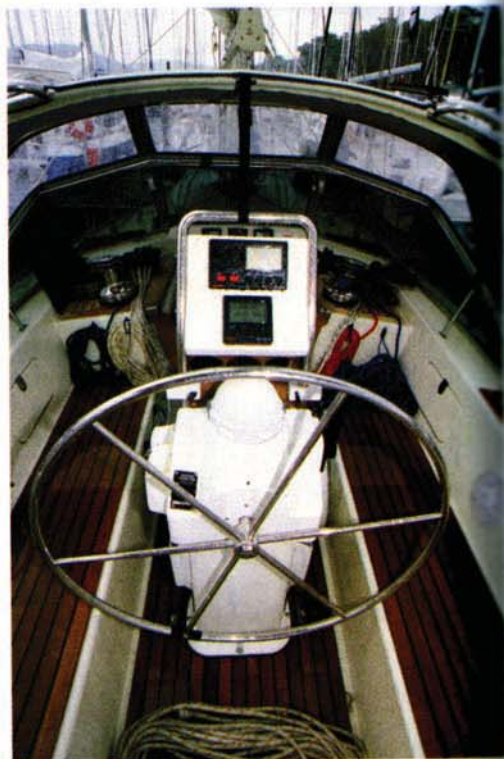
Based on the company's popular 400, Bluewater's 420 Centre Cockpit is in some ways a classic and in others a contemporary cruising yacht. The medium-to-high displacement hull was designed by Joe Adams to offer strength and performance. It has a fine bow and a canoe-shaped waterline.

Serious salties will warm to the 420 for its stability. This comes partly from more than four tonnes of lead ballast in an integrated keel, but also from the generous underfloor fuel and water capacities and great buoyancy amidships. Under one method of calculating stability, the 420 falls into what's reassuringly called the Unrestricted Safe Zone.

The hull is fitted with a skeg-hung rudder for protection, while construction tends towards the better-safe-than-sorry theory. The high-volume hull is laid-up from solid glass that, in some areas, is as much as 26mm thick. The tie layer is vinyl ester resin. The hull is topped in several layers of epoxy to prevent the ingress of water and boat pox.

Surrounded by 75mm fibreglass bulwarks and toe-rails, the Bluewater 420 Centre Cockpit boasts a deck that is deliciously flush. It doesn't need a raised deck because the hull has enough volume up front to provide headroom in its forepeak cabin. This flat deck aids crew work at sea. As the deck is cambered, you will find your feet when the wind is on the nose.

The deck is foam cored and reinforced with GRP beams. Deck fittings are through-bolted using aluminium backing plates in high-load areas. All internal bearers, bulkheads, chainplate



Above: Hydraulic steering adds to a well-balanced helm, and serious cruising sailors can escape the elements behind the cockpit dodger and windscreen. **Right:** Home is where the heart is on the Bluewater 420 — it virtually sails itself.

knees and so on are bonded to the hull. Furniture is made from 12mm marine ply, and I thought the joinery was particularly well done.

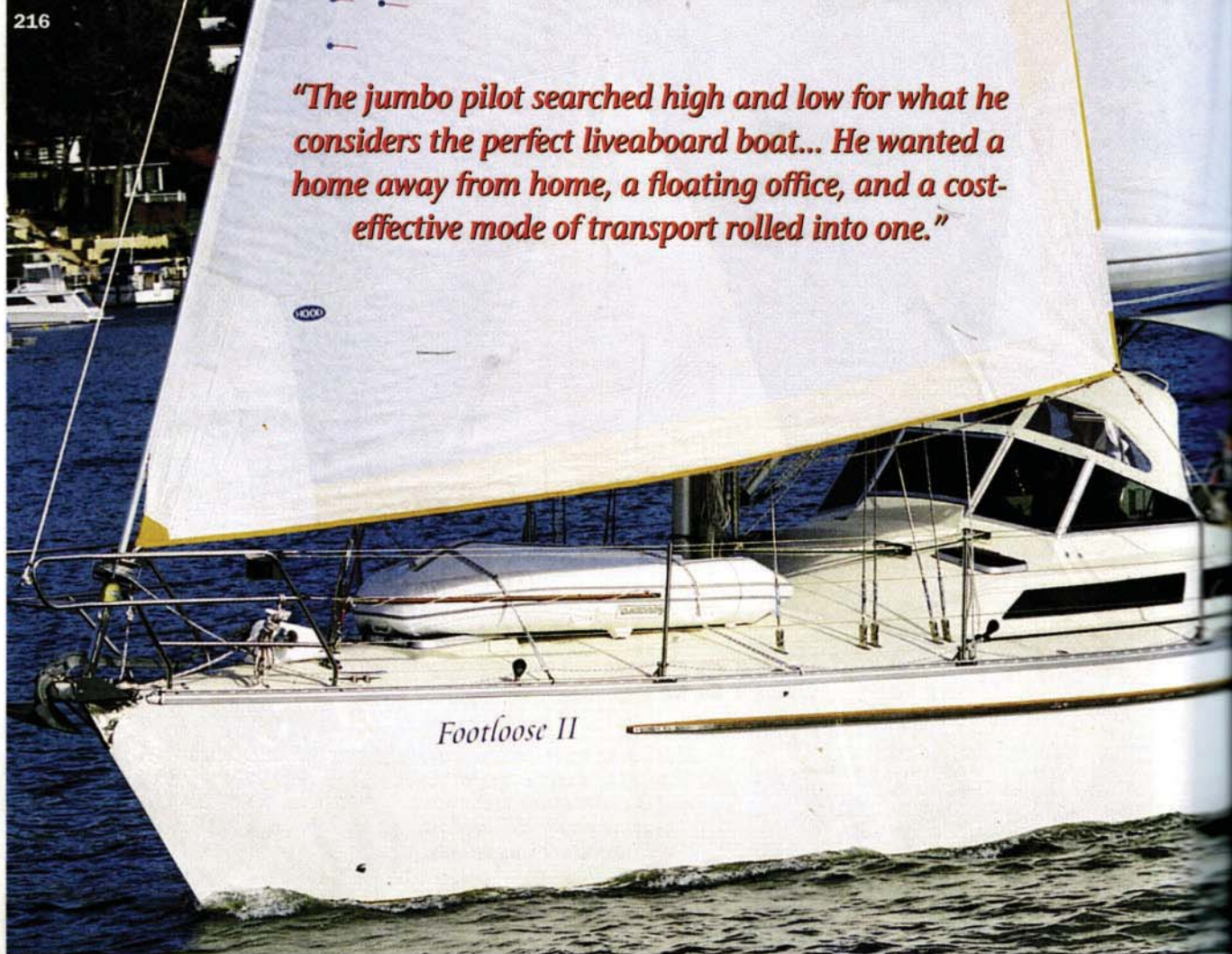
INTERIOR FITOUT

The amount of space aboard this high-volume 420 footer is really something else. Wherever you turn, you don't need to stoop. To reach the aft cabin, for example, you stroll down wide companionways flanking the 43hp Nanni motor. This motor, incidentally, gives the boat a 1200nm range thanks to a whopping 560lt fuel tank.

To port is a huge, moulded, walk-through bathroom big enough for a crew of six, with storage for wet-weather gear, and a great shower linked to 800lt of water. "All any good yacht needs is a good shower and a good sound system," Parlane quips before taking me to the galley.



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HIGHS

A high-volume ocean-cruising yacht built on sound principles of seamanship. Fitted out in a traditional manner, the hull is proven on the high seas. The centre cockpit version of the 420 provides a huge owner's suite, lots of liveaboard amenities, and a rig that a couple can easily control. Being very well ballasted, the Bluewater 420 will get you through fair and foul weather.

LOWS

The boat dawdled in light airs due to a fixed prop and the inner forestay hinders tacking the headsail. Having said that, this is a cruising boat whose stout and well-supported rig is designed for the long haul. The finish is honest, with excellent teak joinery, but the laminex benchtops could be improved upon. A layout with second head might be better for social sailors.

There's a maze of cupboards that are well-stocked with provisions, a two-burner gas stove/oven — gas bottles are in aft lockers — a microwave, and a 150lt fridge/freezer. Details such as the neat workstation with 240V power and a vice highlight the pragmatism behind his boat. As does the rig which was beefed up to handle the most tumultuous seas.

Meanwhile, the Queensland myrtle joinery reflects a high standard of craftsmanship. The ruby-coloured wood was used to good effect on the interior panelling and bookcase which carried salty titles such as *Heavy Weather Sailing*, *After 50,000 Miles* and *Cruising for Cowards*. Hardly.

Big on communications, Parlane installed a full

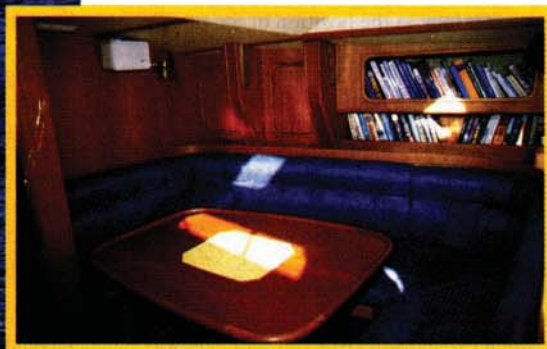
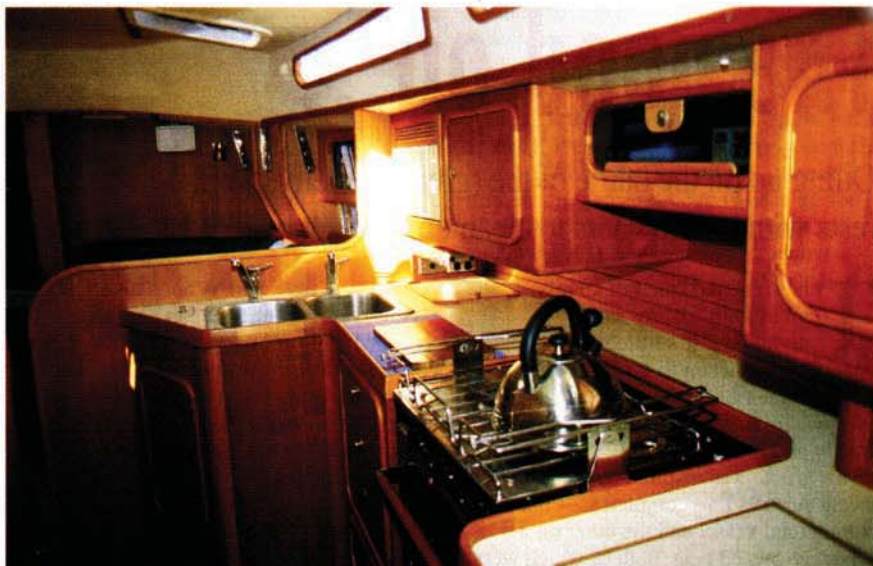
spread of long-range radios, satellite navigation system, all the charts and tables plus a sextant for celestial navigation along the coast. The navigation station is bigger than on most 42ft yachts and it can double as an office.

Forward is a settee that converts to a sea-berth, while the big oval dinette opposite can seat a Catholic family. I found the red wine — stowed beneath the lounge — and behind the lounge backrest I noted the solid knees where the chainplates attach.

Up front, the forepeak cabin includes a big double V-berth and two small overhead crew berths. Hanging lockers and cupboards can swallow several suitcases of clothing. A sink with hot and cold water allows guests to freshen up before hunkering down or visiting the yacht club. Nice touch.

But the piece de resistance was undoubtedly the aft cabin. Parlane doesn't need to force a smile when he shows me inside. Like all good centre-cockpit yachts, the 420's owner's cabin is the yachting equivalent of the presidential suite. There is room to dance the tango, a massive queen-size bed, a view back through of your wake, enough headroom to do your morning callisthenics, and storage for a wardrobe of clothes.

It's the volume of this cabin, the exceptional beam and width of the saloon, and the big head plus comfortable guests' quarter for'ard that make the Bluewater 420 Centre Cockpit a true liveaboard yacht. Lots of windows accentuate the sense of space and ensure that, even when you're



Clockwise from left: Beautifully crafted Queensland myrtle joinery highlights the interior panelling and bookcase; Excellent access to the engine compartment; The giant navigation station can double as an office; *Footloose II* — a true liveaboard yacht; The galley has all the mod cons, plus a maze of cupboards.



down below, you are relating to the outside world. I like that in a cruising boat that is meant to travel by day and night.

SAILING AWAY FOR A WEEK AND A DAY

The 420 dubbed *Footloose II* reached around 4.5kt in eight knots of wind before

rain set in. By any standard, it wasn't a fitting test of the solid boat's sailability. The 420 likes a bit of breeze before winding up to its top speed of between 7-8kt.

Bluewater says the boat happily carries a full load of sail up to 25-30kt. As mentioned, the mast was very well stayed. Deck equipment includes a mainsheet traveller on the aft deck, four 40 and two 52 two-speed person winches, Muir windlass, and teak-laid swim and boarding platform.

According to the performance figures, this yacht can point all day at 30° in light airs. As it was set up with all Parlane's possessions for a big north, we had trouble filling the big genoa. In needed a helping hand around the (available) inner forestay during our lazy tacks in Pittwater.

But in a breeze, the 420 will be a snap to sail. A husband-and-wife team should find the boat virtually sails itself. All lines, including the Selden single-line reefing system, lead back to the centre-cockpit. Options including an electric halyard winch and Hood Furlboom are for the real cruisy types.

The helm was light and well-balanced, even more so thanks to hydraulic steering, and the high decks help keep the boat dry underway. I escaped the inclement weather behind the cockpit dodger and windscreen. But given a cruising-yachtie's agenda, we could have found an anchorage somewhere and kicked back inside behind a cup of hot char and a good book.

On the good days, the 420 Centre Cockpit has a layout that endears it to outdoor living. A pushpit arch with targa protects the seats on the sternrail. The stainless tubing is strong enough to mount davits from which you can swing a tender, while solar panels trickle-charge the batteries.

A boarding platform leads down to the water from which you can extend the swim ladder. The two big, moulded, wide steps are the perfect spot for doing breakfast if not sundowners. With lazy jacks and headsail furling, I managed to drop the sail one-up before heading back to the marina.

Sometime later I farewelled the footloose pilot and his merry crew. Less than three days later they were on the Gold Coast. Next stop was the Whitsundays. Parlane's only firm plan is to stay north for the winter and sail south for the summer... And fly a few jumbos in between.

BLUEWATER 420 CENTRE COCKPIT

PRICE AS TESTED

Around \$500,000

OPTIONS FITTED

Invertor, autopilot, GPS, radar, davits, bimini over targa arch, and so on. Also, full sail wardrobe and built to 2C offshore survey and including life raft.

PRICED FROM

\$460,000

GENERAL

Material: GRP with foam-cored decks
 Type: Monohull
 Length (overall): 12.75m/10.67m
 Beam: 3.99m
 Draft (max): 1.90m
 Displacement: 12,000kg (dry)
 Ballast (std keel): 4500kg (lead)
 Headroom: 1.85 - 2.05m

CAPACITIES

Berths: Six
 Fuel: 560lt
 Water: 800lt

ENGINE

Make/model: Nanni
 Type: Four-stroke diesel
 Rated hp (ea): 43hp

ENGINE

Mainsail: 36sqm
 Genoa: 53sqm

SUPPLIED BY: Bluewater Yachts, Cardiff (NSW), tel (02) 4956 8522.