

Basic Detail Report

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History

BLACKMORES FIRST LADY was the yacht sailed by Kay Cottee AO on her voyage around the world in 1987-1988, when she became the first woman to complete a circumnavigation as a solo, non-stop and unassisted passage. The stock design was modified by Cottee herself with the intention of undertaking this challenge. The yacht was acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum in 2000 and returned to its arrangement for the voyage, then put on display inside the museum in the Watermarks Gallery.

BLACKMORES FIRST LADY's record making voyage spanned 6 months, leaving Sydney on the 29th of November 1987 and returning on the 5th of June 1988. As she crossed the line inside the harbour marking the completion of the voyage Cottee was surrounded by well-wishers aboard a vast number of vessels who had come out to cheer her home, including a fire tug creating a huge fountain of water. It was a yet another cause for celebration as part of the country's Bicentennial year, and gained her national and international recognition. Kay Cottee came from a sailing family, the McLaren's, and sailed many miles with them aboard their home built Tasman Seabird yacht JOY TOO. After leaving school she continued to be involved with yachts as an owner and builder, and then with her own charter business based at Pittwater, north of Sydney. BLACKMORES FIRST LADY is a production Cavalier 37, designed by New Zealander Laurie Davidson. The yacht is 11.3 metres long, and the mast height is almost 15 metres above the deck. It was a class Cottee knew well, she already owned another Cavalier 37 as part of the charter fleet. Planning ahead for the eventual voyage, Cottee bought the bare fibreglass hull and fitted it out herself, strengthening the hull and deck in various places so that it was better suited to open ocean sailing in the most severe conditions. It was first named JIMMY MAC after Cottee's father. However in a sponsorship arrangement with the Sydney based pharmaceutical company Blackmores Laboratories, owned by yachting enthusiast Marcus Blackmore, the yacht was renamed CINNAMON SCRUB after one of the company products. In a gradual process Cottee built up her confidence in the boat and her credentials for the voyage by sailing in a two-handed race to New Zealand then sailing in the solo event back to Australia. Blackmores upgraded their support to a full corporate arrangement midway through 1987, and the boat was renamed BLACKMORES FIRST LADY. Cottee was then able to concentrate on the final fitout and provisioning before the departure, timed to take in a summer passage through the southern oceans and around Cape Horn. Significant changes were made to the standard Cavalier 37 configuration. The mast and rigging were made stronger, the sloop rig modified to a cutter, increasing the range of headsail options to suit strong

conditions, an extra water-tight bulkhead added in the forward compartment, while radar and solar panels were mounted on a frame over the cockpit. Below decks navigation and communications equipment were installed in the aft cabin, and a diesel generator was located in the saloon. When it came to supplies, the large quantities of canned food were stowed where ever space permitted. BLACKMORES FIRST LADY left in a well publicized departure enjoying mild conditions as Kay Cottee settled into the long voyage ahead. Quite quickly this changed as the Tasman Sea lived up to its reputation for frequent rough conditions. Only a few days into the voyage, BLACKMORES FIRST LADY was knocked down by big seas, and the main damage was the loss of the wind-powered generator. This was unsettling for Cottee as it had happened so early in the voyage, but the yacht had recovered and proven capable of withstanding a major incident. More dramas followed with severe storms on the passage across the southern Pacific, and then again coming through the Indian Ocean. During the voyage she remained in radio contact with supporters and family ashore and often established short term exchanges with radio operators on passing ships. One serious issue was when the boom cracked, but her practical background enabled her to fix the spar on the boat by improvising a sleeve and splint, and continue under full sail. The repair remained secure throughout the voyage. It is still sound and holding the spar together. Kay Cottee was recognised for her achievement when she was named Australian of the Year early in 1989, and also awarded an Order of Australia. The record as ' First non-stop, singlehanded circumnavigation by woman' is listed with the world authority for sailing records, the World Speed Sailing Record Council. Her point to point route included sailing north into the Atlantic Ocean well above the equator to fulfil the proper definition of a true circumnavigation of the world. In the year following her return Cottee wrote a book about the voyage entitled 'First Lady, A history making solo voyage around the world', (MacMillan 1989), and BLACKMORES FIRST LADY became her cruising boat. In 2000 the yacht was acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum as part of the National Maritime Collection. It is now on display in the Watermarks Gallery at the Museum building in Darling Harbour. The yacht has been fitted out to how it was configured during the voyage, and visitors are able to go aboard and see first hand what living conditions were like for Kay Cottee as she sailed BLACKMORES FIRST LADY solo around the world into the record books.