



Kiss & tell

Using his numerous jaunts aboard sister magazine BlueWater's Black Watch 34 as a basis for review, David Lockwood reveals the innermost secrets of the mighty BlueWater IV.

First impressions are lasting ones, but a thorough offshore thrashing of a boat is a more revealing thing. A top-to-bottom boat test, with time spent ferreting in the bilges, yields even more clues.

However, nothing can match a long-term loan as the basis from which to judge a vessel. This brings me to sister magazine BlueWater's long-term demo boat, the Black Watch 34 dubbed BlueWater IV.

The boat is equipped for big-game fishing and, in the interests of such, I have spent quite some time aboard. Some trips have been long days waiting for fish to pounce on the hook - others veritable fish feasts where you have to bait up in the bilges to avoid catching one. The BW34 is a great fishing boat.

But between bites I got thinking. Leave the lines at the dock and what do you have? A good cruising boat? It is this answer that I went fishing for.

While I first set foot aboard in Sydney, I had to wait for a sunny Queensland day to go bluewater boating. Since then I've spent four days aboard on the Barrier Reef.

It is from these outings that I pass judgement on the BW34. But to add weight to this report I also sought critiques from professional skippers who have driven BlueWater IV or other BW34s over many more sea miles than I have.

SHE'S GOT THE LOOK

Aesthetically, BlueWater IV looks the goods emblazoned with sponsors' badges and a navy-blue gelcoated hull. Of course, those of you who have owned dark-coloured boats are all too aware of the maintenance.

A white boat won't show the bingles, blood, brine and shark bites like a dark hull. Then again, a white boat won't look as classy at the boat show or by the back door. The hull lines are classic, but to me the subtle swoop to the bow signifies a boat intended for offshore use.

Teak decks and covering boards enhance the blue hull and make good practical sense on high-wear areas on any boat. The marine carpet in the bridge was a simple, hard-wearing material, but non-skid would be just as effective considering you are seated 95 per cent of the time.

I gave full marks to the internal upholstery, which was all wipe-clean man-made suede. It has stood the test of time like an English rugby forward. The head is also an easy-clean item - all moulded surfaces, with an electric loo too. The days of manual heads are surely behind us.

The powder-coated tee-top framework is lighter than one fashioned from stainless steel, yet it appears resilient to the constant running at sea. I haven't seen much lifting paint on the welds of the framework, even on much older 34s. An alloy tower could be a handy option in some areas, such as when navigating the Great Barrier Reef at sunset.

BlueWater IV's stainless-steel work - rocket launcher, small ladder to the bridge, grabrails and low-slung bowrail - were professionally welded with no dags or rough edges. The deck fittings are generally flush mounted and snag free, unlike those sitting proud on some mainstream flybridge boats.

The heavy-duty marlin door hinges outwards. The mid-cockpit fuel filler has a dipstick for foolproof fuel checks. However, there were a few fittings that were self-tapped in place and which have subsequently worked their way free. No excuse for that in a \$450,000 fully-cocked ocean-going boat.

ON THE BRIDGE

Because it has been kept low profile to reduce weight and retain its righting moment and stability, the flybridge on the BW34 isn't exactly big. The hull and bridge certainly haven't the volume of, say, a Caribbean 35 or a Riviera 36. In this sense, the boat isn't quite so communal for cruising.

BlueWater IV's bridge is pretty much the skipper's domain. It is designed for serious, hands-free navigating, hot-dog driving and calling the shots to the crew down below. While there are two pedestal seats and a lounge ahead of the console, the bridge can carry no more than three people. According to NSW Waterways, a 10m flybridge cruiser with 3m beam is permitted to carry no more than two adults in its flybridge.

The dash on the BlueWater IV has been borrowed from the BW40. The large, moulded console has room for two 10in video screens.

BlueWater IV's Raymarine electronics package included a digital colour sounder and combo GPS plotter with radar overlay. However, the leading edge of the console needed to be trimmed so the skipper didn't need to sit bolt upright to see over the bow when cruising. This way, with the pilot on, you could kick back and keep an eye out for fish-trap floats, migrating whales or schools of skipjack.

The electronic Twin Disc controls, which hadn't yet been calibrated to give at-call idle speeds for trolling baits or lures, are among this writer's favourite. They allow fingertip gear shifts with little delay. Best of all, you can rip the box from forward to reverse or vice versa and know you're not going to do any damage.

The canvass top on BlueWater IV is nice and tight, and the clears didn't seem to flap around when underway. However, Riviera has introduced a new style of clear curtain on its flybridge boats called Strataglass, which is more rigid and almost, well, glass-like compared to the Vibak clears.

The clears don't extend all the way aft and the open sides could let in rain or spray in strong crosswinds. Despite the **excellent Navigator helm seats**, the co-pilot doesn't get a great sense of security when the boat bucks sideways. Fitting a footrest or intermediate rail would help. The lack of posts, supports and uprights otherwise contributes to a good view of the ocean.

SOCIAL COCKPIT CAPERS

Deckies and anglers - and perhaps concerned mums - might find the coaming height lower than optimum. Thankfully, the BW34 has a dry cockpit.

The boat lifts its transom when reversed - just as well, as the cockpit steps down into the saloon and there is a footwell that drains into the engineroom. A washboard slots into the companionway to reduce the risk of water flowing inside.

More of an issue is the fact that you can get water into the engine boxes and, despite the fact that the cockpit is self draining, a lot of the boat's plumbing drains underfloor.

The big engine vents on BlueWater IV - which I'm told came from the BW40 - are too close to the water and guilty of letting in saltwater mist.



For serious cruising work the engines need to live in a drier environment.

Having said that, the cockpit is big enough for a family of six to set up a table and do lunch at anchor, or for a couple to entertain two other couples for a champagne cruise.

The oval livebait tank in the transom can be converted into an icebox. A sink and deck will be handy for cleanups. When cruising offshore, the crew will find the portside padded engine-box lid the best outdoor seat in the house.

INTERIOR COMFORTS

First-timers to a BW34 might hit their noggins on the flybridge lid if they don't duck when moving inside. This is a downside to the upside of having a low-profile, compact flybridge superstructure. But once inside the saloon, there's a sense of space, plenty of comforts, shade and natural ventilation.

The blue Novasuede upholstery, oiled-teak trim, blue-fleck Granicoat counters and rounded interior-liner mouldings are all pretty and practical. Headroom is a highpoint at about 1.87m (6ft 3in) and full marks for the handrail running down the ceiling.

I found more hatches, counters, shelves and so on for stowing gear than I imagined I'd find on BlueWater IV. Aside from storage for 14 fishing outfits and tackle drawers, there is space under the bunks for holding hardware, spares and so on.

The convertible accommodation layout lets you make additional beds when the kids choose to stay over. The backrest on the portside settee - itself a great daybed - attached to ring-eyes to create a pullman berth and a second bunk underneath it. The small dinette opposite, around which two people can sit comfortably, also converts into a berth.

Add the big vee-berth in the bow and it's possible to sleep as many as six people aboard. In reality, five is a more considerate overnight limit. A family of four should find the BW34 a comfortable craft for weekend cruising.

In dayboat mode, there are good views out of the picture windows and the open bulkhead behind. But the fully-enclosed aft bulkhead version will be more compliant as a year-round cruiser in temperate and southern climes.

The galley isn't big by cruiser standards, but it has a useful amount of food-prep space for assembling lunches. Fiddle rails trace the counters and there is a nice big cutting board and a useful sink.

Pantry space is sufficient to store a week's worth of dry stuff and canned foods. The boat's convection microwave oven/grill offers a wide range of cooking options.

Fridge/freezer space is quite impressive on BlueWater IV. There is a 12V fridge under the galley counter, a big fridge/freezer under the portside lounge and a third icebox up top under the skinny lounge in the bridge.

The moulded head is serviceable, with an electric loo, sink, small vanity unit and handheld H/C shower. Full marks for the addition of a solar-powered extractor fan.

HEADING WIDE

While a family of four will find everything they need for a weekend or longer aboard, the BW34 will



be used mainly as a dayboat. It's a low-maintenance, affordable-to-run and seriously sporty boat that packs a punch on the throttles.

BlueWater IV has an engine upgrade to twin 440hp 6LY2ASTP diesels, which are probably overkill. A pair of 370hp motors will generate hull speed of about 32kt.

While BlueWater IV has touched 35kt, it now tops out at 33kt when loaded. The boat has a speedy maximum continuous cruise speed of 29kt at 3000rpm and a fast cruise of 26kt at

2800rpm. The hull holds plane down to 17-18kt.

The deadrise at the transom is 18°, but the boat feels a lot sharper due to its superfine entry. As far as ride goes, this little boat beats its opposite number on the water. Into a headsea, you need to button the bow down and force its sharp nose through the waves. The boat will be a bit wet, but the smooth ride is worth it.

Down sea, the BW34 rides almost as though there is a lot of rocker in the hull.

The forefoot stays out of the water when driven down the face of a wave, and the boat doesn't have a tendency to broach or steer from the stem. It is a perfect autopilot proposition for passagemaking.

The four-blade Tige props, survey-standard two-inch shafts, and responsive rudders are serious running gear partially responsible for the boat's improved performance over other BW34s. Rudder stoppers were fitted to the boat after a problem during its recent delivery from Sydney to Townsville.

During the 800nm (or thereabouts) of open-water steaming, professional gameboat skipper Dean Beach thought the boat was especially good for a 34-footer. It is a lot smaller than, say, a Caribbean 35 or Riviera 34 - but it performs like a giant killer.

At around 25kt, fuel consumption is about 80lt/h. So the boat is one you can afford to run. It's also a cinch to berth. While the 34ft includes bowsprit, and the waterline length is 9.70m, in many ways the BW34 is a big boat.

After spending almost a week aboard BlueWater IV off places like Mooloolaba, Townsville and in Sydney, I consider it a great alternative to the high-volume, mid-30-footers on the market. It hasn't their volume, but its offshore performance makes it a premium passagemaker.

HIGHS

Bluewater performance, manoeuvrability and stability. Ergonomically-designed helm station. Fuel frugality makes for affordable running. Structural integrity is second to none.

LOWS

Comparatively small 34-footer. Low freeboard and lack of headroom at saloon door. Some fittings could be better attached. Salt mist in the engine compartments.

Second opinion

We have only completed the one liveaboard trip on BlueWater IV, but it was a good test of its facilities and capacities. There were four of us on the boat for four days, and the only real issue we had was the limited amount of freshwater.

Onboard for the four days were BlueWater CEO Gregg Haythorpe, crewman Dave 'Tagpole' McMaster, photographer Ellen 'Ankles' Dewar and myself. Dave and Ellen are actually an item, so they reserved the vee-berth - Gregg being the tallest got the saloon bed, and I got the dinette. I found the dinette to be a bit short, so by the second night I'd removed the mattress from the pullman berth and transferred it to the flybridge where I was able to stretch out.

Refrigeration worked out okay. The fridge/freezer located below the saloon bed was cranked up as a freezer, and we stored block ice, bait and frozen food in there. The galley fridge was used for other food items that needed refrigeration.

We ran a day icebox for drinks and another one for bait. The insulated box on the forward edge of the helm console was also filled with drinks and ice, and only accessed once per day when restocking the day icebox. We still had some ice left after four days at sea.

Showers were obviously very brief affairs. We got water from another boat on the reef, but otherwise I'd say we would have run out on day three. A compact watermaker might be a smart investment if liveaboards are your gig. BlueWater IV only holds 270lt of water, so the builder may be able to increase the size of the tanks.

Fuel capacity was not a problem as we only used 600 of our 950lt in the four days at sea.

As far as cooking goes, we did most lunches and dinners in the microwave - but we did buy one of those little butane single gas burners, which are fantastic. Every morning we would fire it up and have a big feed of bacon and eggs behind the reef before heading to sea.

It's not bad when four people and all their gear can live in relative comfort for four days on a 34-footer. Especially with the amount of camera equipment we had onboard. - David Granville

BLACK WATCH 34
PRICE AS TESTED: \$450,000 approx
OPTIONS FITTED
Yanmar engine upgrade, Raymarine sounder, chartplotter, radar, autopilot, VHF radio, Twin Disc electronic controls, Tiger propellers, Pakula tackle rodholders, outriggers, helm seats, gamechair, tuna tubes, Interphase sonar, Zodiac liferaft, coloured hull, refrigeration, transom livewell, open bulkhead, teak deck and covering boards, auto battery charger, remote spotlight, windlass, deckwash and more
PRICED FROM: \$320,000
GENERAL
Material: Fibreglass
Type: Deep-vee monohull
Length overall: 10.39m (34ft 1in)
Beam: 3.35m (11ft)

Draft: 0.87m (2ft 9in)
Deadrise: 18°
Weight: 6500kg (14,330lb) dry
CAPACITIES
Berths: Five
Fuel: 950lt
Water: 272lt
ENGINE
Make/model: Yamnar 6LY2A-STP
Type: Inline six-cylinder turbo-diesels
Rated hp (each): 440
Displacement (each): 5.813lt
Weight (each): 515kg (1135lb) dry
Gearbox (make/ratio): Twin Disc 2.01:1
Props: Tiger four-blade bronze
SUPPLIED BY: Deep Vee Marine, Southport, Qld, tel (07) 5526 3945

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