

# Kotick Part 2

# Overboard in the Pacific!

*James and Griselda McGougan sailed their new 'Kiwi prodigy', Kotick, back to New Zealand at the end of a shakedown cruise. They finished more shaken than they had anticipated . . .*

**V**anuatu had provided some of the most delightful anchorages in the whole Pacific, especially in the Masculine Islands to the north of Emi. Amazing fish life abounds in the reefs there, including giant Napoleon wrasse, longer than a man, and turtles of every shape and size.

Now it was time to sail our new Elliott 50, *Kotick*, back to the Land of Long White Cloud and refine the yacht further before sailing beyond the Pacific – always necessary with a vessel newly designed and built.

The wind, when one leaves Port Vila heading south, is nearly always on the nose and soon sorts out those cruisers which can sail to windward and those which can't. *Kotick* was hard to fault in this respect, cutting through the steep short seas without a trace of hobby-horsing or noticeably slowing her speed.

However, her canoe body with its flat under-section forward sometimes slammed dramatically; if she was travelling fast, her whole bow entry section would pierce the waves, leaving her clear of the water.

In practice, providing she was going fast enough, her re-entry into the water proved smoother than one might expect and we were able to make good quite a reasonable angle to the wind at between seven and eight knots.

This voyage was to prove the most eventful we

have experienced so far. Gradually our average speed increased as the wind freed and we were exactly halfway by the middle of the third day – 600 miles from anywhere.

Starting my watch after breakfast, I noticed that the lazy sheet from the genoa had curled round the top of a partly opened hatch, just forward of the mast. I ran to the foredeck, intent on clearing the sheet and closing the hatch properly.

Conditions were fine and we had no more than 20 knots of true wind – possibly less. As I bent down to free the line, a gust headed *Kotick* and the genoa suddenly cannoned across the deck and then cracked back and filled. It happened in less than a second.

The lee sheet coiled round the hatch lid in a loop and ripped it from the deck before tossing the whole lid overboard. The sheet had meantime taken another turn – round my wrist – and flicked me off my feet in the wake of the hatch lid.

Suddenly I realised I was passing the lifelines horizontally head first and was about to join the hatch lid in the Pacific Ocean – not part of my

We first met the McGougans at the start of the ARC in 1992, after which they cruised on into the Pacific. When they reached New Zealand they decided to have a new 'home' built, a fast cruising yacht from the board of Greg Elliott. We described the rationale behind *Kotick* last month. This was her maiden cruise . . .

master plan. Instinctively, I grabbed at the top lifeline as I flew past in a desperate attempt to stay on board. Having gripped it, my body catapulted over my arm and I crashed into the topsides, outside the lifelines, but still managing to hang on, partially winded.

Somehow I managed to get my foot up to the gunwale and gradually forced my body to follow, eventually letting go with my right hand. When I did so, I realised that I couldn't get my right arm under the lifelines and, feeling sick and dazed, couldn't understand why.

Lying at last in a heap on the foredeck, my arm stuck out at a weird angle, pain arrived in earnest. The whole ball socket on the top of my arm dangled below my shoulder like a poorly made marionette.

Griselda, my wife, had heard the frantic yell and thud of my body on the topsides and was already on deck, dragging me along on my bottom to the safety of the cockpit. What a mess! I was in shock and unable to move in any direction to ease the crashing pain. ▷

**'Suddenly I realised I was about to join the hatch lid in the Pacific Ocean – not part of my master plan'**





*Kotick*



Then Gris was at the SSB, calling Russel Radio for help. Des, the station operations manager, was magnificent. Within 20 minutes he had patched in a doctor who described to Gris exactly what she had to do. It sounded horrific and neither of us at that moment thought we could succeed – but with no alternative it is surprising what one can achieve.

I lay on my back in the saloon, holding onto the bottom of the fridge cabinet with my left arm while she placed her foot under my armpit and started to heave. Yelling and blacking out momentarily, I recovered to see her standing over me like an Amazon warrior with tears pouring down her face and an inflatable life vest slung over her otherwise naked torso – very fetching in other circumstances, no doubt.

We had been reprieved, but were not out of the wood. All circulation had been lost from my arm for most of an hour and I was fearful of losing it. Nevertheless, the shoulder had gone back in – partially – and my cold white fingers slowly warmed as blood started to circulate again.



**Above: Kotick proved her worth for short-handed sailing. Left: the deck saloon where James was strapped to the table to straighten his shoulder**

Next we had to get the ship seaworthy. We had on board spare timber hatch covers, salvaged from the original templates. With me trying to give advice from the saloon floor, Griselda managed to drill two holes between two of these and make a sandwich. When tightened together with bolts, it could fill the void in our deck.

Eventually she succeeded, but needed my help to place the top board in position while she screwed the bottom board from underneath.

Somehow she managed to drag me along the deck once more and I sat on the newly prepared hatch cover, my left hand holding a screwdriver while she did this. All that remained was to make

a fully waterproof seal round the lip of the repair. It worked!

Soon Des on Russel had enlisted additional help from Taupo Radio who handle Safety at Sea relays for the whole of New Zealand. Another

doctor was patched into the radio and I ended up strapped face downwards on the cockpit table (to prevent me rolling off), with a can of baked beans tied onto my right hand in order gradually to pull the torn shoulder muscles in the right direction.

After three hours of acute discomfort this strange arrangement eased the muscles enough to allow Griselda to strap my right arm flat along my side and prevent further movement.

All this time (some four hours) we had been drifting aimlessly in light conditions, going nowhere. Now we gradually pulled ourselves together and made a new plan. Half a day behind us an Australian couple were sailing back to New Zealand in their boat, *Midnight Sun*. John and Wendy Taylor are good friends of ours and Griselda explained our predicament over the radio on the evening schedule.

At once they volunteered to provide us with additional diesel fuel from their reserves to enable us to motorsail at maximum speed to try and reach hospital in the fastest possible time.

What amazing generosity and kindness! We

**'I ended up strapped face down on the cockpit table, with a can of baked beans tied onto my right hand, in order gradually to pull the torn shoulder muscles into place'**



made a rendezvous with them and by the following afternoon they had caught us up, motoring at their maximum cruising speed. We transferred five cans of fuel, using long lines between the two yachts. This would enable us to motor all the way to Opua if the wind was foul or if we became becalmed. We can never thank them enough.

As it transpired, our rendezvous in a flat calm was soon followed by a fresh gale from the north and *Kotick* faced a new set of problems. She had been set up and designed for two-handed sailing, but not really for single-handing.

When the wind is from the aft quarter in excess of 40 knots, the seas soon build up. A fast cruiser which will surge beyond 12 knots in these conditions needs to be set up to handle waves without getting into trouble, often entailing hand-steering. *Griselda* was exhausted. I was still useless.

We decided to take all foresail in and reduce the main to a wisp. Our sail area still allowed her to track along at between 8.5-10 knots and the autopilot hung on in there – just – sometimes squeaking its off course alarm for half a minute at a time. We even catnapped for the odd hour.

Gradually, after 16 hours, the wind eased and we found ourselves with some 320 miles to go. The wind had partially headed us, but we found we laid our rhumb line if we motorsailed with a single reef in the main and a full staysail. *Kotick* responded magnificently.

We reeled off those miles in just over 33 hours, averaging 9.2 knots – which can't be bad for a 50ft cruising yacht with all the goodies on board.

The reception when we edged *Kotick* nervously towards the Opua Yacht Club pontoon was heartwarming. Customs and MAS quarantine officers smoothed the way and then drove us to hospital. New Zealand is a great place to be – once you get there.

*Kotick* looked pretty smug, too. □

## How did the new boat perform?

Last month we wrote about the philosophy behind *Kotick*, the Elliott 50 we had had custom-built in New Zealand. She was to be a fast cruiser, suitable for long-term living aboard.

Her maiden voyage to Vanuatu would be the acid test as to how she performed.

We left Opua in New Zealand's Bay of Islands at 0700 on Sunday 16 August. The sky was clear and a 15-knot breeze from the south-west allowed us to sail free on our northerly course towards Vanuatu, 1,177 miles away

As we adjusted sail trim and allowed her to settle down, we began to realise what an exciting cruiser she was. The log read nine knots. The wake – reminiscent of a motor boat – creamed away behind us. We carried little wave hump along our side.

Although the autopilot is our normal helmsman on long passages, *Kotick* much preferred being hand-steered with the minimum of rudder and a sensitive hand on the wheel.

Carefully nursing her in the puffs, with the wind just forward of the beam, we got 10.4 knots every few minutes, but we could only hold around 9.2 knots average.

At 1600 hours we had sailed 83 miles and the sea was nearly flat, with a swell of two metres. The wind died, leaving us becalmed.

Our policy on passages to and from New Zealand is to maintain a minimum average of five knots if we can – especially when within 500 miles of North Island where weather systems from Tasmania and South Australia sluice through every six to eight days.

We furled the genoa and reefed the main, so that it wouldn't foul the backstay, and started the motor. The 100hp Yanmar is turbocharged and we had been advised to make it work hard for its own well-being.

The engine room had been carefully insulated and ducted to allow plenty of air into the bay for the engine to use. There is virtually no vibration – perhaps due to the Aquadrive unit. In the cabins we could hear a pleasant gentle hum – positively soporific.

We motored like that – nine knots at 2,300 revs – reducing the revs to 2,100 and averaging 8.6 knots through the water, but with 1.5 knots of current setting against us; still respectable.

At 2200 a fresh wind sprang up, directly heading us. Soon it gusted to 20 knots and we killed the engine, taking one deep reef in the main which took us all of three minutes, hauling



Top: large, well protected cockpit. Above: central power winch with all lines led aft

the tack line secure with the central power winch. With that and a full staysail we pressed on, well off our rhumb line, at about 7.5 knots.

The angle of heel was acceptable, but because the raised saloon is comparatively high from the water it seems more.

Later the wind eased a shade and we completed our first 24-hour run having made good 188 miles mostly in the right direction.

The passage continued mostly with minimal wind. On the last day we wanted to reach Port Vila in time to clear Customs as it was coming up to the weekend. Winds were light directly from astern with a significant sea running – perhaps 4m.

We decided to use the motor to keep up our speed to allow us to reach the anchorage by 1500 latest – about as late as it is safe to approach any reef-strewn area.

*Kotick* responded by averaging ten knots for six hours and we dropped the anchor by the quarantine buoy in Port Vila soon after 1200, after a painless seven-day-plus first journey.

We had sailed 1,270 miles at a speed of 7.3 knots, during which we had motored or motor sailed for about 18 hours, using one Imperial gallon of fuel per hour.

