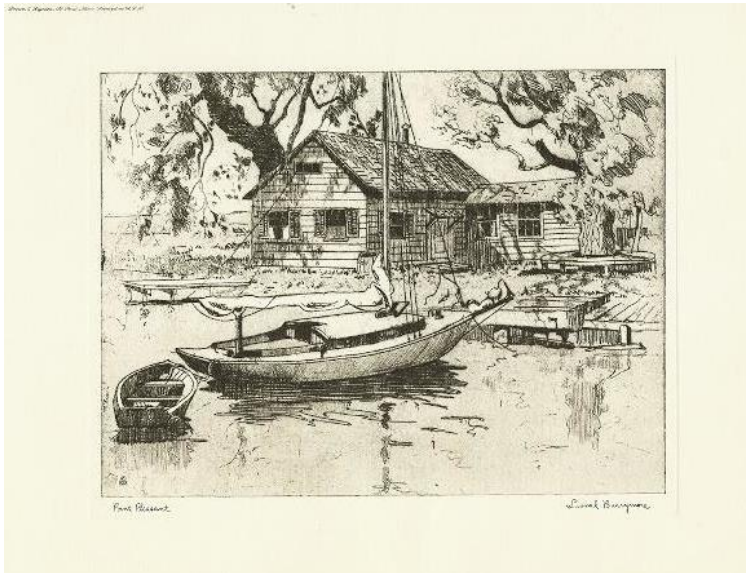


History of the Ketch “Ventura”

Written from discussions with previous owners and crew members by Jonathan Crockett, current owner, in January 2012 and updated with new information in 2022.

Design and Building

Ventura, Vicroads registered number G 139 and currently on the Register of Queenscliff Cruising Yacht Club, was built in 1946 and 1947 by her first owner, Jack Wear¹, to a scaled-up design of a US West Coast day-sailer. This day sailer, possibly a “Pilgrim” was 21 ft. long and its design was commissioned by a US actor who played the part of the Judge in the MGM Andy Hardy series of films from 1937 to 1958 which starred Mickey Rooney. This actor was probably Lionel Barrymore (but may have been Lewis Stone who played the judge in all episodes other than the first). Lionel Barrymore was a noted artist as well as actor. One of his etchings appears below and it may even be that this depicts the 21 footer concerned. It is thought that the name of the designer may have been Payton. The design was probably influenced by the many Herreshoff designs at the time and has similarities to the H28.



John Erickson and his father built a 21 ft. strip-planked yacht “Elsinor” to the same original design and launched it in 1970. This yacht is now at Meeting.

In the scale-up, the longer counter stern of the 21 footer was shortened giving Ventura its distinctive (and not particularly attractive) wide transom.

Ventura, was built with an overall length of 34 ft. (10.3 m) with a beam of 11 ft. 2 inches (3.4 m) and a draft of 4 ft. 11 inches (1.5 m). Displacement is around 7 tonnes. She is currently rigged (and from

the photograph taken in the 1950’s was originally rigged) as a cutter-rigged ketch with a short bowsprit and bumpkin. The solid Oregon, keel-stepped, main mast rises 33 ft. 9 inches (10.29 m) above the deck with one pair of spreaders. The hollow, deck-stepped, Oregon mizzen rises 27 ft. 2 inches (8.29 m) above the deck. The mizzen was removed at some stage and a photograph of Ventura at Queenscliff in the 1990’s shows her rigged as a sloop.

Ventura has an Oregon keelson, keel and deadwood with approximately 2 tonne of lead bolted through the deadwood and keelson by bronze bolts cast into the lead. There were several steel bolts in

¹ Early history was provided by John Erickson who sailed as a boy and young man on Ventura in the 1970’s and later took over responsibility for her around 1982 when Ron Davies moved to Ocean Grove. John was yard manager at Hobson’s Bay YC in the 1980’s and again had this job in the period 2006 to at least 2012. The fact that Jack Wear built her in 1946/1947 has been confirmed by information from a member of the Queenscliff Cruising Yacht Club who knows Clive Barnard, a Melbourne Shipwright who also sailed on her and knew Jack Wear. Ventura and J. Wear are mentioned in several articles on Hobson’s Bay Yacht Club races in the Williamstown Gazette in December 1949.

the keel timbers as well as galvanised steel floors and bracing (most bolts, the floors and some bracing have now been removed). The frames are dual laminations, probably of spotted gum. Planking is New Zealand Kauri except for the sheer planks which are Oregon (apparently because insufficient Kauri was purchased).



**Proud owners in the 1950's,
(Photograph provided by Archie Burns)**



**Berthing at Hobson's Bay
(Photograph provided by John Erickson)**

Fastenings are copper nails and roves. The deck was initially planked and later, around 1980, covered with ply and canvas². Currently the whole cabin top and deck are covered with ply and epoxy fibreglass and painted. The cabin top was initially flat (as in the photograph above right) but in the 1970's a raised section was added to increase the limited headroom inside.

Previous Owners

Jack Wear, her builder and first owner was a regular competitor in races organised by the Hobson's Bay Yacht Club in the 1940's and Ventura (then H39) is mentioned in three articles in the Williamstown Gazette in December 1949.

No definite information is known on who Jack Wear sold her too or when but up to 1952 it may have been a used car dealer from Prahran, possibly by the name of Barber³.

In 1952⁴ Ron Davies purchased Ventura with Archie Burns, then 18, as co-owner. Ron was a boilermaker by trade and a quiet person who sailed very regularly, worked a lot on his boat and introduced a large number of young people to sailing. John Erickson recalls that, when asking girls to go out sailing with him in the early 1970's, the mothers of these girls would say "we sailed on Ventura years ago".



When they bought Ventura, Ron and his crew⁴ had a dream to sail to the Pacific islands. Unfortunately, lack of money and limitations of the boat prevented this dream ever being realised.

² Information from John Erickson.

³ From Archie Burns obtained in conversation on November 2008. Most information about Ventura in the 1950's is from Archie Burns, co-owner with Ron Davies from 1952 to the 1970's.



H 39 beating in the 1970's, (Photograph provided by John Erickson) Ron Davies at the helm (Photograph provided by John Erickson)

However, during the 1950's to 1970's Ventura was a common sight on the northern end of Port Phillip Bay and sometimes cruised to the south end of the bay and, for short trips, out through the heads. There were many keen young boys⁵ who wanted to go sailing from Hobson's Bay during the 1970's. Regular crew members were John Erickson, Leon Raymond, Mark Gregson, Chris Herbert, Andrew Roache, Simon Bold and Ross Finlay (current owner of Indai at HBYC). Les Norton was a regular crew member between 1954 and 1964, other crew members were Paul Hollister and Max Wilcox. These keen boys and young men sailed with Ron often five days a week, sometimes with girlfriends, out of Hobsons Bay where Ventura had a pile berth. Jocken Coeler, a close friend of Ron, also sailed on her. Ron was a keen photographer and also keen on visiting Cameron's Bight.

Painted on the underside of the starboard deck in the fo'c'sle are the words "I love Sally" which John Erickson says was written by Chris Herbert in 1974. It is still visible under the paint. Chris ended up getting engaged to Sally. John Erickson says he always got the blame for this graffiti, possibly because he too had gone out with Sally.



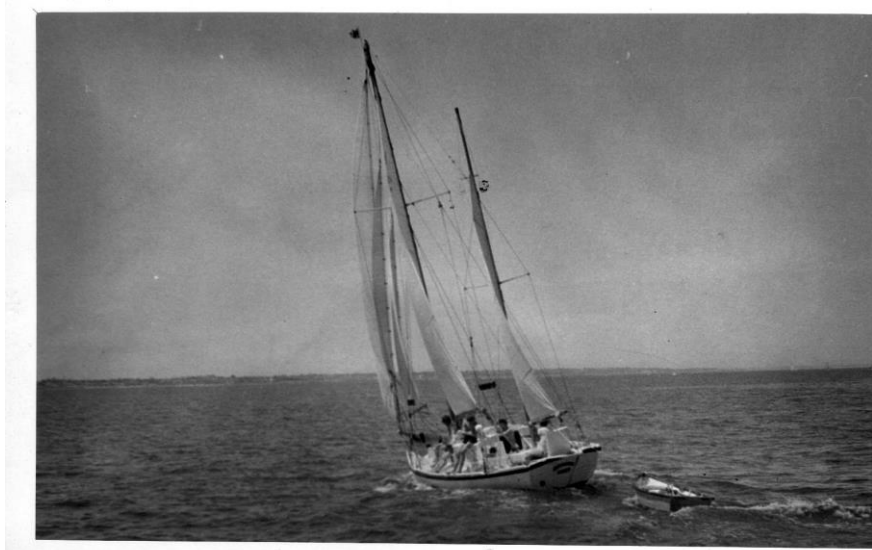
Ron on Ventura at Hobsons Bay 9/5/ 1969 (Photograph provided by John Erickson). Note the inner foresail traveller and solid toe rails

Ventura sailed to Refuge Cove at Wilsons Promontory a couple of times in the period of Ron Davies' ownership. On one occasion, she had to be careened on the beach to repair damage from hitting a submerged object. For some years there was a photograph (taken by Ron, a keen photographer) of this event on the wall at Hobsons Bay Yacht Club,.

During one of these visits, the crew painted "VENTURA" on a rock on the north side of Refuge cove (this vandalism was popular at the time). This was still visible in 2011 when Ventura was again sailed to Refuge Cove by her current owner.

⁴ From John Erickson, obtained in conversation on 5 December 2011.

⁵ Information from Andrew Roache in conversation November 2008 supplemented by information from John Erickson obtained in conversation on 5 December 2011.



A fine photograph of Ventura under full sail during the 1970's or 1980's (photograph provided by John Erickson). Note the three staysails.



Graffiti at Refuge Cove (Photograph by Jonathan Crockett)



Pictures from the 1970's provided by Andrew Roache. Note the incident in the top left where Ventura almost sank.



John Ericson, Neale Sheridan, Nick Mayner and Ron Davies with Ventura on the slip at HBYC c1979

One of the upgrades carried out in the 1970's was to attempt to stop leakage through the deck at the gunwale when heeling. This was successfully achieved by bolting some heavy timber toe rails down into the shelf below the deck. The regular crew had little money to spend on this so they manufactured their own stainless steel bolts from old rod rigging. It was a time-consuming task to make threads and hammer bolt heads. These bolts were removed in 2006 and still had considerable life left in them despite some pitting.

In the late 1970's, Ron was making plans to live on Ventura at Limburner's inlet on the northern side of Corio Bay. Instead, he bought a house in Ocean Grove and needed to sell Ventura to assist with this purchase. He asked John Erickson⁶ to look after her and see if he could find a purchaser. John, who had done a great deal of work on her with Ron over the period from 1976, was at that time the Yard Manager at HBYC, a job he was to take on again in the 2000's.

John eventually found a purchaser in 1984 when a couple bought it for \$17 000. She was not used much but the previous long-time "Kentucky Green" hull was repainted in beige. Unfortunately a lot of the brass and bronze lamps and internal fittings were removed at this stage and were never seen again. In addition, a lot of the spare equipment and sails sold with Ventura were lost during this period.

⁶ From John Erickson in conversation on 5 December 2011



In 1987 Ron Patterson, a Consulting Engineer from Geelong, purchased Ventura and moved her to a swing mooring at Queenscliff. Ron and his family sailed her for many years around the southern end of the bay. He became a member of the Queenscliff Cruising Yacht Club. He re-canvassed the decks and replaced some sails but the galvanised steel rigging was not replaced as it was still serviceable. The motor did good service but by 2006 required periodic use of jumper wires to the starter motor solenoid in order to get it started. Ron regularly sailed after work which he found relaxing. As Ron's family grew up, he used Ventura less and around 2005 decided to look for a new owner.

Ventura when rigged as a Sloop in the 1990's

Engines

Over the period 1952 to around 1979 Ventura was fitted with a side-mounted 4 cylinder Morris Cadet petrol engine which was very quiet⁷. In 1979 Ron Davies, helped by his crew, installed a centre-mounted 3 cylinder 20 HP Buch diesel engine with vee drive to a three-bladed propeller mounted just in front of the rudder. A small cut-out in the steel plate rudder was necessary. The Buch was always hard to start until the wiring loom was modified to have shorter wires. It suffered some damage when Ventura nearly sank in 2005 and was replaced during a refit in 2006 with a 30 HP 3 cylinder Volvo Penta directly driving the shaft. The same 3 bladed propeller was retained.

Renovation and Current Ownership



Inspection of Ventura in February 2005. Peter Crockett on deck, Ron Patterson in the dingy



Inside Ventura in February 2005. The Buch engine was under the stair.

Ventura's current owner, Jonathan Crockett, previously sailed a Cherub dingy off the beach at Queenscliff as well as windsurfing in Swan Bay. For many years he and his family had spent their summer holidays in the area and often admired the boats in the harbour. He was finding it progressively harder to get his family to go out in the Cherub and also progressively harder to get back on board after bottling. As he was approaching retirement from his job as a Consulting Engineer, he started looking for a boat that he thought would be less strenuous to sail. He had little experience on keel boats, a few days on a Nolex 30 in New Zealand and two day-sails in Port Phillip on friend's boats. He was thinking of a cousta boat but happened to see Ventura on the slip with a "for sale" sign and phone number on it. This was in February 2006. He rang the number and spoke to Ron Patterson to make a time to inspect the boat. After an initial inspection he entered into an agreement to purchase Ventura for \$27 000 subject to a satisfactory survey and a test sail. This was the limit of his research into possible vessels. Following a survey and enjoyable sail with Ron, Jonathan purchased Ventura, had several good sails on her and then implemented his plan for a significant renovation. Mishaps during the first months of ownership included almost sinking when a wire to the bilge pump corroded and later, the mooring breaking, fortunately when Jonathan was on her, working on the engine.

⁷ From John Erickson, obtained in conversation on 5 December 2011.



Whoops, she almost sank but the motor still started to pump her out. (May 2005)

A budget of \$113 000 was set for purchase and for essential work and equipment and more expenditure foreseen. Ventura was craned out of the water in June 2005 and work started in the Yard behind George Day's Queenscliff Marina chandlery. George charged a very reasonable \$60 per month including use of some scaffolding, the waste bin and a very large tarpaulin. Local boat builder Brett Almond carried out most of the work with help from the owner. Peter Bell supplied and fitted a new Volvo 30 HP diesel to replace the 20 HP Buch which he renovated and sold. The propeller and shaft were retained but the new configuration avoided the previous troublesome vee drive. The photographs below and on the following page show the progress of the renovation.



Craning out and in the Yard. The lean was a result of incompetent propping. In the right-hand photograph, the Buch motor can be seen on the left and the main mast on the right.



The motor space and remnants of the vee drive below and rot in the top port planking at the mizzen chain plates.



The deck and deck planking ready for fixing ply and epoxy fibreglass and priming of the Bilge.



Brett Almond supervising craning of Ventura onto the truck for re-launching on 20 February 2006.



The owner (with Brett Almond) taking a break from desperately trying to get the masts ready for re-stepping.



The nearly completed and varnished cabin.



Brett and Laker Engineering's Fitter reassembling the rudder



Sandra Crockett working late at night on leathers on the shroud loops, one of the many jobs for which the time was underestimated, started too late but nevertheless finished just in time for re-stepping the masts.



The final cost of this renovation work was surprisingly close to the budget, around \$129 000 (including the original purchase price). Since re-launching in 2006 to the end of 2011, a further \$50 000 has been spent on improvements, including new sails and equipment, and, on average, a further \$7 000 has been spent each year on maintenance, mooring costs and registration. The fibreglassed and painted deck and cabin top has proved to be an excellent investment with no sign of rain getting in and no leaks when she dips a gunwale.

Since this re-launching, the current owner has sailed with family members and friends extensively around Port Phillip Bay as well as on extended cruises to Westernport Bay, Three Hummock and King Islands, Apollo Bay, Refuge Cove and Port Welshpool.

In 2017 Ventura was sailed by the owner, his son Peter and Colin Gibbs from QCYC, to Hobart for the 2017 Hobart Wooden Boat Festival. Jonathan's wife Sandra joined her during the festival and together they sailed her down the D'Entrecasteaux channel for a few days. The return voyage was via the east and north coast, departing from Stanley for Port Phillip with two guest crew, Ed Featherstone (the yachting writer for the Herald Sun) and Bill Wallace.



Loading on the truck for the 200 m trip back to the harbour and stepping the main mast, 20 February 2006

New sails have been purchased, including a cruising spinnaker, she now carries HF as well as VHF radios and she is set up and equipped for extended off-shore cruising largely to the standard required by for Yachting Australia Category 3 Racing.

Ventura is a fast and stable boat on a reach and performs well downwind. She points poorly, typical of boats of the era. The rig has evolved rather than being designed and it is quite probable that up-wind performance could be enhanced by redesign of the rig.

Two new 316 stainless steel keel bolts have been installed as the original bronze bolts cannot be removed from the lead for inspection. The bronze bolts have been inspected within the deadwood where they appear to be in nearly as-new condition apart from one that fractured many years ago.

Additional bronze screw fastenings have been set in the garboards and adjacent planks as these seams have always been an area for leakage, particularly in a seaway and under full sail. The additional fastenings and re-caulking have reduced leakage from up to 30 L/d down to under 5 L/d with most

leakage occurring during sailing. Before this work, leakage rate during sailing was measured at over 500 L/d on some occasions.

Several times over the period 2006 to 2011, the owner has pulled into a pier around the Bay and somebody has walked up and asked if this is Ventura and then said that they used to sail on her when they were younger.

The fact that Ventura is still sailing and giving pleasure to young and old is a testament to the craftsmanship of the original builder and the care taken to maintain her by all her owners.



Ready for the first sail, Jonathan and Sandra Crockett, 18 March, 2006. Alongside the Queenscliff Cruising Yacht Club Wharf

Photographs on following page, clockwise from top left:

Ventura's first trip to Westernport after renovation, 9 am, 13 February 2007

Completion of maintenance, Queenscliff Harbour, October 2010 (the proud owner)

Off Shortlands Bluff, Queenscliff, 2021

Sailing down the east coast of Tasmania on the way to the Hobart Wooden Boat Festival, 2016

At anchor in the D'Entrecasteux Channel, February 2017

Peter Crockett and Colin Gibbs as crew on the way to the Hobart Wooden Boat Festival, 2017

Arrival at the HWBF in January 2017

Ed Featherstone and Bill Wallace off Stanley, February 2017

