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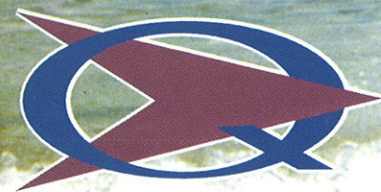
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# NZ Professional Skipper

The official journal of the maritime transport industry



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**WEST**

# Q-WEST IS TOO BUSY

*to look back*

by Mark Barratt-Boyes

*Q-West Boat Builders show that it is possible for a boatbuilding company to diversify successfully as demand for new fishing boats decreases. NZ Professional Skipper spent an afternoon recently at Q-West, looking over the yard and facilities with the company's sales and projects manager, Colin Mitchell.*

You approach Q-West at the end of a long drive on the outskirts of Wanganui's industrial area. Immediately you realise that this is a strictly no-nonsense operation. Three large sheds, a 200 tonne slipway, four five-tonne overhead gantries and a modern machine shop give the yard the ability to build vessels up to 30m in length, with a number of projects running at the same time.

Outside on the hard, several aluminum fishing boats from Tahiti are being extended. Inside, the sheds are filled with the rest

catamaran hull designs provide speed, stability, ample deck space and comfort.

Q-West then built a structurally identical vessel, the Te Ao Marama, for Whale Watch, which underwent sea trials shortly before Christmas before heading down to Kaikoura. They are the first of a fleet of new vessels promoting the company's international image, and are powered by MTU diesels producing 525kW (715hp), linked to two 391 Hamilton Jet units. They carry 50 passengers at speeds of up to 35 knots fully loaded.

Mitchell says Whale Watch looked at boatbuilders all over Australasia before awarding the company the contract for its ability to meet the design standards and its competitive edge. The Wheketere exceeded the client's expectations, he says, and they are considering building a larger vessel of up to 25m.

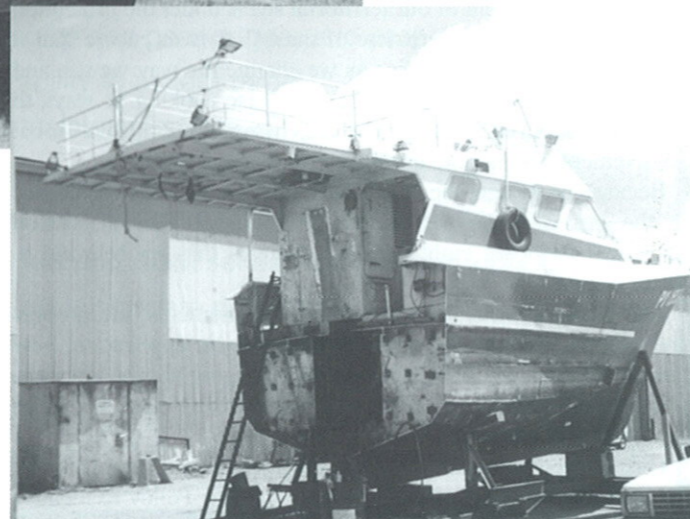
"We use outside designers because it's more cost effective," says Mitchell. Q-West has its own design and development studio, but also builds vessels designed by Phil Curran of Australia, Striker Boats International of The Netherlands, and New Zealanders Wright Lavranos,



of the fishing boats, plus ferries, charter vessels, a survey vessel and a small, ocean-going tug. (see box story)

Q-West is able to win contracts because of the quality of its finished vessels and by offering good value for money, says Mitchell. The company has also broken into international markets in Fiji, Bahrain and the United States of America.

One satisfied customer is Whale Watch Kaikoura. Two years ago Q-West constructed a 17.7m passenger ferry, Wheketere, with a three-hull design by the New Zealand naval architect Nic De Waal of Teknikraft, with whom Q-West has built a close working relationship. Teknikraft's innovative foil-assisted



Scott Robson and Alan Warwick.

Other recently completed craft include Al Masaha, a 19m aluminum displacement catamaran built for hydrographic survey work in the Persian Gulf. She was fitted with sophisticated sounding and positioning electronics, a heave, pitch and roll sensor and a gyro-compass, so she can provide a highly accurate chart of the sea bed. She is powered by twin 770hp Volvo diesels coupled to shaft drives.

Another recent contract was Lagilagi, a Teknikraft-designed 20m foil-assisted aluminum catamaran passenger ferry built for the Beachcomber Island Resort in Fiji, a 12m charter vessel with twin 350hp Yanmars, a 13m monohull charter boat with two 450hp Volvos, a 12m catamaran with two 430hp Yanmars for a super-yacht, and a 12m Teknikraft passenger ferry with a Perkins diesel and a shaft drive, for Lyttelton Harbour.

Q-West has had to hire 10 new staff for aluminum fabrication. "We are taking on people who are multi-skilled. We have three apprentices, and we will be taking on more." Q-West now has close to 40 staff, three of them women, compared with 1998, when there were only about 10 on the payroll.

Mitchell says aluminum is easier to work with than steel because it doesn't require protection with paint systems, reducing maintenance. The company uses 5083 grade aluminum for hull plates, but will use other more advanced grades when prices are acceptable and available in the appropriate sizes. "We are also working with copper nickel, which is a very unusual material."

The skills and dedication of the staff enable Q-West to provide complete in-house construction and fit-out of vessels, including interior lining, windows, graphics, plumbing, painting and electronic components. There is an in-house 3D computer and extensive other software.

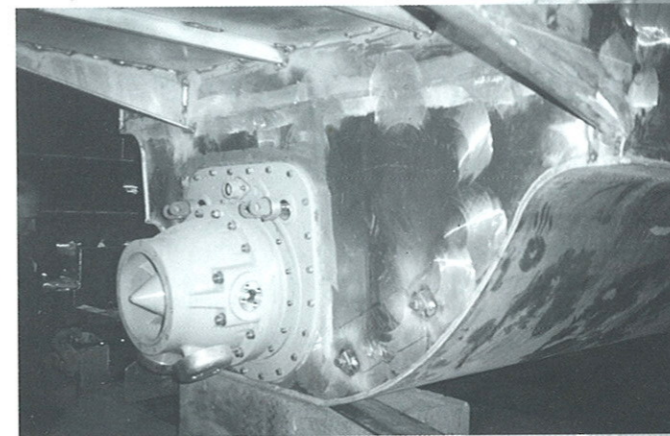
Q-West uses sub-contractors for specialist fittings and equipment, including hydraulics, paint and electrical work. While many sub-contractors are locals, some come from as far away as Whangarei, such as Universal Enterprises. The company has built up a good relationship with its sub-contractors, and can rely on them to deliver on time to the quality it needs to compete in a highly competitive market.

"We are very busy at the moment, so we don't have time to sit back and think about the last job, we are concentrating on the next one," says Mitchell. "Our work force and subcontractors give us great service."

Q-West's design and workmanship is aimed at producing a very fair aluminum hull at a cost-effective price. The company's methods mean no filler is required, reducing distortion and pleasing the eye.

"We use simple methods, and realistic pricing based on previous boats built. Other yards throw in a boat price. They don't keep track of pricing and materials. If they identify difficulties, they go back to the client or cut corners."

"We don't leave stuff out. We try to eliminate variations or extras because they add time and complicate the process. It's all about working together."



## Current boats under construction

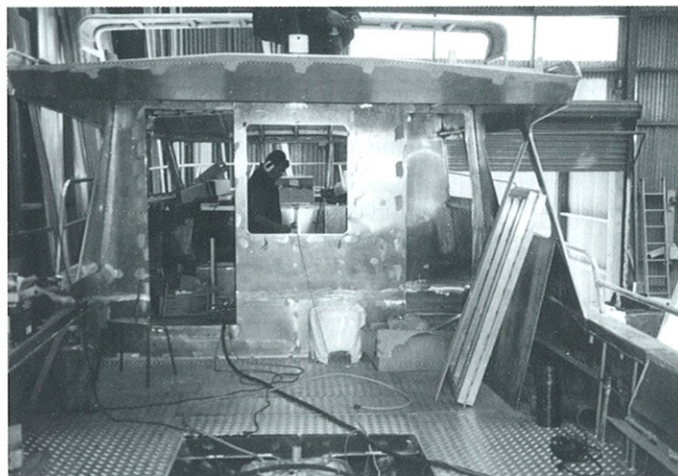
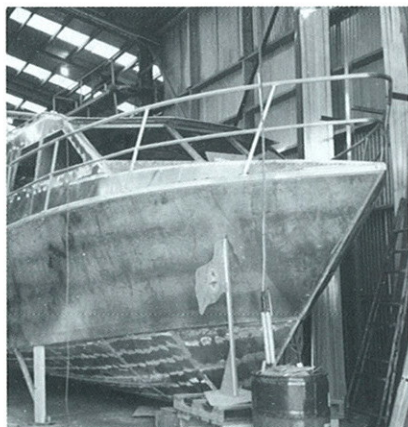
- **Nine fishing boats** from Tahiti are being completely overhauled, including new Scania diesels, machinery, refrigeration and paint, for a new fishing company in New Caledonia. "We have to complete three every four months, as well as construct two service vessels for use as tenders," says Mitchell. The boats will be used for longline fishing. "The client asked around, our name came up, and we put forward a package. So far it's all going to plan."
- **A 23m Chris Williams catamaran** passenger ferry for the Bay of Islands, built with twin MTU 2000 M70 V12 diesels, and shaft drives with five-bladed propellers. A Williams Tech Marine design for Kings Tours and Cruises in Paihia, she will have a service speed of 20 knots, and seat up to 200 passengers, inside and out.
- **But the most curious** and interesting vessel is a little tug, Boojum, only 7.5m long, with all the systems of a 15m vessel. She is finished to a very high standard for an American client based in Oregon. Designed by Kasten Marine, this ocean-going tug can also be trailered to explore rivers, lakes and canals. She is powered by a Sabb 2JHVP 30hp diesel coupled to a shaft drive with a variable pitch propeller, giving her a leisurely cruising speed of four to five knots.

As well as customised vessels, the yard has its own Ultracat series, which range from 7m to 12m in length. They can be used as charter boats, commercial fishing boats, passenger ferries, patrol boats, gamefishing or dive vessels, as well as luxury pleasure craft. A wide range of inboard diesel engines are available to suit different needs, and propulsion can be shaft drives, stern drives or jets.

The busy workload saw the company's annual turnover increase from \$1.4 million to \$5 million in the 12 months to mid-2000. The owner and managing director, Myles Fothergill, says future orders are strong, and he is confident the trend will continue. Team New Zealand's success in the America's Cup has opened good future opportunities in tourism ventures, transport and private vessels.

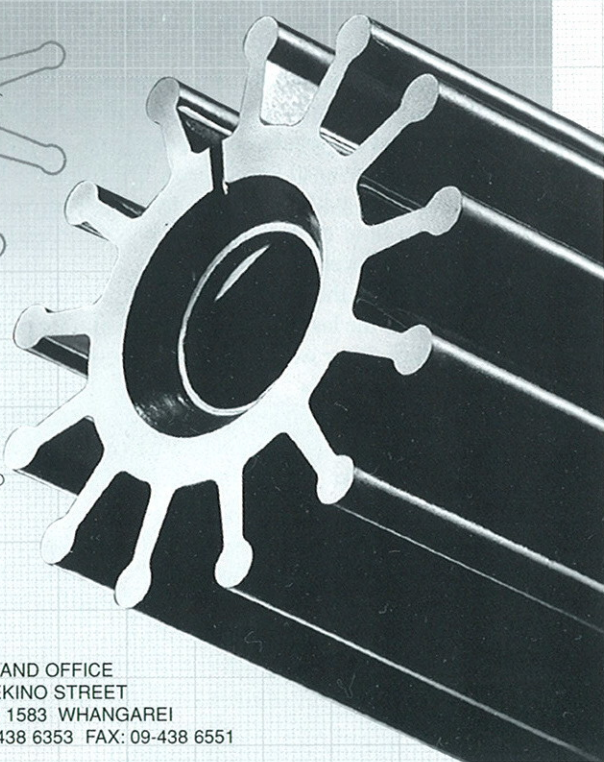
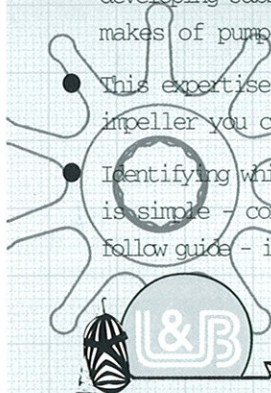
Mitchell says it is important for boatbuilders to pick their direction. "We are very good at aluminum ferries so we can build on that expertise. But we are looking to move to more and larger pleasure vessels.

Nor is there much of a disadvantage from being so far away from Auckland. "Wanganui has been good for us," says Mitchell. "We have a good labour force. The locals are supportive and are proud of us."



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