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# EUROPEAN CANALS

*beckon Kiwi boaties*

Just before Christmas, Auckland's waterfront saw the launching of a very interesting-looking craft destined for the European canals of France, Belgium and Germany.

Liberté has been built for Dave and Janette Wylie, who are well known in the maritime industry for their boathauling business. Dave is pursuing a dream to spend six months of the year cruising the European waterways with friends and guests during New Zealand's winter months.

He had looked at what was available in Europe and for the kind of money being asked he thought "I can build a far better ship than these relics, which will suit our needs much better.

"The European vessels all tend to have cramped living areas and a small deckhouse which are all right as day or weekend boats, but are really not suitable for extended cruising with guests aboard for a few weeks at a time. Plus we intend it to be our home for six months of the year, so we wanted some Kiwi boating comfort and not be faced with the problems of refuelling each week or topping up the water daily," said Dave Wylie.

Liberté, which means freedom, was designed by Max Carter of Marine Design limited in Auckland, who saw Wylie's wish list and the European canal barge requirements as a challenge. Carters years of previous experience as both a wooden and steel boat builder allowed him the freedom to design a practical vessel which would meet both the owners and EU standards. "So often designers forget that someone has to build their ideas, so it is essential to keep the practical and cost element in mind" he said.

This Carter design was then built by John Ross boat builders of Papakura to the standards of the European canal barge specifications. She has an overall length of 16m, a beam of 4.4m, a draft of 1m, a gross laden weight of 36 tonnes and a height above the waterline of 2.7m. While there are many hundreds of barges of all sizes working the inland rivers and canals of Europe, the restricted height and smaller size was essential to allow Liberté the freedom to move unrestricted throughout the canal network, which has hundreds of low bridges and tunnels.

The hull is built in 8mm mild steel up to the bulwarks and deck level, and the superstructure is of laminated marine ply. The rationale behind this move was ease of maintenance and the ply-foam sandwich construction will give better insulation when the



*Liberté undergoes sea trials in Auckland*

frosts and snow is about, said Carter.

John Ross specialises in constructing displacement steel yachts and launches from laying the keel through to finishing the vessel ready for the water. Liberté was an excellent challenge and a pleasure to build, he said.

However, Liberté should not be confused with the narrow boats which travel on the English canal system, where the locks are only 7ft or 2.13m wide and barges are restricted to 6ft 10 inches width overall.

The headroom throughout the interior is a respectable 2.1m, so although there is an overall height restriction of the vessel, this in no way restricts the open-air feeling between decks. Liberté sleeps six in three double cabins, with a separate en suite servicing the master cabin. The other two cabins share a separate head and shower. To keep the vessel environmentally friendly she is fitted with large holding tanks.

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A 130hp John Deere marine diesel provides an economical service speed of 8 knots. Although the speeds in the canal network in Europe are restricted to 4 knots, the speed on most rivers is 7 knots, and 8 knots is useful when shifting between canal networks which require short coastal passages, such as across the Baltic Sea to Sweden, says Wylie.

"This reserve speed ability means the engine is not working hard in the canals, and power is available when punching any canal or river flow where the 4 knot speed over ground may be effectively maintained."

Wylie says he chose the John Deere because there are literally thousands of them in use throughout Europe as tractors, so servicing and maintenance should not be a problem.

"Although the large propeller is reasonable protected, the canal systems have a notorious reputation for their weed and rubbish, and if you happen to foul the prop, you would not want to have to



Once in the Travelift there is no denying that this is a pretty flash barge



The propeller clearing access hatch saves what was the traditional kiwi swim.

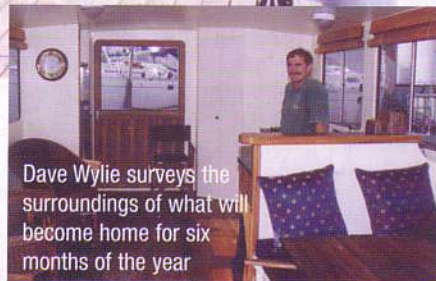
Liberté's large propeller and rudder and underwater configuration is the key to her manoeuvrability in the tight confines of a canal

take a swim." To combat this occupational hazard, Liberté is fitted with a 250mm tube and watertight hatch with an extended hull fairing plug directly above the propeller, which provides good

fuel will vary significantly, so Wylie says he can take advantage of cheap fuel deals, and not have to worry again until the next season. Additional concrete ballast was poured into the pre-prepared steel hull for'ard, which has also helped to deaden any water slapping or underwater noises.

Liberté met and exceeded expectations for her cruising speed and design during the sea trials which followed her launching. She is a very stable vessel and has proved to be highly manoeuvrable. She can turn virtually in her own length, as well as maintain a straight course with the wheel amidships. But like all displacement vessels she tends to be heavy to stop.

"So I have had a steep learning curve in the art of anticipation," says Wylie.



Dave Wylie surveys the surroundings of what will become home for six months of the year



access to enable the propeller to be cleared from inside the lazarette.

Inverters provide 230 volt power to run the refrigerator and the microwave when the vessel is not connected to shore power.

"The idea was to keep it simple," says Dave Wylie. The interior decor uses domestic household decorating materials, and the saloon is being fitted out utilising domestic furnishings, with cane chairs and canvas director's chairs, plus the mandatory Kiwi barbecue. There is a bench seat around the table. "The rationale behind this thinking is to provide flexible seating arrangements and to make it easy to refurbish in the future."

The exterior is finished in two-pot marine paint by Altex Coatings. Below the waterline the hull is coated using epoxy tar, in keeping with European standards, plus a top coat of ABC 3 antifouling for the three months or so that she will be in New Zealand waters this summer. The Wylie family intended to use this time to enjoy the sheltered waters of the Hauraki Gulf as a shakedown cruise. Once in the canal system in Europe she will only need to be hauled out for servicing every four years. An addition to be fitted once the vessel reaches Europe will be the fitting of the large duck board which is designed to carry cycles and Wylie's motor scooter which are essential means of transport for all barge owners to get around the many cities and towns and are ideal for the visitors and keeping fit.

Her barge design gives Liberté a huge surface buoyant area, which allows her to carry three tonnes, or 3000 litres of water and the same amount of fuel. One of the reasons for carrying so much fuel, besides providing ballast, was that three tonnes should last an entire season of cruising in the canals. Once in Europe the price of

# Liberté

16M EUROPEAN CANAL BARGE

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