

new boat: Bluewater 420



Built to do battle

Caroline Strainig checks out the latest version of the renowned Bluewater 420, an Australian-built offshore cruiser.

Ten years ago or so ago I wandered down the jetty in Hobart and saw a yacht that stood out from the crowd a little. It looked modern, but not ultra-modern, with a traditional full masthead rig and plenty of volume but not the huge beam aft that is becoming increasingly prevalent in overseas-built production boats. It had also been kitted out for serious offshore cruising, with a targa arch with solar panels, radar and liferaft.

"I bet it has an integral keel and a skeg-hung rudder. I wonder what adventures it has had? That's the sort of yacht I'd like to be on if I were caught out in a serious blow," I thought to myself.

I later discovered the yacht was a

Joe Adams-designed Bluewater. For those who don't know him, Adams is one of this country's most renowned yacht designers of the late 1900s. He has penned dozens of designs, ranging from an Adams Tasman 26 to the racing Adams 10 and cruising Adams 12.

The Bluewaters are built by Bluewater Cruising Yachts in Cardiff, NSW, and since then I have seen several more Bluewaters. However, I had never sailed one until recently when company owner David Bradburn invited me to check out the latest version of the Bluewater 420, the Bluewater 420 Raised Saloon. Owned by George and Gail Grant of Sydney, "Southern Belle" had just been

Southern Belle
off the breeze on
Lake Macquarie.



Well laid out saloon.



The owner's berth in forward cabin has gas struts under the bed to provide hassle-free stowage

"The anodised aluminium mast, by Australian company Allyacht Spars, is built in one section and the rigging is oversized, which is comforting when you're caught out"

commissioned on Lake Macquarie, not far from Bluewater's factory. The company was established in 1989, and David told me this was the 16th 400/420 launched since the first hit the water in 1994.

George Grant said he decided to buy a Bluewater 420 after an ocean passage on a European-built production boat. "Everything creaked and moved and a window started to pop out," he said. "I swore to myself that if we could afford it, we would buy something built more strongly. I kept seeing the Bluewaters at the boat show and just kept coming back to them."

Gail said beyond the seaworthiness aspect the 420 was an attractive boat visually. "I may be (I am) very biased, but I don't think any aesthetic looks have been sacrificed by the fact that she is tough and seaworthy. The boat still turns heads," she said.

"Another major plus is that the yachts were built locally and the interior fit-out can be semi-customised," George added.

Design and construction

Unlike many modern production boats, the 420 has a displacement hull so sits in the water rather than on top of it and should be more comfortable in a seaway. Yes, there is an integral keel, which is therefore stronger and less likely to fall off, plus a skeg to protect the rudder, and the ballast ratio and angle of vanishing stability are on the high side and what one would expect of a true bluewater yacht (see specifications box).

Features include top-quality traditional GRP construction methods, watertight bulkheads, Kevlar reinforcing where it counts and lock-down cabin-sole hatches. The lead keel draws 1.9m. David uses Australian commercial survey standards as a guide, although it will cost you extra if you actually want the boat in survey because government inspections and an official seal of approval are required.

The anodised aluminium mast, by Australian company Allyacht Spars, is built in one section and the rigging is oversized, which is comforting when you're caught out in a storm.

"Built like a Sherman tank," was the way one cruiser along on my outing admirably described it.

Company owner David Bradburn is understandably proud of the fact this is a hard-core cruising boat and will show you a myriad of core samples to prove it. He has also written an ebook, "37 Critical Considerations You Must Know Before You Decide to Go Ocean Cruising" you can download from his website. He backs up his faith in the build quality with

a lifetime structural warranty, which is extremely unusual, if not unheard of.

Sail plan

The sail plan is cutter-rigged, with the staysail on a self-tacker. You can fly the staysail as well as the headsail in light winds, although most fly the headsail by itself up to about 25 knots and then swap to the staysail. Both are on Profurl furlers. As standard you get a Dacron main, headsail and staysail made by Hood. A gennaker or code zero are optional extras, which can be set unobstructed on a mini bowsprit.

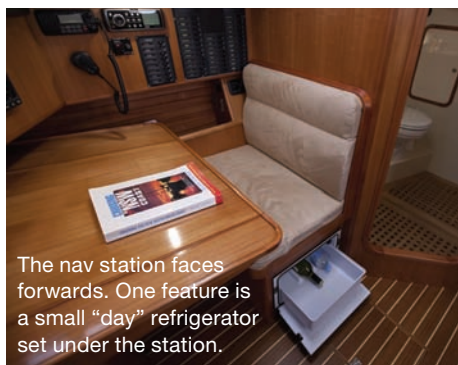
Genoa/staysail halyards are on the mast, but the other sail controls and the two single-line reefing lines come back to a set of jammers and Anderson 46 two-speed ST winches on the cabin top. The headsail and staysail come back to two separate pairs of Anderson two-speed ST winches on the coaming. Furling lines come back on the side deck adjacent to the cockpit.

An electric winch on the cabin top is an optional extra, but the Grants had not ticked the box for this. They had also opted for a rope rather than rigid boomvang, but Bluewater has since made a rigid boomvang standard, so I won't go into the relative merits of different types of boomvang. The Grants had added a Hutton boombrake to help tame the main and combined with lazyjacks and a boom bag this set-up looked like it should be more than adequate.

Cockpit

The cockpit is reasonably large, with seats designed to be slept on,

“Lifelines are four-strand stainless steel with fold-up gates midships that double as access steps”



The nav station faces forwards. One feature is a small “day” refrigerator set under the station.

which is great in tricky conditions for the off-watch partner or on those steamy tropical nights. In the centre is a pedestal with Plastimo compass and engine throttle and whatever instruments you option for, in this case a Furuno chartplotter, Coursemaster autopilot and anchor rode counter. The Grants planned to add a folding cockpit table down the track. The wind indicator and speed/depth were up under the “dodger”. I say dodger, but it is really a hard-top dodger-cum-bimini with side and aft clears that encloses the whole cockpit. Gail said they had already trialled it in wet weather and it passed the leak test. Three opening

Gas struts make lifting the engine cover easy.



Twin rollers with cheeks, mini bowsprit, Manson Supreme anchor and Muir horizontal electric winch are just a few of the features at the bow.

hatches in the hardtop ensure adequate ventilation. “It’s really like having another outside room,” she said.

The cockpit has a large lazarette and two lockers for stowage.

Aft you will find two pushpit seats, a walk-through transom with boarding platform, fold-down stainless-steel swimming ladder and hot and cold shower. Overhead is a huge targa arch with 390W of solar panels,

Side decks are reasonably wide and feature generous toerails and fore, aft and midships cleats. Lifelines are four-strand stainless steel with fold-up gates midships that double as access steps.

Despite the self-tacking track for the

staysail, the foredeck still has plenty of working space. Features include a good-sized anchor locker, salt/fresh-water deckwash, 2500lb Muir electric winch with remote control, Manson Supreme anchor, pulpit, mini bowsprit and double bow rollers with cheeks. The Grants had added 100m of heavy chain for good measure.

Teak is used on the cockpit sole and transom, but a non-slip gelcoat finish elsewhere on deck. I thought this a good compromise.

Below

Two or three-cabin versions are available, with several different layouts, so I won’t go into too much detail. As stated previously, one of the pluses of buying a Bluewater is that it can be customised to a good extent internally.

The Grants had opted for the two-cabin version, which is the most popular layout. This features a double berth aft to port and opposite a large combined head/shower.

Just forward to starboard is a forward-facing nav station with adjacent electrical panel and VHF and stereo and a small “day” fridge underneath the seat. Opposite to port is a U-shaped galley with a top-opening fridge-freezer, twin square-bowl sink and gimbaled stove with oven.

Midships to port is a U-shaped settee with folding table and straight settee berth opposite. Forward again to port is a small combined head/shower,

Opening hatches and ports abound.





LEFT: A hard-top dodger-cum-bimini with clears gives the helmsman total protection when needed.

FAR LEFT: The cockpit. Note the large lazarette to starboard and two pairs of winches on the coaming for headsail and staysail.

which also has a washing machine and workshop and — in the bow — the large V-berth owner's cabin, which has a good-sized double bed with stowage under, a locker and shelving.

The 75hp Yanmar turbo diesel engine with twin alternators is housed under the companionway steps. The engine is propelled by a three-bladed 22" feathering Seawhawk prop, and twin alternators charge five gelcel batteries with a total of 540 AHs housed under the aft berth. The fibreglass holding tank has a 150L capacity and one head is electric and the other manual, so you have a back-up if you have power problems.

Forget tiny little water tanks — the 420 has a massive 1400L of water stowed in four central tanks with a dedicated drinking-water tank. Fuel capacity is also excellent, with a generous 450L stored in two separate tanks under the cabin sole and the aft berth.

Opening hatches and ports are generous in number and size, as is headroom, and decor is a pleasant mix of light-coloured Queensland myrtle timber, cream headliner and an upholstery colour of your choice. Stowage is good throughout.

Little touches the Grants had added included making the table folding instead of fixed, which really opens up the saloon, and a nifty pull-out chopping board slotted in the front of the kitchen cupboard that doubles as extra counter space.

Under sail

My outing was on inland Lake Macquarie in lightish winds but even so the 420 impressed. The rack-and-pinion Jefa steering was ultra-direct and when Southern Belle got in the groove she dug her shoulder in and just stayed there. Going to windward in 19 knots true we achieved 7.2 knots SOG, pointing at about 30 degrees apparent. George and Gail tacked and gybed her easily by themselves. The only issue was the large dodger-cum-bimini which is a huge plus protection-wise, but meant communication could sometimes be difficult. You needed to stand to the side so you could hear what the person on the foredeck was saying or use hand signals. Easily overcome, but something to be aware of. Visibility of headsail tell-tails was good to leeward. We did not use the staysail.

Motoring with the powerful Yanmar diesel she can achieve 8.3 at 3200 rpm in flat water, but this is more than her theoretical hull speed of 7.5 knots and does put the swimming platform underwater, so you'd probably want to ease back on the throttle in normal conditions. However, that extra grunt is obviously invaluable when you have to battle large seas and winds offshore. At 2000 rpm she cruises at 6.2 knots using a very reasonable four litres an hour.

A longish keel and skeg can make a boat a little harder to reverse in a straight line, but Gail had no issues berthing Southern Belle in the



Full profile — note the masthead rig with straight spreaders.

“There is so much to like about this boat that it is hard to single out particular features”

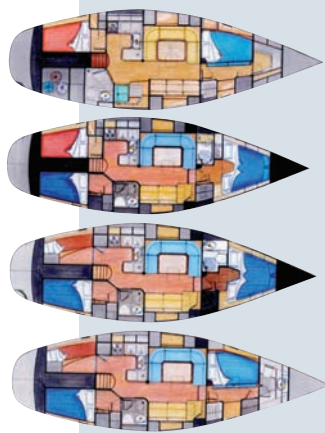
SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	12.75
LWL	10.67m
Beam	3.99m
Draught	1.9m
Displacement	12,170kg
Ballast	5000kg
Engine	Yanmar 75hp
Water (four tanks)	1400L
Diesel	450L
Angle vanishing stability	135 degrees
Sail area/displacement ratio	18.5
Displacement/length ratio	255
Ballast ratio	41 percent

Price: Sailaway from \$750,000.
Test boat \$770,000

You can also purchase a flush-deck or centre-cockpit version or the slightly larger Bluewater 450M or 520.

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LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Two-cabin/fwd storage cabin;
Three-cabin/utility head storage/V-berth; Two-and-a-half cabin/V-berth/large galley/fwd head; Two-and-a-half cabin/large galley/fwd head.

confines of the marina, and it's a small price to pay for seaworthiness and stability offshore.

Stand-outs

There is so much to like about this boat that it is hard to single out particular features, but here are just a few that caught my eye.

On deck, running rigging has been raised slightly off the cabin top or side decks on blocks, so muck doesn't collect underneath and the lines dry out more quickly. Rainwater is collected in deck drains and funnelled below to the tanks, with an overboard option when the water is not needed or you want to wash off the deck before collecting. Deep little fibreglass lockers are set in the coaming either side of the cockpit, providing an invaluable nook for storing those odds and ends. The bilge-pump system has been designed so you can use the engine to power it in an emergency.

Below, not only is there a watertight bulkhead aft of the bow and anchor locker but the door of the forward cabin has been designed to seal if the forward cabin floods, so while water will gradually trickle into the rest of


The forward head. Not only does this house a washing machine, but a vice is hinged behind the toilet so you can turn it into a mini-workshop!



A lift-up section of coaming gives access to the stern boarding platform.

the boat it buys you time. The forward head has also been designed to double as a tiny workshop area.

Summary

If you know enough about design to appreciate true bluewater features and can afford to pay for them, the Bluewater 420 should be high on your list. These yachts may not be as glitzy and glamorous as some European-built production boats, but they are good-looking yachts designed with safety paramount and ideal for bluewater cruising. 

Top-opening fridge-freezer (140L Ozefridge) and twin-bowl sink feature in the galley. Drinking water is stowed in a separate tank from the rest of the boat's water, and can be pumped with a foot pump.

