

Wellingtonians Greg Dean and Karl Stohr only needed one glimpse of an old trawler's plumb stem in the crowded Seaview Marina before making a snap decision to buy into a bit of New Zealand heritage.

Lindsay Wright reports.



Century-old trawler lives again



dock to look her over, the full extent of her plight became obvious. "She was covered in rust stains. The fresh water in the bilges – rain that had leaked through the decks – was about 40cms deep. Nothing worked – she was a wreck."

The deckhouse had been extended to the bulwarks for more room below and the earthy stench of wood rot greeted the pair as they wrenched open the wheelhouse door. The heart of the boat – described in the broker's listing as a 5L3 Gardner diesel – was a rusty heap half-submerged in bilge water.

But Greg and Karl were not deterred for long. "We could see she was a special boat – a heritage vessel – and if we didn't save her, nobody else was likely to," says Greg. "We'll never build boats like this in New Zealand again, there just isn't the wood, so we should be looking after them."

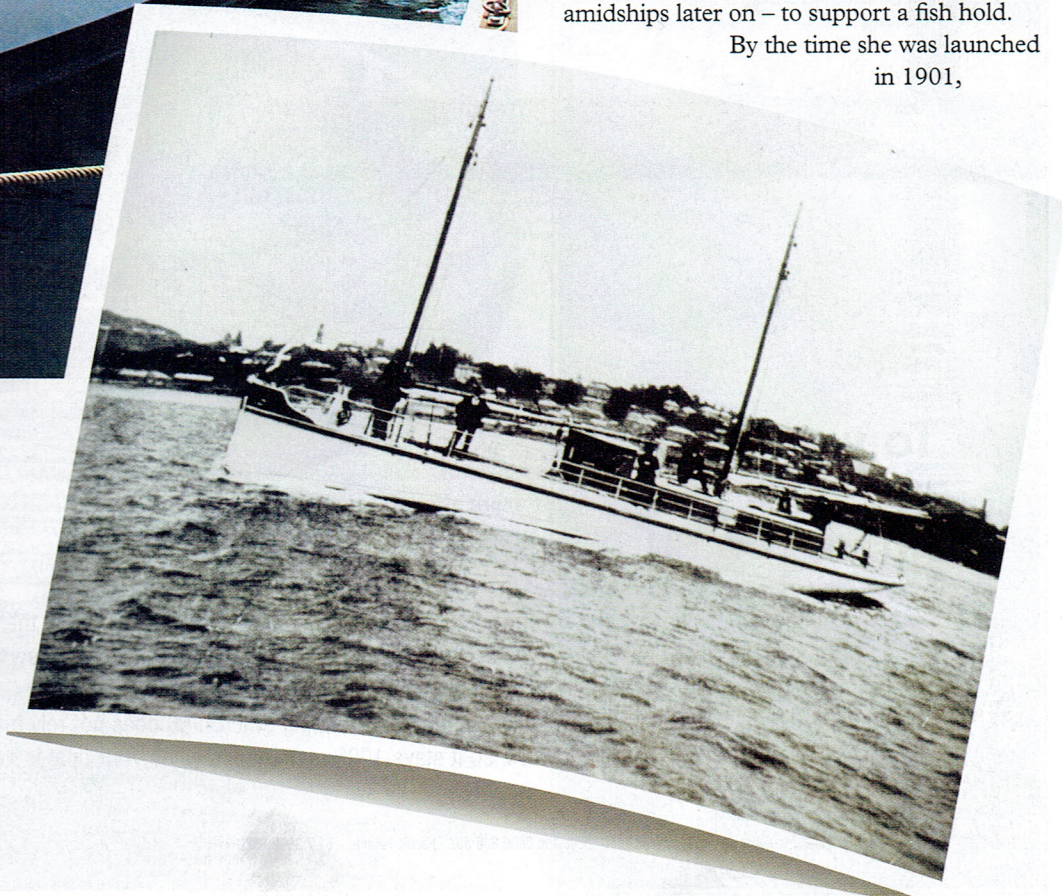
"Having said that... there have been quite a few times during the refit when we've wondered what the hell we're doing here and why we're doing it."

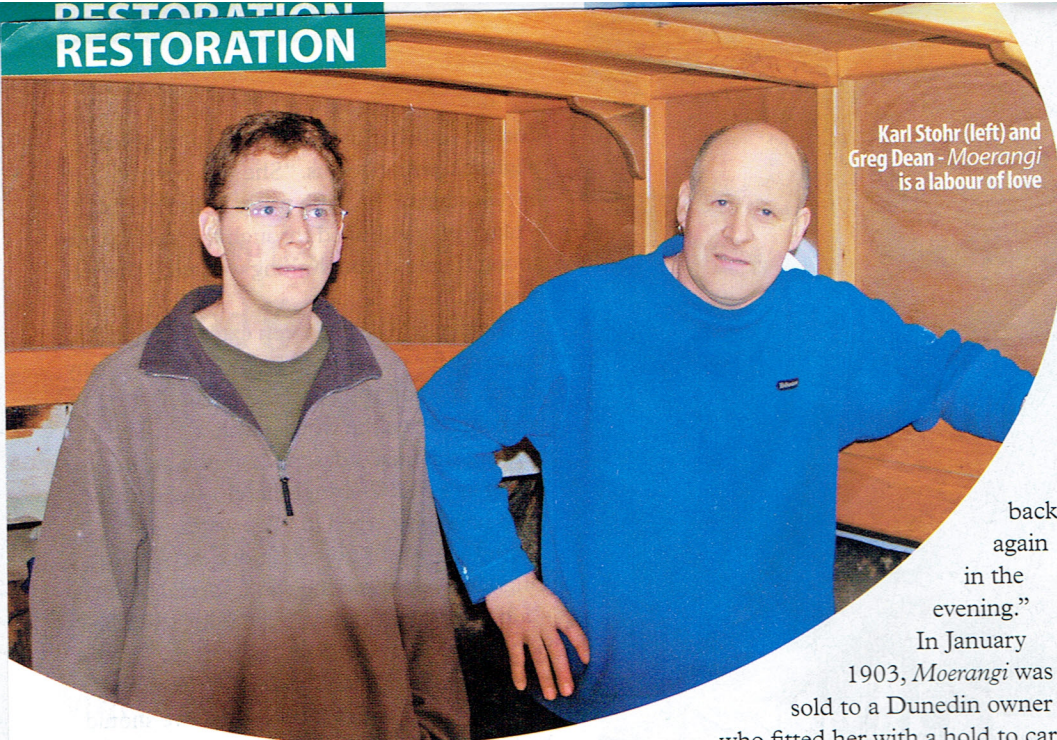
Beneath the rust and rot, *Moerangi's* shapely hull was sound. Her keel had been laid at Logan Brothers' Auckland yard in 1899, followed by three 27mm-thick heart kauri skins, two diagonal and the outside skin fore and aft. The hull, with plumb stem and shapely counter stern, was fastened to full-length 200mm by 50mm kauri stringers with copper nails, roves and bolts. "That type of construction must have been pretty rare back then – there wasn't a frame in the boat," says Greg. Six laminated frames were added amidships later on – to support a fish hold.

By the time she was launched in 1901,

We'd got the listing off a broker and drove to the marina to check out," says Karl. "All we could see was this straight bow poking out from the end of the marina berth – and we'd bought her before we got out of the car. It was love at first sight."

At the pair had seen the best part of a decrepit 16.8m former fishing vessel *Moerangi*. As they walked excitedly down the





Karl Stohr (left) and Greg Dean - *Moerangi* is a labour of love

Moerangi (which translates literally to sleepy sky, or calm weather) was driven by a 26hp engine, but it was the gaff schooner rig which mostly powered her on the maiden voyage to Moeraki in the South Island.

"Twenty-six horsepower was huge in those days," says Greg. "*Moerangi*'s owner, Archibald Weir, used her to tow the fishing fleet out to sea from Moeraki, then tow them

back again in the evening." In January 1903, *Moerangi* was sold to a Dunedin owner who fitted her with a hold to carry around six tonnes of kerosene in drums across Otago Harbour. She's reputed to have rolled over at one stage – a mishap blamed on an overloaded deck cargo.


A long stint as a harbour ferry running from Dunedin to Portobello followed next. *Moerangi* was licensed to carry 150 passengers within her five-metre beam, but it was reported that she often left with more than 200 aboard.

After one grounding incident, a local newspaper suggested that had she been carrying the regulation passenger complement, her reduced draught would have enabled her to clear the sandbank in question. In a reverse image of today's cu a smoking room was provided below-deck while non smokers were expected to star in the weather with the skipper.

Misfortune dogged the little schooner during her years as a ferry. She was run under the wharf and lost her masts, grounded several times in Otago Harbour's foggy reaches and survived a 1904 collision with the freighter *Onslow*. Her skipper, Captain Andrews, was fined six pounds and 10 shillings for failing to keep a proper watch.

By 1916 the shapely *Moerangi* had been up at Port Chalmers. But in 1920 she came into new ownership and was re-decked, powered and began a new life as a side trawler off the South Island's east coast.

Little was recorded about *Moerangi* during her fishing career, but she eventually came to an ignoble end as a hulk, lying on her side neglected and abandoned, on mud flats at Port Chalmers. In 1982 she was recovered, revitalised once again and put back to work fishing – until 1986 when the then owner Bruce Cox re-rigged her as a schooner.




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her in survey to passengers onursions from Akaroa. We're still finding bits and pieces t her history," says "Moerangi has a life of own - we're just the next lment in it. We'd be grateful rone has old memories or photos perangi they could share with us." One kipper, Ross Field, hailed them from the f a few weeks ago and told them that worked the boat from Akaroa when he 6 years old. perangi finally ended up in Seaview na and looked set to rot away before air came across her. "We already owned co 30...but I'd always wanted to do a mnavigation of New Zealand - and I ed to do it in comfort," says Greg. "The nne former fishing vessel had potential

to provide the required comfort with the added fillip of timeless grace and style."

Their first job in the restoration was to take measurements all over the boat, load them into a computer, and design a new configuration using a computer assisted design (CAD) programme. "Once we'd seen what she would look like after we'd done what we wanted to with her on screen, we went ahead and bought her," says Greg.

Brave stuff. It took a petrol-powered pump

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one day, working flat out, to get the water out of *Moerangi* before they started work.

Greg has a background in fitting and welding. "I hated it while I was doing my apprenticeship," he said, "all I did was dream about sailing – but those skills are great when you apply them to boatbuilding." He went on to do a boatbuilding course and then worked as a CAD designer for superyacht builders, Fitzroy Yachts, in New Plymouth.

Karl is a panelbeater and says the combination of skills works out well. "Greg does the structural stuff and I look after the cosmetic side, paint and varnish."

First job was a new 50mm macrocarpa deck overlaid with plywood and fibreglassed. A new wheelhouse, with a 50mm laminated plywood roof curved to match *Moerangi's* sweeping sheerline was built off site then lifted onto the boat by the Seaview Marina travel lift. "The forward cabin coach roof is about the only part of the old structure left," says Karl.

The wheelhouse uprights are of swamp kauri while the rest of the framing is macrocarpa with 25mm plywood sides. The entire interior fit out will be completed in teak.

The engine room's aft watertight bulkhead had been lined with cork insulation (as a fish

hold). The cork had absorbed water which rotted the bulkhead, so it was removed and plans made for a replacement. "The work's all being done to Maritime New Zealand survey standard in case we decide to go chartering later," says Greg.

Two years into the refit, the pair's circumnavigation plans are beginning to look more achievable. *Moerangi's* well on the way to having a double cabin forward with en suite facilities and another one aft. Cooking and dining facilities are situated aft in the wheelhouse, and a wheel will be hooked up to her new hydraulic steering system and installed with a control console forward and to starboard in the wheelhouse.

Under the wheelhouse floor, the venerable five-cylinder Gardner 5L3 takes pride of place with gleaming polished brass and fresh grey paint. "*Moerangi's* very easily driven," says Greg. "Boats of this era were designed to use what we'd consider to be minimal horsepower – or sail. They don't need tonnes of fossil fuels to keep them moving."

Turning over at a leisurely 600rpm, the 98hp Gardner propels *Moerangi* at seven knots and sip about five litres of diesel an hour from an 800-litre tank on the port side of the engine room. "That doesn't seem much fuel for a big boat – but it'll last for about five

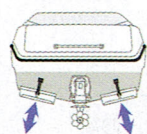
days at those revs. It'll be heaps for gear around the coast." The three-bladed prop is about one metre in diameter.

Greg and Karl are living aboard the trawler to save funds for the restoration wine stowage takes pride of place in the bilge alongside the epoxy and boatbuilding supplies. A 750-litre fresh water tank has been installed on the starboard side of the engine room.

Coming up on the refit agenda is a replacement schooner rig. "We've still got most of the sails they used when she was working as a tourist boat from Akaroa in the 1980s," says Greg, "and they're not in bad shape." The 7m foremast is in place on deck, forward of the wheelhouse, while the 8.5m main mast is awaiting installation at the boatyard ashore. Both will be gaff-rigged with stainless steel standing rigging.

Greg and Karl are reluctant to put a time frame to their vintage vessel's renovation. "I don't know if she'll ever be finished – but I probably just get her seaworthy and go home – finish her off on the way," says Greg. "It'll be great to take her back to all her old haunts: Moeraki, Otago Harbour, Akaroa. If only Logan Brothers craftsmen, the guys who built her in 1900, could see her now – 107 years later – and still going strong." ↓

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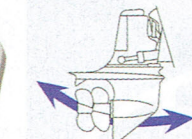


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