



On The Bay

with Wayne Baddock

HOLED UP IN HEDLAND

Just when you have the finish line in your sights, a wild card gets thrown at you and all of a sudden it seems a long way off. I had one more skipper's course, to finish our stint in Port Hedland, before a few days booked in Karratha and then homeward bound. The group on this particular day were blokes who worked for BHP (how unusual in Port Hedland) and knew machinery like no other. We had finished the theory class and were down at the boat ramp checking out my boat for the practical. During the theory I had given a maintenance spiel, mentioned how I change the trailer bearings constantly, had just replaced the rollers, service the motor twice a year, grease all the fittings, run fresh water through the motor, etc, etc. But as soon as one of these mechanical gurus sees my boat trailer, he casually announces, in a way that only someone who has had a head stuck under gearboxes all his life can, that the trailer must have done some hard yards, because the springs were about to collapse. I initially think he is joking, but on closer inspection see that the bushes are shot, there is metal on metal and it's a goner! I thank him for his affable analysis of my training equipment that he has paid good money to use and mentally try to work out how I will get this sorted before the next class and before I hit the road again.

I had previously had good service from Pilbara Boats n Bikes, so called in first thing next morning. Matt, the manager, accessed the required parts quickly and although it was a difficult job, all was sorted just in time to do my practical for three blokes the next day. These guys had travelled 450km from Newman to do my last course here. Naturally, they were all truck maintenance blokes from BHP. We finish the practical, are parked at the boatramp and I am retelling the boat trailer repair story, when one of the guys announces, again in only a way that a truck maintenance bloke could, that of more concern should be my Mitsubishi truck springs that look like they are about to collapse. I laugh at his joke, but he points underneath the truck, has spotted some bare metal between the layers of pindan dust and sure enough I have the exact same problem as with the boat trailer, only potentially far more dangerous. Viv reckons what better place to get a truck repaired then in

Port Hedland, where there are thousands of the damn things and sure enough I eventually find someone who is able to air freight the parts in and so we will be holed up in Hedland for just a little while.

These revelations from my customers were another timely reminder that you never stop learning. When I stopped to think, even though regular boat and truck servicing had occurred, I had travelled over 12,000km, some of it on badly corrugated dirt roads and regular inspection of all moving parts is critical. You could just picture the scene in the middle of bum----, with the boat trailer collapsed and then the truck springs collapsed with a four ton slide on camper. To put it mildly, we had dodged a bullet and we were most appreciative of the Port Hedland businesses that got us under way in short time. It actually gave us a chance to meet a few more people and take in the town. Some people 'pooh pooh' Port Hedland, but we loved it and intend to spend much more time here next year. Those that know the place well keep their secret fishing and camping spots to themselves, so I intend to take the time to find them out myself.

To answer last week's question, Sandfire Roadhouse received its name from Ludwig Leichhardt, who noted that the sand was so hot it appeared to be on fire. This week's question is, 'What is the record longest ship to enter Port Hedland?'

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