

## Design and Build Philosophy – My Way

By Derek Kelsall, 2005

Philosophy is 'a seeking for knowledge'. To me, it seems a somewhat grand word for what I do in designing boats.

"MY WAY" is a 70 foot Kelsall catamaran, which is being custom built at this time. The words in the name came to mind as I started to write this, having first referred to the dictionary for the definition of philosophy. My Way is the way I design. This situation comes about from having started without any knowledge or research into what designers do and having continued to find my own ways of working through the design process that took me into mathematical hull shapes and own lines program which I still use today. My Way is also the way all my boats are built. Again it goes back to my starting point, with the pioneering of foam as a construction method/material. There was no one to tell me how to then and I have continued to refine the methods ever since.

My career has been based on seeking for knowledge, or seeking the better way. My guide in that search has been a fair understanding of the first principles involved and a certain instinct for what will and will not work, combined with a few thousand miles of ocean crossings. Simplicity has always been a keyword, as has the search for shapes which are pleasing to the eye, without resorting to methods which add thousands of hours to the build process.

Starting in multihulls at a time when any sailing yacht without ballast was considered, at best, as the fringe element, was a natural for me. The basic principles made good sense but it was also immediately clear that there was a clean sheet of paper and the imagination and the sea were the only restrictions. Everything was there to be put to the test and, all importantly for me, there were no rules. Kicking against the rules previously had always got me into trouble. Here it was paying dividends. That first design, Toria, and our immediate success on the water set the scene to continue on the same route. We had produced a better multihull and we had used a better build method with better materials. Move the barriers, find the better way has been the enduring motto. We have found those better ways and they are my ways.

I could never have predicted that we would be still finding, simple but effective innovations today, nearly 4 decades on. Boat designing must be one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. Where else could the product of ones efforts be seen to take to its element and perform as she should and be able to say - I did that My Way. I enjoy it even more when it involves working closely with the owner. All kinds of factors are involved from pure performance to pride of ownership. I owe a great deal to my clients over the years. Certainly without their confidence in me, very little would have been achieved. A dozen names immediately spring to mind.

I favour catamarans for their seaworthiness, comfort and efficiency, but take the view that there is certainly both room and a place for all styles. I only wish that there was more time to put to the many other projects that are still on my 'to do one day list'. You can read elsewhere how we designed and built just about every other possible style, providing me with a wealth of experience to draw on. I am occasionally asked if I miss the racing scene, which was such a major part of my life during the first 15 years of my career. At times, I go to a race venue and recall how it used to be. However, racing does require dedication to that subject to stay at the top. For me, there are so many other things that I could not do and could not have done had I concentrated on racing. However, the experience is never forgotten and there is always one eye on performance with every new project.

Particularly gratifying to find that what I did with Nick Keig in the early eighties race design "VSD" is now the latest to come from France. Many designers seem to produce a design and then decide which build options to suggest. I know of only one way to design which is how it will be made as the starting point and at every step. To have spent so many years trying to convince others of the viability of foam/fiberglass sandwich and now see its universal use is a reward. However, even more pleasing is to still be way ahead of the field in how we handle those materials. KSS is superior to any custom alternative. We turn away design jobs where we fail to convince the owner of that fact, rather than be responsible for him entering into all that extra effort and cost. KSS kits are getting established. Some of our efforts will now go into the next developments - our latest trailer/sailer cross beam system and designs to make use of it, towards the Freewing Twins catamaran rig and the modular build approach to make the builders job even easier. I firmly believe that it is the MY Way approach, as opposed to the trained mind, well researched knowledge, or study of current fashion, which has kept me at the cutting edge.