

Brilliant II – a Peterson 44

Sharon Smallwood and her husband Julian hunted far and wide for their new bluewater cruiser, and believe they have found close to the ideal in the form of their Peterson 44, Brilliant II.

Brilliant II, originally christened Dragon Lady, is number 96 in a series of 200 or so Kelly Peterson 44s built at the Yu Ching boatyard in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Her creators were Jack Kelly, a San Diego yacht broker, and Doug Peterson, a former racing designer. The KP44 was the result of a quest to produce the ultimate cruising yacht, combining comfort with performance. After one year of living and voyaging on board Brilliant II, I can confirm that this mission was successful.

Dragon Lady left the US mainland for Hawaii, where she changed her name. Although she may be literally brilliant, another vessel was in fact responsible for her new identity – the racing schooner Brilliant, currently owned by Mystic Seaport and rated by *Wooden Boat Magazine* among the top 100 most beautiful in existence. Following in her namesake's footsteps, Brilliant II was given an IMO rating and set to work as a charter yacht. She eventually retired, changing ownership to John

and Maureen Gapp, who together with their young son headed out on her to sail the South Pacific.

In six years of cruising Brilliant II was a faithful friend to the Gapps, who rode the milk run all the way to Southeast Asia. Here she came to rest and in the Yacht Haven Marina on the Thai island of Phuket, we met and fell in love with her.

Practical choice

Julian has always had a "thing" for timber boats; he likes their style and the sense of tradition, but for practical reasons we've tended towards fibreglass as our preferred material for construction. Brilliant II is made of hand-laid mat and polyester resin, but you have only to step below to travel further back in time than the early days of this technology. Bronze opening ports, just the right mix of woodwork and white and a cabin sole of holly and teak are just some of the features that add to an old-world charm.

Okay, I'm biased. Look closer and you'll see the delaminating veneer and patch of saggy headlining caused by years of endless leaks, and don't even mention the peeling paint or rusty streak from the strange stainless tow bolt below the bow. The Brilliant II is an ongoing project, but that is what we wanted. Here, as I plan the extent of a refit, are an honest appraisal and overall view of my boat.

Fifteen tonnes

A heavily laid-up hull contributes considerably towards 15 tonnes of net weight. The KP44 is classed as a moderate-displacement craft, but her shape below the waterline ensures that she's no slug. A cutaway forefoot, elongated fin keel and skeg-hung rudder give Brilliant II a theoretical hull speed of more than eight knots. She's often exceeded this and our fastest run to date was 100 miles in less than 12 hours. We wouldn't win any prizes in a competition



SPECIFICATIONS

Brilliant II

LOA	13.36m
LWL	11.78m
Beam	3.93m
Draught	1.98m
Ballast	4536kg
Displacement	13,607kg
Sail area	93.92 sqm



The comfortable cockpit on a calm day.



View from the top of the mast.

for the tightest tacking angles but we can certainly get where we want to go.

Mounted between the skeg and rudder, our feathering max prop is fully protected. We're still experimenting with the Fleming windvane; an auxiliary rudder 501 model added to our plumb-cut transom. We've found that since this is close to – and smaller than – the main rudder, it will always lose the battle between the two. Ultimately we expect to run lines into the cockpit and operate only the servo-pendulum side of the unit, stowing the stainless rudder to have as a spare.

Decks and cockpit

Decks are sandwiched marine ply, bolted and glassed to the hull below a teak caprail. A high bulwark and solid stainless-steel lifelines are safety features as much as cosmetic ones. Deck space is ample. White non-skid gelcoat has replaced the original teak planks, responsible for much of our internal water damage. In case of any delamination in the deck and to address the issue of subsequent flexing, a panting bolt has been attached to the keel-stepped mast. A single bow roller holds our 20kg Bruce anchor with all chain rode, and we carry a 15kg Danforth to deploy from the stern.

The centre cockpit is where Brilliant II shines. At over two metres square, it's big, comfortable and secure and so it should be since that's where we spend the greater part of our time. A stainless framework supports a custom-made dodger and awning, with detachable panels that form a fully enclosed but flexible pilothouse. In calm conditions we revel in the open air, on a boisterous day we close down the windward side and when it's downright miserable we can shut ourselves in completely and still have visibility through the clears.

A domed cushion bumps up the height of the helmsperson who sits on a vented locker containing our propane tank. Cable steering runs from our ship's wheel to the quadrant mounted under the aft bunk, where an Alpha ram forms the mechanical portion of our autopilot.

Cutter rig

Brilliant II is rigged as a cutter, with a roller-furling genoa/jib and hanked-on staysail arrangement. We seem to carry more canvas than the James Craig, but it thankfully fits in lockers below the V-berth's bunk, extended to accommodate such bulky cargo. The partially battened main runs up on bronze sliders through a stainless track. There are just two reefing points, but they are both very deep. Five winches are self-tailing; we sail short-handed for the most part and rarely encounter difficulties.

Brilliant II supposedly sleeps seven, though two works fine for me. Double bunks fore and aft are large enough to warrant king-sized sheets. A head with toilet and shower adjoins each of the staterooms. A two-metre-plus pilot berth runs down the starboard side of the saloon opposite the dinette. Our

table is seldom used since dining is mostly al fresco. Cutaways on both sides give us ample storage, as do lockers and drawers under seating. A U-shaped galley sits to port of the companionway, equipped with eutectic fridges built into the counters. The fact that you virtually have to climb inside them to reach the bottom means that cleaning is a job best saved for very hot days. We carry a 12V portable WAECO fridge, which runs as a freezer and reduces our dependency on engine running.

The iron sail is an 85hp Perkins that chews through just under five litres of diesel per hour. Space in the engine room is at a premium thanks to the inclusion of a less thirsty Northern Lights generator. We rely predominantly on energy from the sun to charge our battery banks, with four solar panels swivel-mounted to the handrail, pumping in as many amps as we can use.

There's headroom throughout the interior (excepting the aft cabin walk-through). We don't have the beam of a Beneteau, but we're happy with what we've got. Brilliant II is a competent long-range cruising yacht that enhances our pleasure in voyaging.

cruisinghelmsman Sharon Smallwood



At the time of writing Sharon and Julian were cruising in Australia and enjoying the diversity its islands and coast have to offer. Sharon's first sailing experience was hitchhiking in the Coral Sea as a young British back-packer. She met Julian when her journey took her south to Sydney and the rest, as they say, is history.