



AUSTRALASIA'S LEADING MARINE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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COAST TO COAST PART 1

Some people tow caravans around Australia -
Tim Mitchell and Jade O'Donovan chose an
Extreme 645 Game King for their round-Oz
odyssey.

By Mark Rothfield
Photography: supplied



hardly a luxurious lifestyle but one they wouldn't swap

Somehow, in their rush to enjoy the ocean as much as humanly possible, fishing soulmates and outdoor addicts Tim Mitchell and Jade O'Donovan missed some memos.

First, the one stipulating that 30-year-olds should surrender to suburban life with a mortgage and mower and, secondly, the one stating that continental circumnavigations are the preserve of world-weary retirees with motorhomes or caravans ... certainly not trailerboats.

Instead, the pair has embarked on a remarkable around-Australia road trip-cum-voyage of discovery, with a trusty Extreme 645 Game King, a faithful hound called Indie, and a horde of vicarious social media followers in tow.

The seed was actually planted six years ago when Tim first met Jade at Rottnest Island, WA, and casually asked for her phone number. Jade's qualifying question was "do you like fishing?" His eyes lit up ...

At the time, Tim was working in fisheries management, having studied marine biology to better understand fish behaviour and, in turn, catch more of them. Jade was a former ranger turned environmental health technician, living in Esperance. It took just a year before the trailerboat trip was mooted.

"The idea was obviously very exciting, but the fear factor was also there because no one was really doing it with a boat," Tim says. "We didn't know why that was, and couldn't find a good answer either, so we decided to go for it anyway."

Adds Jade: "We both love being on the water, we both love fishing and diving, it just seemed the perfect thing to do."

Together, they did some increasingly adventurous practice runs in their previous runabout to better gauge the capabilities and possibilities of small-boat touring. Freshwater is obviously a precious commodity at sea, forcing Jade onto hair-washing rations, and the bathroom facilities are generally 'over the stern'. A portable, double-burner cooker with a flat plate suffices as their galley. It's hardly a luxurious lifestyle, but one they wouldn't swap.

Having chosen the Extreme 645 and Yamaha F200, the first step was to calculate the range from the 200lt main fuel tank – 300km, as it turned out – then double its capacity by adding two 100lt bladders.

"All the places we wanted to visit were within reach as we planned to start and return to the same area," Tim explains. "Our longest stay at sea so far has been 10 nights, and the boat is easily capable of that."



Jade O'Donovan, Tim Mitchell and their dog Indie are travelling around Australia in a trailerboat ... We'll follow their adventures as they fish, dive and explore their way around the coast.



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While there were fishing hotspots and particular species on their bucket-list, their itinerary has largely been determined by safety considerations. Even their departure last Easter was timed to ensure the best possible conditions in northern regions, avoiding the



summer downpours that can turn dirt trails into tribulations.

A FRESH START

Despite being WA-based, Tim and Jade chose to leave from south-eastern Victoria, where their new baby was delivered by dealer Inverloch Marine. First, though, they were advised to complete the outboard's first 20-hour service.

"It was May 6, the perfect time to chase southern bluefin tuna off Portland, so that was our first trip," Tim recalls. "The boat performed brilliantly in fairly big seas, but we didn't manage to land anything.

"Next day we went out again, set the outriggers, and managed a three-way hook-up and a five-way hook-up between the two of us. It was chaos, as the fish were going in all directions, but we got all but one of them in ... an awesome start."

Given the thumbs-up by Inverloch Marine, they headed east to Lakes Entrance at the mouth of the Gippsland Lakes, harbouring swordfish aspirations. It coincided with a fishing tournament that Jade entered as one of the few female competitors.

"We left at 4.30 in the morning and came home at 6.30 the following afternoon, spending our first night at sea out near the Shelf," she recalls. "We were just about to give up on the second afternoon when I got a hook-up. Unfortunately, it let the bait go after about five minutes.

"As we were coming in, we saw two other boats with monster swordfish being weighed – ours was a similar size, so it was gut-wrenching."

The entire south-east coast proved equally fickle in the mostly fresh winds. Even Mallacoota, renowned for its flathead, wasn't overly productive, and nor were NSW's southern waters.

Tim quickly gained a new-found respect for the wily locals: "We were out of our comfort zone, I guess, and people could see on Instagram that we were struggling, so they started giving us their secret locations. It was so cool they'd do that; otherwise we'd have been taking a stab in the dark.

"Bermagui was a big one for me. I lost a monster tuna there once and wanted to redeem myself, but couldn't do so. We then tried deep-dropping off Batemans Bay, using electric reels, and caught some nice perch in about 400m of water."

The Sydney sojourn coincided with the harbour's Vivid light show, dining at waterside restaurants before mooring for the night in a protected bay. Port Stephens, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour were equally accommodating, if not prolific.



I thought I'd destroyed the leg and the gearbox





The pair name the
**Great Barrier
Reef** as their
highlight

Jade was happy to catch a GT she could handle.



Strong winds had followed their path throughout the four weeks spent on the NSW coast, however a change of state would bring a change of luck.

LAND OF PLENTY

"It was a different story once we got into Queensland," says Jade. "Things started to heat up and the fishing heated up as well."

The pair named the Great Barrier Reef, in its entirety, as their highlight, and not just because of the pristine coral. A bounty of large-mouth nanngai, goldband snapper, Spanish mackerel, cobia, giant trevally, coral trout and crayfish awaited their hotplate.

Squalls of over 30 knots struck them while 100km offshore from the township of 1770 yet, fortuitously, they were able to tuck into the wake of a charter boat that was heading in.

There was no such luck at Lady Musgrave Island, also near 1770, where Tim was caught napping by a setting sun and low tide. He hit a coral bombie flush at 25 knots.

"Straight away I thought I'd destroyed the leg and the gearbox," he tells. "I jumped in with a mask to see what I'd done, fearing that I'd ruined



Port Douglas delivered a memorable Spanish mackerel

the trip. In the end we'd just bent the prop and sheared off two inches of skeg."

The region's Yamaha dealer soon had them going again, and it was a sobering lesson in dealing with huge tides.

Further north, off Yeppoon, the Keppel Islands provided eye-watering scenery, both above and below. Great Keppel still has the decaying remnants of a once iconic resort that

was felled by the GFC and then damaged by cyclones.

"As soon as we saw the coconut trees it felt like we were in a tropical paradise," remembers Jade. "We were cracking coconuts open and eating them with the fish. If we wanted a coral trout or a cray we could just jump in and grab one – it was unbelievable."

At night they'd switch the underwater lights on and watch the water like it was their private aquarium. Baitfish would come, then a procession of predators.

Their windiest night at anchor came at Airlie Beach in the Whitsundays, with a solid 25-knot breeze causing the anchor alarm to sound twice. They grabbed a berth at Hamilton Island Marina for the following three nights, again using their trick of riding in a ferry wake to soften the seas.

"It was a little bit of luxury for a few days," Jade sighs. Unfortunately for Tim, it was also the start of an injury run.

"We were casting for GTs in 25 knots and a strong current," he explains. "Waves were coming from everywhere and Jade wasn't comfortable, but I was adamant I had to catch one."

Tim put everything into his last cast, not realising that his lure had snagged the boat, and the reel rotated then struck his face. The resulting split lip required stitches at Proserpine Hospital on the mainland.

More stitches were needed after a mackerel tooth sliced his leg open, and a grazed knee



Above: Jade's first mackerel on a jig.

Right: It took blood, stitches and hours of hunting to land this GT.



became badly infected while on Hamilton Island, sending Tim back to hospital on an IV drip for five nights. And still he hadn't caught a GT ...

"The curse didn't last long though," he hastens to add. "We picked a better weather window for the next trip out and landed five huge GTs. I hooked the first one in the side, so it was the hardest fight of all, but I wasn't going to let it get away."

Jade particularly liked Magnetic Island off Townsville as it was reminiscent of Rottneest: "Ever since I was a small girl I'd dreamt of living on an island and living off the land. Being able to do that was such a good feeling."

At Cairns, they explored Lake Tinaroo and the Daintree as the weather remained hostile, while Port Douglas delivered a memorable Spanish mackerel.

CAPE CRUSADERS

Port Douglas was temporarily the end of the road for the Extreme, as locals warned that the rugged Cape York track could damage the trailer, even

though it was configured for off-road use. They now regret not taking it, although a ferry ride to Thursday Island and a camping trip provided consolation.

Along the way, they explored areas like Portland Roads, near Lockhart River where they stayed at newly renovated WW2 bunkers with friends, and switched to land-based fishing. The Jardine River, for example, held an abundance of sooty grunter, saratoga and giant freshwater prawns known as cherabin.

At remote Restoration Island they met David Glasheen, author of the book *The Millionaire Castaway*, which details the loss of a \$37 million fortune in 1987 before finding natural riches as the sole inhabitant of a deserted Peninsula island. A kindred spirit, if ever there was one, for Tim and Jade, and even Indie got along well with David's pet dingo.

NEXT ISSUE: Tim, Jade and Indie tackle the Top End from east to west in Part II of their Extreme journey around Australia. Follow them on Facebook and Instagram @hereweareaustralia.

Above: Eliot Falls, Jardine River National Park, Cape York.



PICK-A-BOAT

What kind, and how big? These were the two all-important unknowns when Tim and Jade began mulling over trailerboat candidates for their round-Australia odyssey, yet it soon became obvious they needed something tough to allow beaching in tidal areas and also lightweight for easy towing.

Plate alloy was therefore the answer, which dictated a size of around 6.5m to keep towing weight below two tonnes and fuel costs down.



"Once we began looking at the plate alloy options in this size range, the name Extreme Boats kept coming up as a big green light," he adds. "Catch Fishing Tackle, who is sponsoring our trip, have two Extreme boats and put us on to the guys at the factory in New Zealand."

They ultimately chose the 645 Game King, with its sturdy 5mm bottom and transom, 4mm topsides and deck, and semi-enclosed hardtop. The hull boasts a 20-degree deadrise, downturned chines and flooded keel that make it soft-riding, seaworthy and stable.

In rough waters, it likes to ride at between 18 and 21 knots (33-39km/h), and in good conditions at around 24 knots (45km/h) for maximum efficiency. A Raymarine autopilot is summoned for long runs and it apparently tracks perfectly true while Tim and Jade rig up.

Tim already had a high opinion of the Yamaha F200, the maximum horsepower allowable, noting: "They've been proven over and over on commercial vessels and they're very quiet, light and fuel-efficient."

The Yammie has clocked 380 trouble-free hours in the first six months. Jade says the Kiwi builders were 'phenomenal' in tailoring the 645 for their needs.

"It has the perfect amount of space up front for our bed and the cabin is lockable as well, so it feels really safe and secure," she says. "I've made it like a little cubby house and we're living out of it like a caravan.

"For what we're doing, I wouldn't change a thing." 