

feature

Restoration

WORDS BY KIA KOROPP
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CRAFTING A DREAM

DIY restorations are always a labour of love – usually more labour than love. Most begin with an idea but never get started. Some start but are never completed. Only a very few cross the finish line.



LEFT Jordan (left) and Thomas – they started with a dream that quickly turned into a nightmare, but there's no faulting their resilience. Incredible job guys!!

ne boat, two mates, three years – they form the tripod that's resulted in the unlikely transformation of a sorry, rotting derelict into a gleaming work of art.

Auckland's Thomas Rutter and Jordan Chilcott are tight friends. They met, aged 13, on their first day at Westlake Boys' High School in 2006. As university graduates more than a decade later, they elected to take on a small do-up project to fill their spare time – and settled on a boat restoration.

They found what they thought was the perfect candidate on Trade Me – a 1964 15ft runabout built by Brin Wilson as a one-off design. While her detailed history is unclear, the boat passed through the hands of four or five individuals who all attempted to renovate her. By the time she was listed on Trade Me 50 years later, she was a bare hull rotting in an overgrown Murray's Bay backyard.

With a starting bid of \$1, the new graduates thought they'd pick her up for a handful of pocket change. But they ended up in a bidding war against another buyer – the 'Governor'. When the hammer went down, Thomas and Jordan were \$600 poorer but had found the boat's name – *Governor*.

She was transported to a garage in Milford with the intention of slapping on "a lick of paint, a cheap engine and banging about in the Bays." That idea faded quickly when they pulled off the outer decking and found a rotten transom. 'Quick-fix' morphed into 'massive overall'.

It was then that they looked at the boat's lines and began

toying with extending the hull by five feet and recreating an Italian-style Riva/Chris-Craft. They found a photo of the boat they wanted to replicate and showed it to friends. They always responded with: "Wow, that's beautiful! Is that what she looks like now?" Inevitably, when shown the image of the derelict hull, the mates fell about laughing.

And the scepticism was understandable. Thomas had just started his first fulltime job and Jordan was finishing some remaining coursework. Neither had tackled a project of this scale before and neither had any boatbuilding experience. The boat didn't come with any blueprints.

Still, despite limited time, money and resources, they weren't deterred. Google and YouTube proved invaluable. After countless hours on the internet, taking notes and running calculations, they turned their accrued knowledge into a working concept.

"We did our research and came up with our own answers," says Thomas, "but before proceeding we needed to make sure we were on the right track. That's the point we would 'check-in'."

Checking-in meant deferring to the consultants they pulled into the project along the way. "We got a second opinion on all the fundamental, structural components."

Henleys Propellers & Engineering reviewed their calculations and provided prop and shaft advice. Mike Pearce Boatbuilders helped with the finishing coats of paint and varnish, and Robin (Blue) Hewitt provided endless support for engineering and stainless work advice.

"[Blue] would either say, 'Yes, that's exactly right. Given the



way you are doing this that's the only way you can go ahead' or, equally, he would respond, 'Na, if you do that you'll bugger it all up' and steer us in a different direction. He was our sanity check," says Thomas.

Much of the hardware was sourced from overseas. "Finding all the products and materials was a massive part of the project," says Jordan. "Given our plan for an old-style boat, we needed material reflective of that period."

They spent hours on eBay trolling through listings, looking for parts from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, weighing up cost against quality. "It became a passion craft," Thomas sighs ruefully. "The deeper you get down the hole, the more things you want to do and the more money you need to spend."

The initial time/cost estimate was 10 months with a \$12K budget. As the project's scope increased, so did the time and money required to complete it. "We tried to balance the cost with the look," adds Jordan, "but got to a point where we realised the look took over the project. We'd gotten too far down the hole to save a few bucks here or there."

They learned Blue's advice the hard way: "Take your duration and double it, then double it again. Take your budget and triple it, then forget about it." Sure enough, laughs Jordan, that's pretty much where they ended up.

Though both perfectionists by nature, they were able to find a balance between their different styles, even though the process wasn't always peaceful. "We'd get to a stage where we'd butt heads and end up with a stalemate – so we'd play a game of basketball. The winner made the decision – the loser bought a box of beers."

Working side-by-side for three years, the research was extensive, the labour intensive and they had to learn along

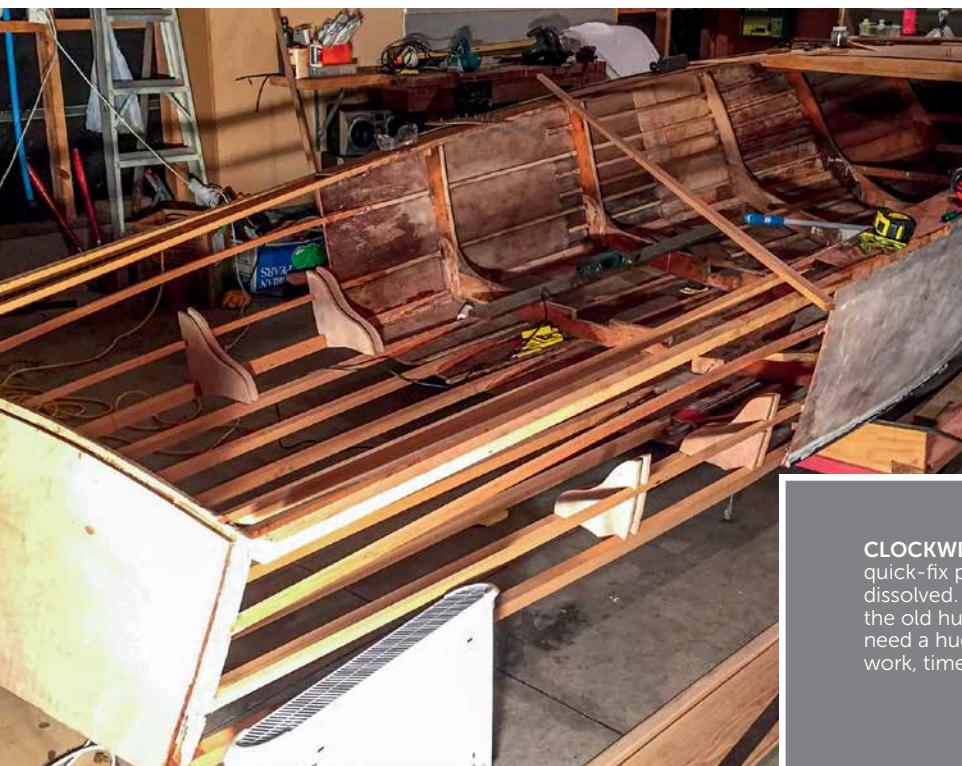
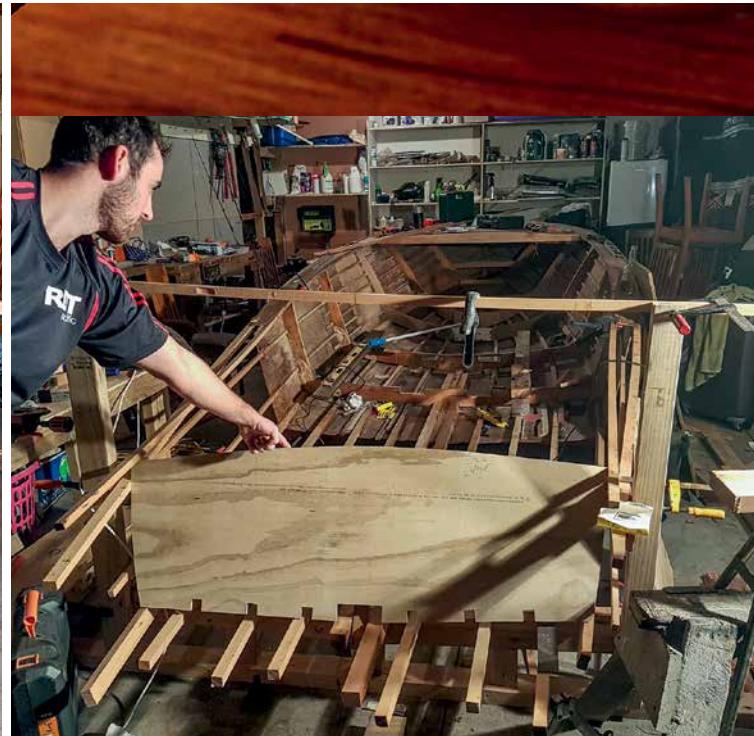
Finding all the products and materials was a massive part of the project.



ABOVE Not many enthusiasts would have believed this derelict was worth saving.

TOP LEFT The completed item – what a transformation.

BOTTOM LEFT The photo that inspired it all – and generated so much derision among friends.



CLOCKWISE The quick-fix plan quickly dissolved. Resurrecting the old hulk would need a huge amount of work, time and money.





ABOVE "With this wee dram I name thee Governor..."



the way. "If we'd done it from plans we'd have worked from the inside out," explains Thomas, "but because we were doing everything by reverse engineering, we had to go from the outside in."

The external construction used sapele mahogany, teak and maple, which they cut and milled themselves. Sanding the hull was the most labour-intensive part of the project – it had the pair hunched over in a garage shorter than their height for four months, four times a week.

"There were times when we were covered head to toe in dust, looking like ghosts, and we'd look at each other and say, 'When is this going to finish – this is just stupid!'" They went through periods working every night for weeks, but then hit a threshold and they could close the garage door and walk away.

Once the extended hull was structurally sound and the first round of primer applied, they took the boat to Milford Marina and dropped her in the water to work out where the waterline would sit with the engine installed. Buckets of water emulated the engine's weight. Several more months went by – laying the deck, finishing all the woodwork and mountings, fitting the engine bearers, installing the seats.

And then – a near disaster...

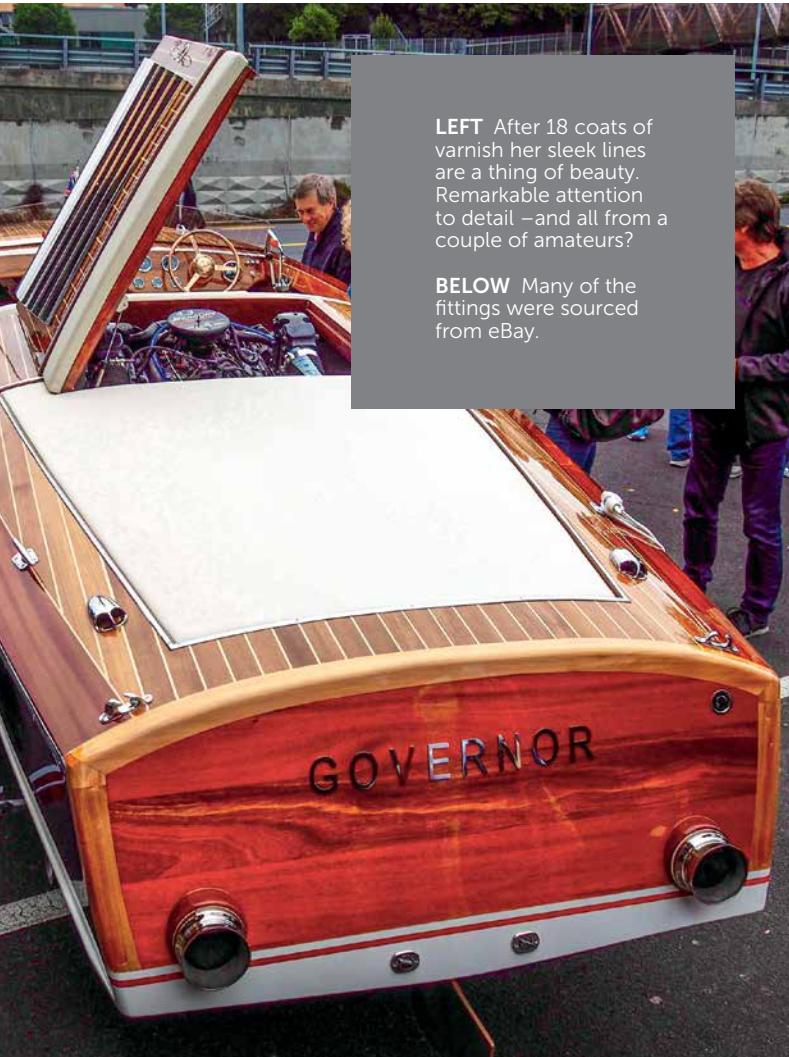
Before the boat was painted they took her for a second water

test – with the hardware installed – for a final waterline check. Backing down the ramp with the boat untied, a sudden stomp on the brakes sent the boat rocketing off the trailer, bouncing off the concrete ramp into the water and drifting out into the middle of Lake Pupuke.

With only a slab of tape covering the two holes in the hull – one for the rudder and one for the prop shaft – there was controlled panic as Thomas swam after the drifting boat with visions of their nearly-completed project ending as a shipwreck at the bottom of the lake. Luckily, the tape held and they were able to get her back ashore, much to the amusement of the gathered audience.

They found an affordable engine in a Christchurch mechanic's garage – a 2015 4.3L V6 Mercruiser TKS 220hp – about 80% complete. "We knew nothing about engines and more knowledgeable friends would ask, 'but where is this part?' and we'd ring the seller and ask him," recalls Thomas. After a flurry of phone calls and heated conversations, the engine was eventually pulled together.

But after all the sweat, tears and laughter – it all paid off. *Governor* wears 18 coats of paint and varnish. The engine was operational – and with the seats and electronics installed, Thomas and Jordan finally stepped back to admire what they'd



LEFT After 18 coats of varnish her sleek lines are a thing of beauty. Remarkable attention to detail – and all from a couple of amateurs?

BELOW Many of the fittings were sourced from eBay.

accomplished. "Absolutely amazing. Pretty cool to get the boat out on the water and actually enjoy something that's been nothing but hard work over the past three years."

The boys also want to thank Thomas' father, Owen Rutter, for all his help during the project.

Ironically, now that *Governor*'s complete, they've run short on time to enjoy her. Jordan's now working in Sydney. Thomas has numerous work commitments, so neither will have the opportunity to use the boat. So they plan to sell her – with the hope of buying her back one day.

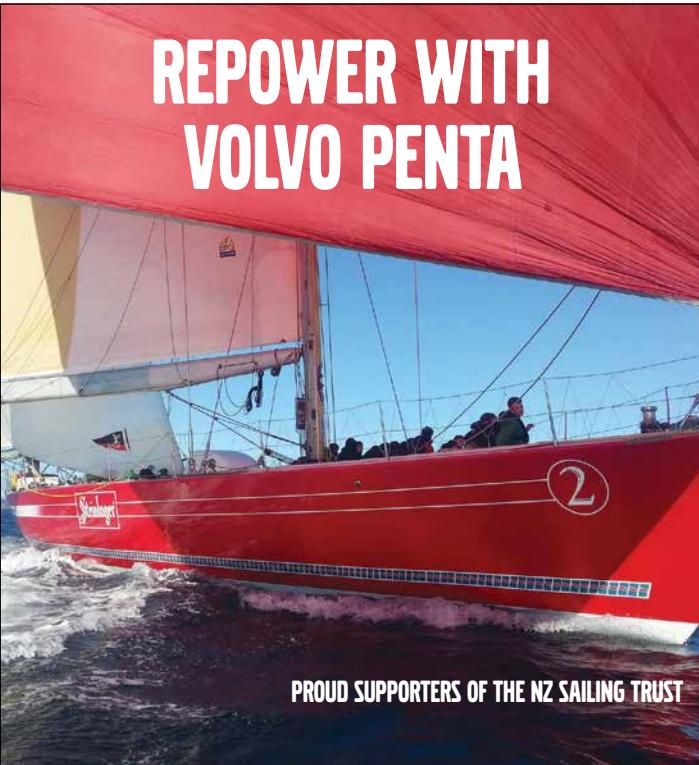
Both are pragmatic about this. "It is a bummer to sell her," confesses Jordan, "but it's been a great ride. We were interested in pushing ourselves to see what we could achieve – the learning process has been the most rewarding aspect of the project."

Watching them at the boat launch, surrounded by proud parents, admiring friends and curious onlookers, it must feel like sweet justice to be able to stand among the same people who kept asking, "So, how long did you say this was going to take?"

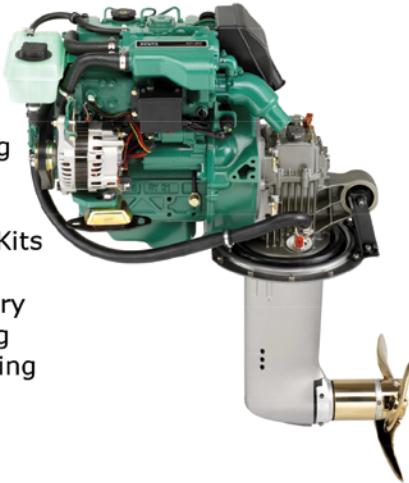
"It took us a long time to get here," says Jordan, "but we're proud of what we've achieved."

And so they should be! **BNZ**

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