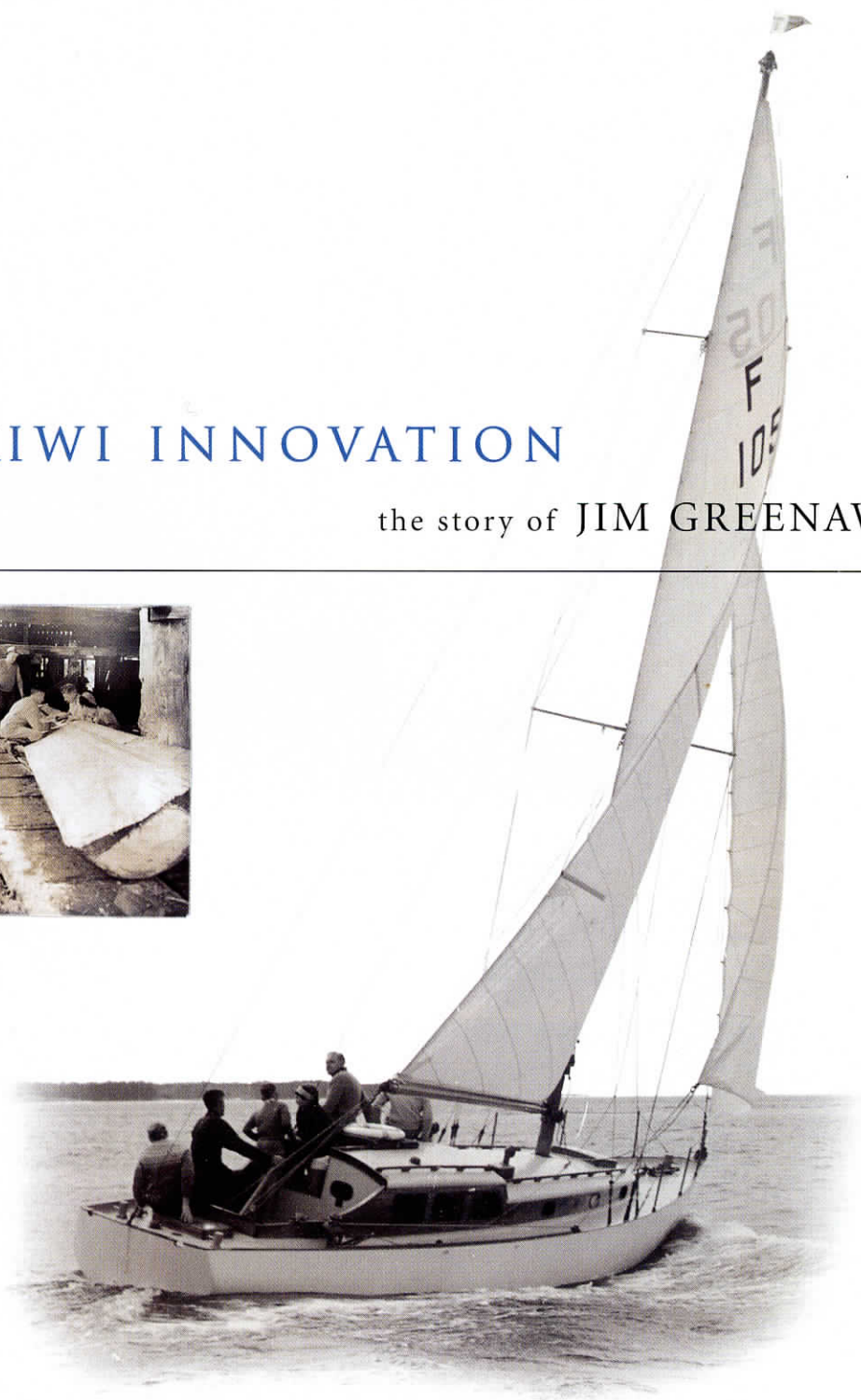


# KIWI INNOVATION

the story of JIM GREENAWAY

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STORY BY rob greenaway







ONE OF THE GREATEST ABILITIES  
OF NEW ZEALANDERS IS THEIR  
ABILITY TO BE ABLE TO MAKE DO  
WITH MATERIALS THEY HAVE AT HAND.  
THERE ARE AMAZING EXAMPLES OF  
KIWI INGENUITY IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE.

Bill Hamilton put together the Hamilton Jet on his farm in Ocean River and revolutionised river travel. Richard Pearce designed his own airplane independently of the Wright Brothers, and almost in the same year, on his farm near Temuka. If he hadn't crashed into a hedge, he might have made international history. It's prevalent in some of our inventions too - like the paper clip. Armed with the Kiwi cure-all for fixing anything - number eight fencing wire - Kiwis are renowned for having the ability to get on with the job with whatever equipment happens to be lying around.

Jim Greenaway comes from the same mould. In his case the passion is yachts, and his story represents very accurately the Kiwi ability to make pretty much anything anywhere, from the materials at hand.

Jim is currently in his 70s and although boats nearly killed him several times, they made the Second World War bearable, they found him a wife and a family and in his words, they saved him from being a wealthy man. At least in monetary terms.

He started boat-building from a young age, with an ambitious project to skipper the first square-rigged sailing vessel in Matapihi, a small farming community across the harbour from Tauranga. He was about ten at the time and had at his disposal a four-wheeled trolley, a large wet paddock, a chaff sack, some salvaged bailing twine, a few lengths of tea tree, a raging westerly, and a surprisingly co-operative sister.

He accelerated across the home paddock in what might have been this country's first land yacht. The rough ground caused the lower yard-arm of his contraption to frequently dig into the soil and flip the yacht over. His older sister Beth would assist by dragging the trolley to windward after each exhilarating run, and after several modifications a few

records - but surprisingly few bones - were broken. Intelligently, he rapidly moved from accepting the risk of concussion as part of yachting, to accepting the risk of drowning.

This was the beginning of a lifetime habit.

His next vessel was a tin boat, constructed from a sheet of corrugated iron laboriously hammered flat and bent into the shape of a Canadian canoe. Two pieces of fencing batten formed the stem and stern post, but it was soon evident that a sail would not assist passage. A tea tree paddle enabled Jim to effectively explore Tauranga harbour. Little did he know that 20 years later he would be winning local races on the same piece of water in his own beautifully built 33ft kauri sloop.

Before then, he had to learn how to sail. During the school holidays Jim stayed with an Uncle in Auckland and spent much of his time at the Wallace Street Beach pestering a chap, Toby Riley, who hired out dinghies

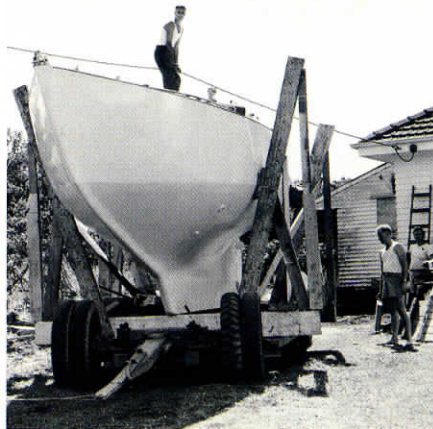
for free rides. He was reasonably successful, but there were no sails on Riley's boats.

It was about this time that the 18ft M Class yachts were very popular, and very fast. On the same beach a local family stored their racing yacht, the Mercedes. The same pestering trick Jim had tried on Mr Riley fell on deaf ears. But Jim was desperate for some sea experience and resorted to stowing away under the foredeck of the yacht, covering himself with sails. The family was quite amused the first time, but not so happy the second so that avenue of training closed.

Jim had no choice but to become a boat builder. On a grassy slope in the yard of an old boat building shed Jim discovered an abandoned 12ft clinker dinghy with a large wattle tree growing through the hull. He plucked up his courage and asked the owner if he could buy the wreck. He replied, 'Take it away.'

After felling the tree, Jim replaced almost every board on the boat, using the rotten planks as patterns, and his sister as a painter.

Of course, the dinghy did not have a sail, so Jim kept his eye out for a replacement. Shortly he spotted an advertisement for a 16ft Mullety at Mission Bay. These are low decked, big sailed, heavy yachts and are ideal inshore vessels. Jim hitch-hiked over and offered the owner his clinker dinghy in exchange. The owner didn't take Jim seriously until he rowed the dinghy all the way from Herne Bay, a distance of about 13 kilometres, to show it off. The total cost of the exchange was ten bob and the dinghy. This left Jim with a Mullety in Mission





Bay and no sailing experience, beside piloting a four wheeled trolley in the home paddock.

He'd done a lot of reading though, and the reality was pretty much like the theory. He was also lucky to have picked a calm day for his first sail.

Again Jim had to replace virtually every board on the boat. Once completed, he firmly embedded the sailing bug in his soul by sailing around Waitemata Harbour and the Hauraki Gulf.

By now he was working as a storeman in a hardware warehouse in Auckland. The war was on and although he applied to join the forces several times, his employers kept him back as a member of an essential industry. He now understands how lucky he was. By the time he enlisted, the focus of New Zealand's assistance with the war had moved from Europe to the Pacific, where survival was slightly more likely.

Jim hauled the Mullety out near Cox's Creek, leaving it under the watchful eye of an elderly gent living on a derelict launch, and joined the services as an engineer. He never sailed the Mullety again, and eventually sold it to a friend for 45 pounds.

Jim spent short stints in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and finally landed in the Solomons on Guadalcanal. The Japanese had just been routed and skeletons and wrecked equipment littered the landscape.

There's a classic army saying I've heard a few times: 'Hurry up and wait.' This applied to Jim's division, and once they were established on the island, there was plenty of free time, which he occupied by - you guessed it - building a boat. This time he started from scratch, using a 12 foot 6 inch Z Class design and the dunnage of war, which included plenty of Canadian redwood. These inch thick planks made for heavy construction, but considering he'd be sailing through coral reefs it was probably fortunate.

His army camp published a periodical newspaper called 'The Rotator'. In its November issue of 1943 you will find the following entry:

#### YACHTING SEASON OPENS

*Star achievement of all things made around camp is Jim Greenaway's yacht - a masterpiece admired by all. Interviewed by*

*our reporter, Jim said that his yacht showed a triumph of mind over material - he made it all out of his own head and has enough wood left over for another - and that answers all queries as to where the material came from! Confidentially, we think that improvisation and the peculiar ability of the \*Sapper - the power of acquiring things - played a major part... Founder of the Guadalcanal Yacht Club, Jim is challenging all-comers to a race around Savo Island. The date of his sailing for New Zealand is a close secret, and he wishes it known that he is NOT taking any passengers, thank you.*

(\*Sapper: = Kiwi soldier of World War 2)

Jim still won't let on about where the sails came from.

It appears Jim took to sailing the boat before building any oars, and this caused a spot of bother. A gentle breeze took him and a companion some distance down the coast one afternoon and left them becalmed near evening. It wasn't until midnight that the wind returned. In the meantime they had been missed at that evening's mess and all ships in the area had been warned to keep an eye out. An American destroyer located them in what Jim and his colleague assumed was an attempt to run them down.

The destroyer did not report seeing them and the camp was up until daybreak still looking for them when they returned. Not much came of the incident, apart from an order to build some oars.

An American army doctor bought the yacht off Jim, which was a better option than leaving it to rot when the unit moved on. Soon after, an 18ft lifeboat washed ashore with the bow on one side

completely burnt out. This was an ideal replacement and Jim teamed up with two other Sappers to do it up.

Jim was moved to Nissan Island to help build a new runway, and left the lifeboat behind. He had just completed building a ten foot dinghy in a deserted native village when he developed malaria for the third time. Boat building was finished for the duration of the war and he was soon back in New Zealand being interviewed by a selection panel for a rehabilitation loan for a balloted farm. He was successful, and while waiting for a ballot he worked on a couple of other farms to gain more experience. During that time, 15 hour days and recurring bouts of malaria made him think twice

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about a farming career. He wanted something where he could go boating at will, rather than waiting until he was 70. He swapped his farm loan for a subsidised three year cabinet-making apprenticeship back in Tauranga. He completed that plus one more year with a second firm, and then set up his own business.

Actually, he was busy setting up his business while still completing the apprenticeship. He used a rehab loan to purchase two adjacent sections, building a house on one and a workshop on the other, and the hull of a 19ft motor sailor in between. And his bosses always wondered why he wasn't very keen on working overtime!

These were post-war days and materials were hard to come by. Jim had to either wait for sufficient timber to build his home and business to be provided by commercial mills, or he had to locate some other materials. Fortunately, a friend owned a block of native bush and he sold Jim six large rimu trees, two rewa rewa and two tanekaha that were still standing at the time.

The 19 foot motor sailor took some time to complete. Business was too successful and there was simply not enough time for recreation. A lot of his spare time went into building his own woodworking machinery, including a bandsaw, bench saw and belt sander.

Eventually the hull was dragged out from behind a bush and with the help of his brother, Allan, the Naiad was completed and launched. For a time, recreation became a little more important than work.

Over summer they cruised from Tauranga to Great Mercury and Great Barrier Islands. On Great Mercury they met another sailing team, and on the wharf in Great Mercury Island's main bay, Jim met a very good looking 17 year old sailor, Lesley Innis. Jim was 32 and he had to keep sailing to Mercury for another seven years until she was old enough to marry. He had never previously spent much time chasing women because, as he says, he was simply too busy.

In that time he sold the Naiad, re-built another boat, sold that, and over a four year period, built his dream boat, the *Aries*, an exquisite Bert Woolacott Kathryn Anne design, 33 foot Bermuda sloop. The *Aries* had been on his mind for some time, but first, he had to find some

timber and a whole range of other essential fittings. Although it was the 1950s, materials were still scarce.

He happened to be wandering through a saw mill in Thames and spotted a 34 foot kauri log and could see a yacht in it. The cut timber took two years to dry.

Three tons of lead was also required, and this was extremely hard to come by. Jim bought a wrecked yacht off the NZ Insurance Company. The *Starloch* was in several metres of water just off Whale Island, near Whakatane. Although Jim thought it would be a 'piece of cake' to lift

the lead, it required five days of hard work, and almost resulted in the wrecking of his own boat of the day – the *Rawhiti* – on Mount Maunganui beach. It's an epic story in itself.

For several years he continued to court Lesley, built the yacht (and a large shed to house it), and ran his business. He was successful on all three accounts. The *Aries* was launched in 1958, and that summer on the wharf on Great Mercury Island, where Jim and Lesley had first met, he proposed and she accepted.

The *Aries* proved a capable and adaptable vessel, winning for two years the Tauranga Yacht Club's premier racing event, the prestigious Colin Norris Gold Cup. It also housed Jim and Lesley's family for two years when they temporarily closed the business and lived on board, sailing and working around the Bay of Islands and Whangarei. It was considered an odd thing to do at the time - the 1960s - and occasionally they'd attract a bit of publicity as 'water gypsies', appearing once on the cover of the Northern Advocate. The family at that stage consisted of two daughters - Kristen and Clio.

Lesley became pregnant for the third time, and they settled for a while up the Opua Channel in the Bay of Islands. Jim worked as a 'seaguller' on the Opua Wharf, unloading the freight ships which used to berth there. He also did a spot of work for a commercial boat yard and found the odd bit of cabinetmaking, until their third child was born. Both Jim and Lesley tell the story that their son was born 'on the boat' to make a good story better. I know the truth. My birth certificate says I was born onshore, in Kawakawa. My parents have always been very good at making almost anything from the materials at hand.

