

The Launching of *La Chica* by Annie Hill



La Chica on the move

La Chica is one of the few boats that survived Hurricane Luis, in St Maarten, back in the 90s. Although she had been securely moored and survived the first onslaught of the storm, after the eye had passed and the wind had started to blow from the opposite direction, she found herself in the direct path of all those boats that had so far survived and not gone aground. For many of these boats, the 180° wind shift was just too much and they dragged their ground tackle; several landed on top of *La Chica* causing her, too, to drag. They ended up in a pile on the beach and the result was a hull with one side severely deformed and the other with a couple of deep dents. However, there were no holes, and once the other boats had been dragged off, she floated again. There was, of course, a certain amount of damage. To his chagrin, Paul discovered that a plate and two of his favourite wine glasses had been broken.

It was in this state that *La Chica* arrived in New Zealand, and in due course, Paul decided it was time to give her a bit of a refit. She was hauled out at Johnson Yachts International at Pine Harbour,

which is where Paul was working at the time. The owner of the business took one look at her and deciding that she was lowering the tone of his establishment, ordered that the worst side should be cut out and re-plated. As he offered to assist both materially and financially in this matter, it was hard for Paul to refuse. Of course, like all of us, once the boat was on the hard he got a bit carried away. He'd always fancied the idea of a

junk rig, and this was the ideal time to fit one; of course this would require some alteration of the interior, but there were one or two things here that he wanted to change; and it would be nice, wouldn't it, to have a sheltered deck house from which to watch the world go by? All this could be knocked over in a few months ...

Seven years later, by which time the boat had been moved a couple of times and nearly everybody apart from Paul and Graham Johnson, had decided that *La Chica* was a permanent static sculpture, she was ready to be launched once again. There were the usual last minute delays with low-loader and crane, but once at Pine Harbour again, the cradle that had been welded to *La Chica's* hull so many years ago was cut off, the steel cleaned and painted and the boat readied for launching. On Saturday, 6th April 2013, the gods smiled, the planets were aligned and smiling guests started to arrive ready to see *La Chica* once again take to the water. There were friends of Paul and his wife, a number of people who had helped



A few minutes more and La Chica will be back where she belongs



La Chica now well and truly launched with a big splash!

lay poised once more to enter her natural element. Paul jumped aboard, followed by his wife, Jiao, wielding the mandatory bottle of bubbly. She made her speech and smiled at the assembled multitude, but her elegant performance was somewhat marred by the recalcitrance of the champagne bottle, which refused to smash for several blows. But it made a satisfying spray when it finally did!

Ceremonies completed, *La Chica* was lowered into the water and after a quick survey by her proud owner revealed no leaks, more bottles of bubbly were broached, food produced and there followed a party worthy of such a long-awaited event, with the die-hards staying late into the night.

Paul in his lengthy refit and stalwarts of the JRA (Annie Hill, Marcus Raimon, Roger Scott and David Webb). All the last-minute jobs had been completed and in due course, the travel lift lumbered

over and gently lifted *La Chica* into the air.

Accompanied by a camera- and telephone-waving crowd, the boat made her last overland voyage and



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BUILDER : NELCO MARINE, South Africa
 BUILD DATE: 1986
 REGISTRATION: BRITISH SSR
 Length 54' 06" Beam 14' 03" Draft 5' 00"
 Fuel 800 litres Fresh Water 1300 litres
 Engine Perkins 4236 80 HP inboard engine
 Onboard 3.5 kva single cylinder diesel generator
 Vetus 95 Kgf electric bow thruster controlled by rocker switch at helm
 Constructed in steel with timber fit out, long keel with fenestrated rudder.
 Large, comfortable & well equipped wheelhouse measuring 11' 00" x 8' 00"
 Eight berths in four cabins, two toilets with showers.
 Calorifier 32 litres hot water tank with immersion heater and heat exchanger from engine
 Twin 400 litre fuel tanks port and starboard sides of engine room.
 2.5 HP 4 Stroke Yamaha outboard
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 Two tenders
 Plus loads more..... Currently lying in Karpaz Gate Marina, Cyprus

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