



BART ROBERTS



(o n b o a r d >



Not many refits are as extensive, bold and imaginative as the one undertaken by the owner of **Bart Roberts**

David Pelly takes a look around this remarkable vessel which started off life as a Canadian Coastguard icebreaker. Photography by Martin Fine



Eye-catching details abound in the main deck saloon: a unique herringbone brickwork floor, a large stone fireplace complete with cannon balls and a self-



Eye-catching details abound in the main deck saloon: a unique herringbone brickwork floor, a large stone fireplace complete with cannon balls and a self-playing Yamaha grand, are all watched over by pirate Bartholemew Roberts



Of all the refit projects that have been featured in *Boat International* none has been so big, so extensive and so ambitious as the conversion of the 80 metre Canadian Coastguard icebreaker *Narubal* into the charter yacht *Bart Roberts*. Not only because it has been a project of daunting complexity and scope, but equally

because it has all been done by direct labour rather than by a shipyard.

It was the former airline pilot Arnie Gemino who had the vision to take on this extraordinary project and bring it to a successful conclusion. Gemino had dabbled in yacht conversion and refit in his native Florida for several years as a sideline

from running an airline. He was actually looking for something to convert for his own use when he heard about *Narubal*, which was about to be put up for sale by the Canadian Coastguard.

Only a government could manage to spend public money on such a grand scale. Built by Canadian Vickers at Montreal in 1963 as an



ice-breaker/supply vessel, *Narwhal* operated in this role until 1986 when she was given a massive refit costing 20 million Canadian dollars to enable her to take on the new tasks of survey, search and rescue and buoy tender, operating on the Pacific north-west coast. This refit was virtually a total rebuild that included new main engines and auxiliaries, new systems throughout and

provision of a helicopter landing pad and telescopic hangar. Two years ago, it was decided that she was surplus to requirements and put up for sale by auction.

Although she was a far larger vessel than *Gemino* had sought, the potential of *Narwhal* seemed limitless and he could not resist bidding for her. Somewhat to his astonishment he found he had won the

bidding war against the Russian government for possession of the ship. Following the sale, the Canadian Coastguard asked *Gemino* if he wanted the spares, a whole warehouse of them, and in due course it handed over at least \$1 million worth for which it had no further use. One of the special appeals of *Narwhal* was that she had been built with the relatively shallow draught of 3.6 metres –



Relax in the grandeur of the master stateroom, with his-and-hers bathrooms, which like all ten staterooms, is named after a pirate. Or you may choose to settle into a comfortable double seat in the yacht's cinema for the latest movie



roughly the same as a typical 50 metre motor yacht rather than an 80 metre ship.

Realising that he now possessed something that far exceeded the practicality of his personal use, Gemino's company, Tradepower International Inc (a marine and aviation service company), decided to convert the ship into a world class explorer vessel for charter and/or sale. His vision was

to transform her into a luxury charter yacht with a pirate theme, to cruise primarily in the Caribbean. But as a charter yacht she would be limited to 12 paying passengers and could never be economic, so it was apparent that this would have to be increased to at least 20, which made SOLAS approval and licensing as a passenger vessel unavoidable. Gemino decided to register the vessel in the Cayman







(o n b o a r d >

Islands, not only because of its highly respected British flag, but because the island's government proved genuinely enthusiastic and supportive of what was to be the very first commercial passenger vessel on its registry. *Bart Roberts* is currently configured to carry 20 passengers but is licensed for up to 36 under SOLAS rules, which are far more exacting than the MCA code for commercial yachts.

The first step was to hire a project manager, Swedish-Canadian naval architect Lennart Edstrom, an immensely experienced and versatile engineer who had worked mainly in the oil industry. Then came the question of where to do the job and Edstrom suggested that instead of handing the whole thing over to a shipyard, they could form their own team to do the job with the help of various sub-contractors. For the refit site he suggested Victoria, on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. This attractive old town is nowadays mainly a tourist destination, but until recently it had shipyards with many well-qualified workers. A vacant berth was found at the disused Ro-Ro ferry terminal at Ogden Point and a small village of temporary offices and workshops sprang up alongside the ship.

Edstrom found no difficulty in hiring a hard-working and talented team, skilled in all trades from steelwork, engineering, plumbing, electrics and woodwork to painting and at the peak of activity had as many as 100 people on the payroll. Gemino, who as a pilot already had an engineering background in addition to considerable experience of yacht refit work, conceptualised the changes that Edstrom then turned into engineering drawings.

The first task was to transform this sturdy, utilitarian ship into something a little more romantic looking. The principal alteration was to increase the outreach of the bow and to clean up the profile so that the bulwark dropped down just once from the fo'c'sle to the main deck level. A great deal of clutter and unnecessary equipment was removed, including the massive derrick that had been used to hoist navigation buoys on board. However, the A-frame mast that supported it has been retained, as it seemed to be an essential part of the vessel's character. The superstructure was then extensively re-modelled to provide a sun deck and Portuguese bridges on two levels.

A big question was what to do about the hold, which offered a large volume of storage

Jeff Maltby's mural decorates the magnificent dining room with its vast oak table providing dining for 20 guests



space below the main deck, covered by a large hatch above. One desirable feature was a swimming pool but with this in place, the storage area would be inaccessible. The highly ingenious solution was to install the pool liner in a steel frame which can be lowered down into the hold and then shifted to one side on rollers. On the opposite side there is space for a standard shipping container holding all kinds of stores, and still leaving plenty more space for smaller items. When required, the empty 6x3 metre pool is raised up to deck level and locked into place before being filled with crystal-clear water from the ship's watermakers.

On either side of the main hatch, tracks are fixed to the deck allowing chocks to be



moved into place for various tenders. For a start, these include a 15.2 metre Thriller Cat, carrying 25 passengers at up to 70mph, an 11.6 metre aluminium landing craft and a general purpose RIB. The landing craft, which is powered by two 350hp turbo diesels, can carry a vast amount of weight and is fendered so it can operate as a pusher tug to ease *Bart Roberts* in and out of tight moorings. These boats and other sports equipment are launched by the impressive new 30 tonne telescopic crane that can reach out 23.8 metres from the ship's side. There are two other cranes on board – one aft to handle stores and engine room parts and a smaller one for the emergency boat.

Access to the sea can be a problem with a

high-freeboard vessel, so a flap-down boarding platform has been built on the port side with stairs down from the deck. The whole assembly is enclosed by a watertight compartment to eliminate the chance of accident, so that the yacht cannot flood if the door is left open. The heli-deck and hangar is an incredible facility that can be brought into use any time a charterer requires the use of an aircraft. In recent years the yacht has operated up to 85 take-offs or landings per day and is fitted with a 18,925 litre jet refuelling system that could be brought back into use if the need arose. The heated and air-conditioned hangar is in three sections that extend over an aircraft once it is secured and the rotors folded.

Steel decks are unappealing but teak ones would be prohibitively costly on such a large vessel, so all the outside decks have been sheathed with mature Douglas fir planking, which is both attractive and practical. With newly-painted black topsides plus white upper-works with crossed cutlasses on the funnel, *Bart Roberts* now looks the part as 'the biggest of the baddest'.

Thanks to a complete modernisation in 1986 and constant in-service maintenance, the ship's engineering was found to be in very good order and it was not necessary to strip out and replace wiring and piping. The Ruston main engines and Baudouin generators have been fully zero-timed and new features such as computer monitoring have been added. Completely new systems include a massive air-conditioning plant of 240,000 Btu (120 tonne) capacity, serving the whole ship with ducted air. As an example of commercial rather than yacht standards, the Omin 400hp bowthruster has its own dedicated diesel engine installed in the forepeak.

The all-stainless steel galley used to serve 160 meals per day meets every safety and sanitary requirement for a passenger ship. To bring it back into full use only called for some minor updating and cleaning. A totally new luxury facility that the coastguards did not have appears in the shape of a high-speed passenger lift serving all six decks.

One of the biggest engineering challenges was to create a really big open space for the main deck saloon and dining room. Once a large floor area is opened up, it requires correspondingly large headroom and it was decided to specify 3.2 metres throughout the saloon which has a floor area of 186 square metres. To achieve this, two deck levels were incorporated into one right across the aft portion of the superstructure, with a very substantial deck-beam to support the span.

Yet even this impressive construction pales



A circular dance floor, normally covered by a rug, is a feature of the saloon. If you are feeling thirsty visit the treasure infested bar, but don't be tempted to get too close to the fish tank, it's full of piranhas



in comparison with the interior styling. Gemino decided from the outset that the pirate theme would only work if it was exciting but not tacky. Forget theme parks – think only in terms of five-star hotels. In other words, all materials and workmanship should be first class and the overall effect would be both luxurious and fun.

The first – and in some ways the most – dramatic effect was achieved by flooring the whole of the saloon and dining room with real antique bricks set in a herringbone pattern with a broad semi-circle enclosing the centre of the room. To avoid sacrificing precious headroom, each of the several thousand bricks was carefully sliced in half and then set in cement that gradually gets thicker towards the sides of the room in order to eliminate the camber of the steel deck and create a level floor.

The main eye-catching feature of the saloon is a vast brick and stone fireplace with a mantelpiece made from a real bronze cannon sliced lengthways. A total of 14 tonnes of stone went into the fireplace and each individual rock was drilled and fitted with a tie-bar to hold it in place. Above this monumental hearth hangs a portrait of the rascally *Bart Roberts*, a pirate who actually existed and is alleged to have captured 400 ships during a four year reign of terror in the 18th-century. The painting is one of a large



(on board >

number specially commissioned from Jeff Maltby, including two large murals. Each guest cabin is named after a pirate, with the relevant portrait to match.

The further delights of this saloon include a group of comfortable chairs around a kettle-drum table, a bar with a select 'treasure trove' set into a resin top, and a Yamaha self-playing grand piano that can be linked to the main sound system to produce a majestic piano and orchestra ensemble. Near the doors to the aft deck, sound and disco lights are concentrated on the circular hardwood dance floor while, at the touch of a button, a golden pole slides down from the ceiling to the centre of the compass rose to encourage the more energetic dancers.

On the port side, a large fish tank weighing four tonnes and containing live piranha fish acts as a room divider between the saloon and dining room, where an oak table of truly magnanimous proportions provides dining for at least 20 people. Other ways of passing the time indoors include the cinema forward of the saloon on the starboard side, a gymnasium, a nightclub, a games room with pool table and a casino.

The guest accommodation starts with a magnificent master suite that stretches right across the forward part of the superstructure and has its own private balcony, or Portuguese bridge, in addition to his-and-hers en suite bathrooms and a walk-in wardrobe. On the same level, and also with outside views, are four more en suite cabins of various shapes and sizes. Five more staterooms are



Two fine examples of the guest staterooms, each with its own individual characteristics. Metal and wood bedsteads have been used along with luxurious fabrics, and to complete the authentic theme of the ship, a pirate looks on



(on board >



making many engineering parts. This is a ship that was built to look after herself.

Chartering aboard *Bart Roberts* will be so different from a normal yacht charter that it is difficult to compare it with anything. With her cinema and casino and white-knuckle ride tenders, she is more like an exclusive resort cut adrift. And in spite

of her pirate theme and Caribbean atmosphere, she is built and equipped to go anywhere in the world, hot or cold. What is undeniable is that converting her in this way has been an act of extraordinary vision that deserves to succeed.

Bart Roberts is offered for sale and charter through Camper & Nicholsons International. □

BART ROBERTS

LOA

80.77m

LWL

67m

Beam

12.8m

Draught

3.8m

Displacement

2.5 tonnes

Construction

Steel

Engines

2 x Ruston 6RKC,

2,000hp at

800rpm

Generators

3 x Baudouin 250kW,

1 x 200kW emergency

Fuel capacity

416,394 litres

Water capacity

22,144 litres

Speed (max)

13 knots

Range at 12 knots

10,000nm

Classification

Lloyds *100 A1 LMC,

SOLAS Commercial Code

Refit naval architect

Lennart Edstrom

Refit interior design

Tradepower International

& Karen Bamford

Artwork

Jeff Maltby

Charter/for sale:

CNI charter management

division/CNI Palm Beach

Builder/year

Canadian Vickers/1963

Refit company/year

Tradepower International

Inc/2002. PO Box 11107,

West Palm Beach, FL 33419,

USA Tel:+1 561 691 8816

Fax:+1 561 691 1543

placed two decks below and are fitted out to the same high standard, although without overboard views. All the furniture has been beautifully made in a Spanish colonial style, as if *Bart Roberts* himself had garnered it on some of his raids.

Deck space is available on several levels, topped by the sundeck above the bridge which offers a large spa pool, a bar, seating and lounging areas and tremendous views thanks to the elevation of 15.2 metres above sea level. Aft of the saloon there is a large, semicircular deck with tables and seating for casual outdoor dining and this area can be screened off and either heated or air-conditioned depending on the climate.

The working areas of the ship are far more extensive than on any yacht. The captain and up to five officers have cabins abaft the bridge, while up to 18 crew can be accommodated in a series of cabins under the raised foredeck. One deck below there is a spacious crew lounge and fully equipped laundry. Down again to a vast area of storage including the computer-indexed parts store which holds at least two spares for virtually every engineering item on board.

The engine room is huge with plenty of room to stroll around the 2,000hp Ruston main engines and numerous auxiliaries. The three main generators have their own compartment, aft of which is a machine shop with tools capable of repairing or even

