

Keels, Ballast and Offshore Cruising



Swanson 42 at the start of Darwin Ambon Race 1985

Whether cruising as a way of life or a means to visit interesting places, seaworthy keel boats have inspired generations of cruisers to voyage across oceans.

Cruising yachts with fixed keel ballast have many advantages over their shoal draft counterparts when passage making. Unlike Captain Cook's Endeavour which was only able to sail across or downwind, keel boats can sail hard to weather and are not at risk of the winds, seas and gales upending the vessel, due to shifting ballast.

Keels are fixed external ballast that work with the sails to provide forward motion and stability for passage making. The keel on an ocean going cruising yacht helps reduce leeway enabling the vessel to move in a forward direction. The physics being that the aerodynamic effect of the sails and the hydrodynamic effects of the keel are working against each other.

The keel also works as a balance for the mast and sails, thus making the well found cruising boat untipable, due to pressure from the sails. As the vessel heels wind spills from the sails, the pressure lessens and the vessel rights itself, through the keel acting as a fulcrum. This action also enables the vessel to cut through waves when a swell is running.

Especially important on long voyages, the keel also functions to help balance the motion of the vessel in a seaway resulting in smooth sailing.

Fixed keel boats are designed across all lengths with the most popular cruising length for small crews being in the 25' -50' range. Regardless of the length chosen the vessel must be well found, well stowed and recommended seasons for passage making respected.

Tin Can Bay Boat Sales has a range of good cruising yachts designed by innovative cruising keel boat designers, namely: Illingworth and Primrose (Top Hat 25), John Biddlecombe (Citation 34), Peter Joubert (Cape Barren Goose 37) and the Swanson Bros (Swanson 42).



For more details see www.tincanbayboatsales.com.au