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ON THE WATER

Conversion gives peace of mind

Game-fishing skipper makes Wellcraft 270 a 'show boat' with the addition of the latest in electronic equipment



BARRY WISEMAN

ASHRAM is a Hindu term for a spiritual hermitage: a place to find solace, tranquillity and learning. A place close to nature . . . and what better than out on the ocean.

For fishing enthusiast Rhys Whittred, who also happens to be a long-serving member of the Perth Game Fishing Club, naming his boat Ashram perfectly represented his love of the sea.

Ashram is a 2008 Wellcraft 270 Coastal, a bluewater fishing vessel imported from the US and Rhys bought it locally from the owner who wasn't using it as much as he would have liked.

An active and very enthusiastic member of the PGFC for the past 21 years, Rhys has always skippered other members' boats, winning them many club team awards. Plus he has numerous personal awards for scoring the highest points during a fishing season. He has served on the club committee for 19 years and in recent times was awarded life membership for his services.

In all his years with the PGFC he has never owned a boat of his

own until recently and, while the Wellcraft was well equipped with tackle drawers, rod holders, bait well, galley and sleeping for six, changes were required and Rhys' major focus was at the helm.

The skipper's main job during a game-fishing tournament is to find the fish — the team's success is only as good as the person at the wheel. Nature will provide some clues to where the fish are but a good skipper will know how to use the bank of navigation instruments in front of him. Never before has so much information been available to improve and enhance a crew's boating experience and their safety at sea.

Rhys is one of those fishers who seems to be able to "talk" to the fish and seldom does he come home without adding to the club points ladder or a feed for the table.

The newly named Ashram was in for a major re-think up front.

It just happens that Rhys is electronics sales manager for Taylor Marine at Henderson, a company that provides Furuno electronics to about 70 per cent of WA's commercial marine sector, from the oil-and-gas industry to fishing. Sea rescue groups and Water Police vessels are all fitted with specialised Furuno equipment.

Working to a budget, Ashram was not only in a position to be fitted with the latest in advanced navigational equipment but here was the opportunity to customise a working game-fishing (and family) vessel with Furuno and other complementary brand electronics that Taylor Marine could use as a "show boat". Customers would be able to see in situ what they might have been considering for their own craft.

Excitement in the project grew and it wasn't long before fellow Taylor Marine colleagues, technicians Simon Gie, Jason Barrett and Russell King, got involved.

Word spread among a number of the company's suppliers, with MaxSea 2-D/3-D Plot computer-



Ashram is a game-fishing (and family) vessel customised with the latest electronics. Picture: Rhys Whittred

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based navigation coming on board along with Icom, Fusion Sound, Hella Australia, Reelax the outrigger people, and All Marine Services where partner Sangeeta works.

Rhys knew what he wanted but making it fit was another challenge. The original helm was not big enough.

Enter Ben Punch from Fibrelite Boats at O'Connor, a fully qualified shipwright who not only builds his own range of fibreglass boats but is an expert at refits and customisation in timber or glass.

He remodeled the overhead console in the hardtop and it is now big enough to accommodate flush-mounted instruments including a 12-inch Furuno FCV-1150 LCD sounder, a GPS co-ordinate screen and Autopilot.

The helm console also needed work to remove the old instruments and accommodate a 9-inch NavNet TimeZero Touch screen unit with multi-functional display, plus a 12-inch monitor for the MaxSea marine computer software system.

All these gadgets are integrated and Mr Punch solved the cabling problem by installing a heavy-



Taylor Marine technician Simon Gie, left, and Rhys Whittred. Picture: Barry Wiseman

duty stainless-steel support between the top and bottom consoles which also doubles as a grab post while climbing through the split windscreen to get to the foredeck.

Kevin Betty from Hella Australia then fitted low-powered LED lights for night operations, including blue underwater units to attract fresh baitfish.

Ashram made her public debut at a recent PGFC open day at the Fremantle annex of the Royal Perth Yacht Club and attracted much attention. She is sure to bring peace of mind to those who fish from her.

Rebuilt consoles accommodate the latest Furuno electronics. Picture: Barry Wiseman



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