

Motoring

Two dogs and the best Deal

You would reckon that when a bloke like Keith Williams was asked what was the best boat he ever had, he would name one of the luxury motor yachts he has owned, such as his current 115-footer (35m) *Phoenix II*.

But get ready for a surprise. The Gold Coast property tycoon's favourite boat is a little 34-foot (10m) party cat – not one of those party pontoon boats, but a genuine catamaran hull custom built by Steve Shaw's Powercat factory at Caboolture.

The affinity for the style of boat started when he bought one of Powercat's 7.6m party cats to replace a centre console boat to take friends and, more importantly, his beloved Billy, a loveable, lively schnauzer, to Wavebreak Island for the day.

About two years ago, Billy fell off the centre console boat at Wavebreak, and the then 74-year-old Williams dived to rescue him only to be caught under the boat when it was rocked violently by a wave, crushing his chest.

A more stable boat was needed and when Billy was joined by his half-brother Barney, the 7.6m Powercat party cat was

the go. But it wasn't long before it became too small for Keith, wife Thea, Billy and Barney, so they started looking for a bigger model.

After talking to Steve Shaw at the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show about two years ago, it was decided to build a bigger party cat based on the Powercat 34-foot (10m) offshore hull.

Two were ordered to make it a worthwhile proposition for the factory – one for use on the Broadwater, the other for use at Port Hinchinbrook, another of Keith's enterprises. But one of Keith's friends, Tony, also wanted a boat, so the second craft went to him and the changes made to Keith's vessel were also added to Tony's.

Billy and Barney love the boat, known as *The Deal*. As soon as they see Keith and Thea put on their boat shoes, they know that they are off to their favourite spot – the sand bar at Wavebreak Island.

The cat is powered by a couple of quiet 250hp Suzuki outboards that push the boat at a genuine 45 knots.

The big advantage of the Powercat for Keith and Thea is it doesn't need crew like the bigger boat. The bow can be run on to



Keith on board with the crew, Billy and Barney

the beach with no need to drop anchors and go ashore in a dinghy. The custom-built cat is basically Powercat's 34-foot offshore hull, with a hard top and refinements, such as a flexi-teak floor and two additional glass panels in front of the helm station to keep the wind out – although the whole boat can be enclosed with clears.

The driver's seat is the same as the helm seat on *Phoenix II*. The wrap-around lounge seats at the bow and stern are finished in a leather-look vinyl, with a soft 'small-dog'-proof back, plus there's a barbecue plate and fridge. A feature is the enclosed head compartment with standing room situated in front of the helm.

The craft accommodates 14 people on a

day out, but it would be rare for so many to be onboard, as it is the very special domain of Keith, Thea and the boys.

The design also makes it very stable and secure for Billy and Barney, who are well contained in the hull, where there is no possibility of Billy repeating his 'dog overboard' trick.

There also was talk of fitting a retractable gangway on the bow for the dogs to run up and down, and to save lifting them on to the boat – but it proved a little too difficult. The boys are so 'full of beans' and love the freedom of the sand spit, that it would also be a losing battle to get them on board via a gangplank.

– KEVAN WOLFE