BRENT McKenzie had fairly typical needs when researching his next yacht. He wanted a good performer that would be competitive in club twilights and the occasional coastal race. And he needed a comfortable cruiser that his wife would enjoy during weekends in Auckland’s Hauraki Gulf and on summer holidays to the Bay of Islands or Great Barrier. Usually such diverse needs would involve compromise, but Brent reckons with the Salona 41 he made exactly the right choice. He’s got a racer that is near the front of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron’s B Division Wednesday night fleet and finished fifth in its division and eighth overall of the monohulls in the Coastal Classic. And he is still married.

STRONG AND LIGHT

As with most boat buyers, one of Brent’s prime considerations was safety. “The hull is strong because they use vacuum infusion, but it’s also light. It’s rated at 7.1 tonnes, which is light for a 40 footer. Here in Auckland the conditions vary a lot. It could be 5 knots, it could be 25 knots. You need a boat that will stand up,” he said.

The Salonas are made in Croatia by a company which also produces high-quality auto parts. They use a stainless steel grid which is tied into the chainplates and keel, with all key elements easily visible for regular checks. Both fore and aft bulkheads are watertight.

Brent says that one of the attractions with the Salona was the high level of customisation that was possible. He chose the racing keel option, which has a bulb (designed by currently “hot” designer Jason Ker) instead of the standard lead over a steel skeleton.

“I’m really pleased with the keel choice,” he says. “That’s one of the key reasons we’re so fast.”

LEFT: The Salona 41 tracks perfectly with a light touch on the wheel.
ONE OF THE MANY THINGS THAT IMPRESSED ME ABOUT THE BOAT WAS HOW QUICKLY SHE WAS CONVERTED FROM CRUISING MODE INTO A RACER.
RACING SAILS

Brent chose to buy his sails locally from the Norths loft. The main is 3DL double-taffeta and the No 1 and 2 headsails are also 3DL. Then there’s a J3 for cruising and a heavy-air J4. The rig is high-aspect, with a 140% genoa and the headsails can be furled rather than dropped on deck.

“Normally the boat won’t point quite as high as some of the pure racers, but we’ve got inboard tweakers fitted and that gives us good angles,” Brent says.

We were sailing in very light winds, but I was impressed with how quickly Zealous picked up speed in the puffs. Brent says he regularly gets 7.5 knots of boatspeed upwind in 28 knots apparent.

“She’s nice to sail downwind as well, very quiet with flat water going out the back. Our top speed so far has been 14.6 knots, but we haven’t been out in the Gulf in 30 knots yet.”

Brent chose the carbon prodder option, which looks to have been modelled on the X-Yachts version, so he can fly a gennaker and a spinnaker. This accounts for the need to have eight or nine crew on board when racing round the cans. Recently they did a peel during racing and everyone “had a bit on”.

The crew is a good mix of experience and youth and Brent says the young guys enjoy racing the Salona, which tells him he’s got the racing side pretty well worked out.

CRUISING COMFORT

Despite the need for plenty of crew to stay at the front of B division, when cruising Brent says the boat is easily handled by two.

Over Christmas he had his wife, his 15-year-old daughter and 76-year-old mother on board for a trip to Great Barrier Island, about 50 miles off the coast. He says there was plenty of room down below and two people could handle the sailing side with ease.
He has upgraded two of the Harken self-tailing winches to electric and the recessed mainsheet system is readily to hand, so sail control is simple. The speed of the boat also means cruising trips are completed quickly.

“On Anniversary weekend we took her to Kawau Island (just north of Auckland) and there was a 30 knot southerly blowing on the Monday when it was time to come home. We put a reef in the main, stuck the No 4 up and passed all the racing boats on the way in,” Brent said.

The twin wheels make access through the cockpit easy and the use of teak makes the whole above-deck area look very presentable. There are a number of different options for closing off the transom, including a hinged barrier, but Brent says he likes the open stern and just uses lifelines.

One of the many things that impressed me about the boat was how quickly she was converted from cruising mode into a racer. A fold-out table in the cockpit was quickly removed by unscrewing four o-bolts and the main stays permanently on the boom in a boom bag which has been cleverly designed to roll up when sailing, leaving very little windage.

A fully-inflated dinghy sits on the bow but is quickly craned ashore off one of the jib halyards.

FULLY EQUIPPED

There are four cabin options offered with the Salona 41. Because he cruises double-handed, Brent chose the two cabin option which gives a large main cabin in the forepeak, another double berth aft and one decent-sized head, located behind the nav station.

There are stainless steel grab rails coming down the companionway and along the full length of the cabin, making safe transit of the cabin easy.

The main cabin layout is traditional, with a good-sized galley to port and the nav station to starboard, with a fold-up table for dining below when in port which can be converted into another berth.

The nav seat has no side-bracing which would probably drop you on the floor when on starboard tack, but Brent says the chartplotter at the wheel means he doesn’t spend much time in the nav station when underway.

There are water tanks fore and aft, which obviously remain empty when racing, and the head has a 40 litre holding tank. Brent says it’s a bit small for extended cruising, but it’s about the only thing he would do differently.
There is excellent stowage throughout the boat, with a big hanging locker in the main cabin, plenty of cupboard space in the galley and main cabin and more-than-adequate shelving in the head, which also has a wet locker.

ALL ROUND EXCELLENCE

It’s a shame we had such light conditions for my day out on Zealous, but I know from sailing other Salona models that they handle high winds well. As I said, the 41 picked up her skirts immediately when there was any pressure and she tracked perfectly with just a very light touch on the wheel. Under asymmetric spinnaker we flew along and again she was very easy to control.

It’s always good to spend time with an owner who loves his boat and there was no doubt that Brent McKenzie thinks he made the right choice when he bought the Salona 41.

The final test came when we had her back at the dock. In just over three hours, the fridge had cooled the beers to a perfect temperature for celebrating a very pleasant day on Auckland Harbour.

Salona is represented in Australia by US Yachts (www.usyachts.com.au) and in New Zealand by Hybrid Boats (www.hybridboats.co.nz) although Brent McKenzie is also promoting the brand in the hope of getting some one-design racing (salonapromotions.co.nz). You can view a video of Zealous racing at the Bay of Islands Regatta at www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFSPmMq5EI.

SPECIFICATIONS

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www.usyachts.com.au