

Farr 400 – Pretty purposeful – Part II

by John Curnow on 8 Mar 2012



Giddy up! Were off and loving it with the kite up. - Farr 400 John Curnow

This weekend, Matt Allen's new Farr 400 will debut at the Helly Hansen Sydney Harbour Regatta. In Part I, of this article, Dee Smith, who is the Project Consultant for the pretty purposeful Farr 400, explained in terrific detail, firstly the creation of the boat and then the strict class controls that will be applied to these vessels. Now in Part II, we get to hear what owner, Matt Allen, has to say and go for the all important sail.

Matt appreciated the Joe Adams-esque comment about the slab sides, which are very evident between the first and second stanchion. Of course, what these do is allow the for'ard volume that Dee spoke of earlier. 'It is strong, well made, and has a high level of finish', said Matt of his newest

toy, but what of a vessel that comes along to virtually sacrifice the F40.

'There's a huge opening for fast fun boats at around 40 feet for a number of reasons. Everyone has been having a blast at 52, so it is only now appearing in the 40. This is a bit bizarre when you think that in the old days the development actually took place in the ¼ and ½ tonners, now it is in the 50s, so it's almost reverse engineering.

'The IRC rule is not really encouraging light, fast and fun vessels at 45 feet or less.'

'With this vessel, we have the opportunity to be in a skiff based scenario and also undertake Category Two races in. I think One Design is clearly the way to go with this vessel. The F40 was ahead of its time in design and also the owner/driver rule.

'The F400 should become the new regime, as it is an easy boat to sail, is modern and fast, especially in the light airs. It powers up quickly and being narrowish, there is not a lot of form stability, so yes; we'll be changing gears quite quickly.

'It is beautifully balanced and when you consider we sail on Sydney Harbour, which has an average of 12 knot winds, well, the F400 will be dangerously fast in that.'

The move from symmetrical to asymmetrical kites may well be one of the most notable differences between the two vessels, but the newer is significantly faster than the older. There is 25% more sail area, less displacement, less wetted surface area and it accelerates faster.

Like the F40, the F400 does have a big rudder, however. Downhill, the new boat is truly incomparable, having made 27 knots off San Francisco

recently. The tall freeboard allows for near standing room for the 6+ footer and that volume in the bow will keep you up. Any boat that is fast is going to make you wet from spray, but with the F400 you will not be a submarine.



[Very much designed to be sailed to her heeling angles. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)

Matt sees a great opportunity for the boat with the Brisbane to Gladstone race, as '...traditionally you have some light uphill work followed by a reach or run on Good Friday'. Given his smile, I think the race organisers can expect to see this distinctive vessel on the start line.

The new Ichi Ban has spinnakers by North Sails and Ian Short provided the working sails. 'We use Ian's GPX sails up in Asia. They last well in the sun and hold their shape without being affected by the temperatures and we have had no issues with de-lamination. They handle the shape of the sail being adjusted and as we expect to do a lot of sail experiences with this

vessel, we think they are the go for us', said Matt.

Expanding from his latest vessel, to the F400 class and sailing in general, you get some good insights from one of Yachting Australia's Board members.

Given global economic factors, it is likely that Australia will be a One Design haven for the F400 or MC38 or Melges 32.

'The F400 can accommodate an older crew easily and it has come out of the best design house of the last 30 years. It is a high quality boat with great systems, just like the F40, but 16 years further along the tech curve.' Matt explains.

The F400 is a strict One Design, but it also makes a statement on the way the IRC rule operates. 'If a F400 is a TP Xeroxed down in terms of ratios, it is strange how it will not get the conditions to beat the TP under IRC. The proposal for two numbers, one for windward/leewards and the other for passage could well be answer, but it is interesting that the TP does not get punished for it's off the breeze pace.

'ORCi may well be the victor from all this. Fast fun boats at 35, 40, 45 and 50 feet must be the key. 49er and Moth sailors do not want to go into a First 40 and not everyone can run a TP program, given the logistics and expense of 15 people and that you need a new light and medium jib fairly regularly. Equally, there are not a lot of souls doing it for a prolonged period of time.

The smaller vessels mean you have less crew to arrange, but the GP42 has not really achieved the goal. With a fast and fun 40 something, you might be wet, but you'll be safer and have a better time than the displacement vessels are able to offer.'

With his Yachting Australia hat on, Matt says, 'We want to keep people in the sport and get even more in to the game. Our medium term view is to grow the whole sport and these fast, fun smaller boats are a really important factor in that equation, given their fun/cost quotient.'

So what of going for a sail on board the new F400 and finding out about that much sought after fun factor?

Well, yes there is the very visible reverse sheer and those solid chines. She certainly has more volume than the incredible MC38 and the white paint down below also allows you to not feel like you're stepping in to Aladdin's cave.

There's the acceleration/deceleration experience, too. As you go through the tacks you watch as it goes from high sevens to low sixes and then back up, all inside about 15 seconds, which not only shows off the power of the vessel, but also those clean, simple deck layouts and crew working patterns that Dee was talking about.



[From mid-sevens to low-eights, there's a groove to suit with the Farr 400. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)

What is really interesting, however, is that there is this groove from 32 to say 38 degrees Apparent Wind Angle allows you to work through waves and different slots.

The pace and numbers are not always the same as what you may have just seen, so the ability to allow yourself to run up when you need to and then fall off a smidgeon and not hamper yourself is a great thing to see unfold.

Dee says it best, 'She'll do 7.5 to 8.2 knots and you choose the mode. It just feels so good high that you get a little addicted, yet adjust your thinking and go a bit lower and you pick up anything up to ½ a knot. To my mind, 7.9 knots seems to be the best spot.'

Surefooted is a good way to describe the feeling you get on board. The

F400 likes the pace - it's not smashing the waves or twitching about, it is just going that's the breeze and this is the number you're going to get. You certainly never wonder about power. The headsail stays up for the trip downhill and is trimmed usually by the bowman. It can be outboard sheeted, cleated off or go around the lazy winch too. It's sort of like an instantaneous staysail, so to speak.



[Dee Smith grabs a bit of Vitamin D before we go sailing. Solid chines very evident in hull form. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)

In 12 knots of breeze, we went down to seven knots from genuine 11's during the gybe and it was all disposed of and back up to pace, inside something like 15 seconds. Such is the power of the rig and poise of the hull. You never felt uncomfortable or nervous. The F400 is all about its purpose.

So is it a perfect yacht for the job? Could well be, but it had to be massaged into that after the first few were already out of the mould.

Ordinarily, that would be a cause for a certain amount of alarm, but as a result of the sailing talent surrounding the project and the dedication of the one builder who'll be making all the F400s, it's actually a positive outcome.

As an example, the keel is probably the most major element to undergo modification.

Ichi Ban is the first to leave the factory with the new one already installed. The others have had theirs fitted retrospectively. The first keels were too fat and did not move in the lifting slot that well. This was as a result of a problem in the mould, which would require a new one to be constructed anyway.

Concurrently, sailors like Dee, Matt and Grant Simmer had found that the vessel needed to have the mast raked all the way back and be sheeted out before it all fell in to place.

Dee asked for the new foil to be shaped with hollow in the back end and not have laminar flow. The result was more lift at each angle - 20% at 10 degrees and no more drag created.

The balance of the profile was moved slightly forward and now it grabs out of tacks and masts are back more forward in their slot, so you have more room to play. 'I asked for the changes on a Monday, by Tuesday they were done and then the new mould was ready in Dubai the next Monday', said Dee.

'The for'ard hatch is getting some tweaks to help with small leaks and the traveller control is receiving a little attention – all at no cost to owner.

'The boat will then be blessed and they'll all come out the same. This is a rarity in One Design, where you have the integrity of the boat, builder and

designer all lined up.

'This is all about backing the strengths from the various pedigrees of the parties involved and the vision for what the boat is to do. Post-construction, we've been able to incorporate major improvements from sailors' input, without being restricted because of ongoing production. Premier has the capacity to administer the full retro-fit.

'It's been an incredibly fun project for me – do the same as I do for custom boats, make sure it all works and it is right – yet see it unfold over numerous craft. Some of the things I did before the boat was ready and others after. Just a tremendous experience.' said Dee

One small F400 Rule has just been changed, as well as allowing combined crew weight to go to 750kg, and that is to allow for an A4 to be part of the package in addition to the A2 and A3, as it was felt they did not overlap enough.

'If you break A2 you're not dead in the race now, as the A4 will be the same size, just heavier. We want the crews to be able to sail our Ferrari comfortably and not be intimidated', Dee said.

Now whether you like Barbara Streisand or not, it doesn't really matter. What you will enjoy, however, is any sail you are lucky enough to get on the wonderful and very purposeful, Farr 400.

This weekend Ichi Ban will be sailing against The Cone of Silence Jamie Neil's McConaghy MC38 in the Sydney Harbour regatta.

As one local wag commented, the conversation might go like this

'Excuse me. Do you have a match? No. I don't smoke, but I can tell you

where there'll be some fireworks!'



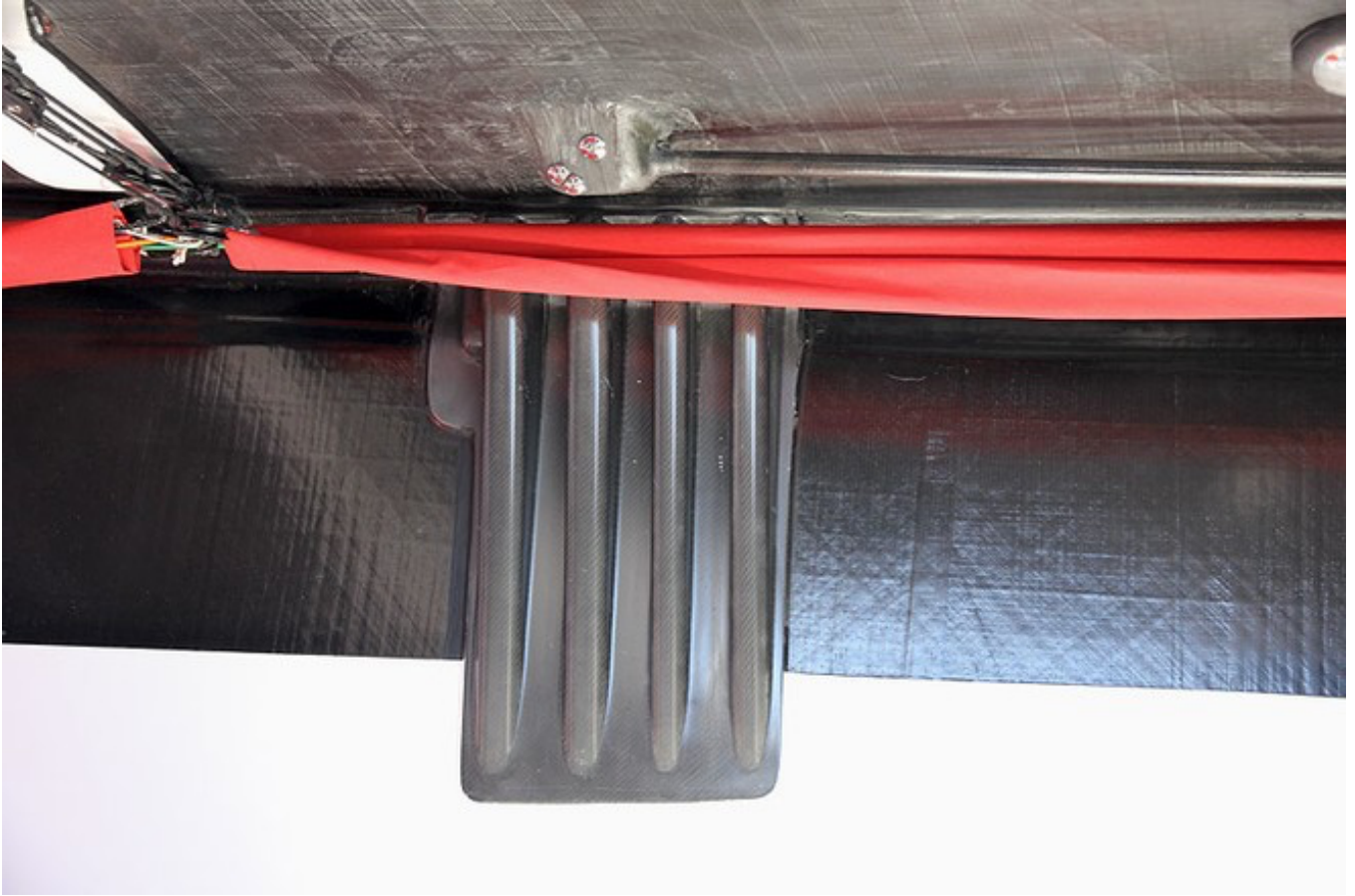
[Easy to reach and easy to use, which you'll need with the big mainsail. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](https://www.sail-world.com/Australia/Farr-400---Pretty-purposeful---Part-II/-94662?source=google)



[Offset office and companionway are a really good feature. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)



[All business for getting the kite down and back out again. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)



[Chainplate detail down below. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)



[No problem turning wind in to pace with the Farr 400. - Farr 400 © John Curnow](#)

Farr 400 website

As a final note then, many thanks to the crew on the day and especially John 'Hanger' Harris for being very generous of his time and driving me whilst I got some shots. Cheers to a new friend.