

A dream job out on the water



Last updated 13:57 12/03/2014
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Just before Christmas Matt Dobson's dream became reality when he bought a custom-built 8 metre boat and established Black Pearl Charters.

Fisherman Matt Dobson grew up chasing anything with fins.

He's had 200-250 kilogram tuna swimming under the back of his boat and he's even caught 250kg plus giant bluefin tuna.

And while this self-professed man of the sea may never get sick of fishing, one thing he's never developed a real taste for is, ironically, fish.

"I know, people always laugh when I tell them that. One of my best mates is a chef and I've tried fish every which way - I don't know whether it's the taste or texture or what, but it just doesn't do anything for me!

"I met a vegetarian hunter once. He loved his hunting but didn't eat meat; I'm a fisherman who doesn't like fish. I just enjoy the experience of catching a fish," he laughs.

Mr Dobson spent more than 20 years out on the water with the aim of one day owning his own boat and running fishing charters.

Just before Christmas that dream became reality when he bought a custom-built 8 metre boat and established Black Pearl Charters.

"I'm all up and running. I have the certificate for nine passengers to the 12-mile territorial limit which means I can go out from Cape Palliser right around to New Plymouth.

"I like to fish no more than six at any one time. I've based myself mostly out of Mana over summer and I've been targeting kingfish, tuna and snapper. It's been going very well," he says.

Mr Dobson's goal is to tap into the type of fishing that is often overlooked around Wellington's waters: "The fun, light tackle stuff" as well as jigging and trolling.

The Black Pearl itself is Mr Dobson's first "real" boat - he bought a jetboat while working in the South Island and he has a 3.5 metre inflatable he purchased 13 years ago, but at 8 metres the Pearl is the biggest he's ever owned.

"This really is a dream come true. I've talked about it for so long, it's just nice to finally be able to do it. It's a big leap, a huge amount of money to invest, but I'm sure it'll all pay off and if it doesn't I'll still have the boat."

In between the charter trips Mr Dobson intends to continue his day job as a captain on the East By West Ferry, the harbour ferry service that makes up to 16 trips from Wellington Harbour to Eastbourne daily.

As a part-timer he is assigned five shifts, each of five hours, each week, including weekends and evenings, when he ferries passengers between Queens Wharf to Eastbourne and Days Bay via Matiu/Somes Island.

He took up the job last June and he's sailed in plenty of rough weather since then.

"There's been some rough sailings - I got caught out when one of the big southerlies hit last year, in 80 knot winds, but I got all the passengers home safe and sound. And I've sailed in swells of two metres, which is pretty big for a small boat in the harbour."

Rough weather doesn't faze Mr Dobson though. Along with his lifetime of fishing knowledge he has more than two decades' worth of experience to call on from working on or around boats too.

It all began back in primary school when he got hooked on fishing.

"No-one in my family fished, so dad would take me down to the wharf. He'd sit and read his book and I taught myself. We'd go to Waterloo Wharf, which is now the police boat wharf at Queens Wharf."

In the school holidays his family would holiday in Taupo, his dad would play golf and Mr Dobson would take to the water to fish for trout.

Eventually he joined the now defunct Port Nicholson's Sports Fishing Club, where he met the late Paul Hayward, who took him under his wing.

"He shared his local knowledge with me - the good fishing spots around the harbour and Wellington area.

"It's true, a lot of fishermen don't tell their secrets, but I believe if you share a little bit of information you get a little bit back too. There's plenty of fish out there!"

Upon leaving school Mr Dobson took up a butcher's apprenticeship at a Johnsonville supermarket but chopping the tip of his thumb off put paid to that.

"That job certainly helped me learn how to clean and fillet fish, and I put the money into my little 13ft plywood dinghy. I spent every spare moment restoring that," he remembers fondly.

"I used to take it down to Makara and around the harbour. It was my pride and joy. Then someone stole it - my trailer got a puncture one day so I left it at Makara and went back the next week to grab it and it wasn't there."

Post-butchery, Mr Dobson spent much of his time around the likes of Tauranga and the Coromandel both trout fishing and land-based fishing.

"I disappeared for weeks on end up north. I told my parents I was looking for work but I fished a lot – I had a little bit of money saved up and then I was unemployed for about a year."

Mr Dobson had always wanted to work on charter fishing boats. He even kept a note of his hours on friends' boats to push his case, but in the meantime he wound up working as one of Armourguard's Walkwise officers in Wellington.

"I was one of the originals. We did a lot of patrols. I was with them for about six years, though I was always fishing when I could."

He then landed a job with a Wellington charter operator in his first commercial fishing role.

"I ended up doing three seasons there. It's where I got all my commercial sea time, enough to go and get my skipper's ticket, about 2750 hours in total."

Tauranga and his skipper's ticket beckoned, and after being immersed in all things nautical he emerged qualified five weeks later.

He returned to Wellington to work on another charter boat but a call from a woman on his course saw him relocate to Queenstown to take on a skipper's job as a jetboat fishing guide for a few months.

"We had the only consent to fish out of a jetboat in a few of the rivers down there, so I'd take people down the river, park up and go for a walk, catch some trout, go for a zoom - it was good fun and I ended up there for two years."

After that Mr Dobson successfully applied for a skipper's job on charter boats taking snapper/kingfish and marlin trips in the Bay of Islands, where he remained for another two years.

"I struggled so much last winter I decided I didn't want to do another one up there, so I packed up and came down here after I got the East By West job.

"It was advertised as part-time, which has given me a chance to set up Black Pearl Charters. I'd spent a year writing a business plan for my own small boat fishing charter in Wellington. There's always been a market for it."

As all fishermen know, there's nothing like the buzz of catching a fish, says Mr Dobson.

"It's certainly a rush. It's just a good reward, and I'll keep a few fish for my family. It's never hard to give away fresh fillets by any means. I get a buzz from putting them back as well.

"Half the time catching a fish is a bonus, to be honest. I've seen more things out in the ocean than people dream about - I've had orcas come up and roll over and tap their fins on the side of the boat, I've jumped in the water with dolphins just off the side of my boat.

"I just love the laidback lifestyle. I don't do stress. I really don't feel like I've worked a day in many, many years!"

For more information go to:

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