



South Passage sails home

The sail-training schooner inspires keen sailors of all ages, by **Fiona Harper**

Returning to Queensland waters after a sojourn south to Sydney, gaff-rigged schooner South Passage's usual home port is at Manly Harbour in Brisbane.

Though she's been scooting around Sydney Harbour over the summer season, it's terrific to see her return to her origins. Named after the passage between North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands and celebrating her 20th birthday next year, South Passage is only marginally older than most of the crew who voyage on her.

Her core purpose is as a sail-training vessel; one that she does exceptionally well thanks to her user-friendly schooner rig balanced by a jib and staysail.

While many sail-training vessels require that crew work aloft as part of the experience, a terrifying element for many, all South Passage's sails are handled from deck level. With just four sails, easily handled across two masts, crewmembers as young as 14 are welcomed onboard.

But it's not just for the young ones. South Passage offers a number of voyages to the general public. Some are day-long harbour sails while others are coastal passages on various legs up and down the east coast.

With a crew of three professionals keeping crew safe and well-nourished, apart from the



skipper, sailing master and cook, watch leaders are all volunteers.

Indeed, the desire to put something back into the community was the purpose behind Simon and Marilyn Steenland's original South Passage concept.

Captain Bill Fenelon, an ocean-going ships officer says it's all about allowing the ship to bring out the best in people, to watch them change as their confidence grows.

"To see the result of kids working in a team is the best part of this job," he explains. "It usually takes them a few days to get over their seasickness, but once they do they start getting to know one another and their enthusiasm increases. You see them wanting to learn and take on responsibility."

More info: www.southpassage.org.au

ABOVE: South Passage in the Southport seaway (Stuart Webber/South Passage).

TOP LEFT: Joyful helming struggle (Fiona Harper).

