

“It seems that everything I ever had, I had to build or rebuild.”

—Rick Horne

A commercial fisherman who lives in Bay Center, Washington, Horne has built or rebuilt boats, a truck, and even the off-the-grid house he lives in with his wife, Jazz.

Story by DWIGHT CASWELL

Horne was born on “the island,” the high part of Bay Center that is almost an island in the middle of Willapa Bay (the other part is known as “the flatlands”). “I was the only white guy in my peer group,” he says. “The others were Chinook and Chehalis. I didn’t care for playing cowboys and Indians.”

At the age of 12, Horne went to Kodiak, Alaska, with his father to fish for shrimp. That wasn’t unusual. “Before we had bicycles,” Horne says, “we had skiffs and outboards. That’s all we had.”

After high school he was shrimp fishing full time along the coast from Alaska south, and by the 1980s he had bought his own boat and was gillnetting, crabbing and trolling. Then, in 1993 he built another boat, the Dou-

ble Eagle, beginning with a derelict hull. “It was lying there in the mud,” Jazz remembers, “I used to see it every day, and then it disappeared. I never thought that years later I would be married on that boat.”

The 56-foot hull came with an engine but no wiring, no rudder, and not much of anything else a commercial fishing boat needs. But after five months of work, the Double Eagle was launched. “It was kind of a major undertaking,” Horne says.

He fished tuna in the Double Eagle, crossing the Pacific as far as the Hawaiian Islands. “That boat was dialed in” Horne says, “and it fished pretty well. It was a helluva good sea boat, too, and we got into some pretty severe storms.”

With the cost of fuel rising and fishing “flatlining,” Horne sold the Double Eagle, and with Jazz bought a commer-



Photo by Dwight Caswell

“He’s led a colorful life,” Rick Horne’s wife, Jazz, says, not providing details, “but he’s mellowed over the years.”

cial laundry in Ilwaco, Washington. Not that he’s stopped fishing, he still crews for his old running partner.

Rick and Jazz own a house in Bay Center and had rented it out for years, unfortunately, to drug abusers. When the renters left, there was little left of the place: sinks, appliances and windows removed, plumbing and wiring stripped, walls and floors destroyed. Horne began to rebuild and discovered that he would now be required to run the power underground, and access was difficult. He decided to go off the grid.

The house now has LED lighting that runs off batteries powered by solar panels that are assisted by a generator in the winter. “I just love no PUD bills,” says Horne, “and three months of propane costs me 26 bucks.”

“23 bucks,” Jazz corrects him.

“My biggest bill,” Horne says, “is for the water, and that’s the minimum. Eventually I’m going to get off the water, too.” He envisions another project: rainwater collection on the roof, with the water filtered and stored in cisterns. They may be back on public water during the summer, but rainfall will supply all their needs during the winter.

The project that occupies a lot of Rick Horne’s time these days is rebuilding another boat, the Klick Tat, made in 1939 by Merriman and Sons in Portland as a “custom sedan cruiser.” The previous owner, Horne says, “ran into a gal and became allergic to the boat.”

A sleek 44-footer with “three times



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Rick Horne, right, stands with his wife, Jazz, in front of their off-the-grid house that he built.

the power she needs,” Rick and Jazz took her down the Columbia from Scappoose and across the Columbia and Willapa bars to Bay Center. “She came across both bars like she was slicing butter,” Horne says.

There was a time when Horne had something of a reputation, and there weren’t too many ports where he was welcome. “He’s led a colorful life,” Jazz says, not providing details, “but

he’s mellowed over the years.”

Horne has seen a lot of changes, especially in fishing. “One thing that bothers me,” he says, “is that it used to be that if you looked down Dike Road you’d see a lot of boats. There were 17 of us gillnetting. Now there’s nobody.”

Whatever life throws at him, though, Rick Horne appears to be just the man to find a way to build or rebuild whatever he needs.



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Rick Horne’s latest project is to rebuild the Klick Tat, a custom sedan cruiser made in 1939 by Merriman and Sons in Portland.