
Original
Creators

PIONEERS OF THE INFLATABLE PONTOON

One of the advantages of living in Queensland is the abundance of gorgeous waterways, dams, and lakes. Like many avid boating enthusiasts, Gavin and Lydia Skinner looked forward to their regular visits and boat excursions to the idyllic waters of places like Lake Moogerah and Somerset.

There are two unavoidable annoyances familiar to all boaties – getting onboard covered in mud or scratching the boat's hull. They are minor inconveniences, but finding solutions to these issues would change the couple's lives.

As Lydia explains, it began simply enough. "We love boating, and places like Lake Moogerah are incredibly beautiful. But getting through the mud each time was unpleasant and slightly detracted from the experience."

Soon, her husband Gavin was carrying her, then other family members and friends. "It was partly to be nice and partly to make cleaning the boat easier," he jokes. "But eventually, it became a little annoying." The solution was obvious – buy a portable platform.

"We looked everywhere for a simple pontoon we could bring with us, but there was nothing. So, we decided to make one ourselves," Lydia explains.

This was easier said than done, and the couple spent years in research and development before finding the perfect formula. Finally, in 2013, they launched Big Sky Innovations (BSI) and their first pontoon. Made from PVC horsehair material, it was sturdy, easy to install, and took just 3-4 minutes to inflate and assemble.

They started taking their product out to the lakes. It was an instant hit, with fellow boating enthusiasts wanting to know where they bought the pontoon. With Lydia doing the marketing and Gavin designing, BSI took off.

"We had massive interest from the boating community just from using it," Lydia says. "It was a simple idea that people loved, and everything grew from there."

Demand increased, and soon there were requests for different designs. "People liked the convenience of the pontoon, so we started to design various shapes for



different needs," Gavin explains. "We currently have five types of inflatable pontoons from straight walkways to extendable decks, with more on the way."

Soon, the company was gaining considerable media attention, featuring on QLD Weekender, Morning Sunrise, and outdoor adventure TV programs like Creek to Coast.

The popularity resulted in demand from beyond the boating community. BSI was approached by various industries that saw numerous innovative uses for custom-designed pontoons.

"Our customisable designs have been adapted for use by Olympic Swimming Pools, NSW Wakeboard Association, Polo Australia and more," Lydia says, "but we're most proud of our ongoing involvement with the Great Barrier Reef restoration project." Gavin adds, "We work with Southern Cross University producing inflatable floating structures for scientists helping save the corals of this beautiful wonder of the world. It's really satisfying work."

The success of the enterprise has come as a surprise to both of them. "This started as a simple solution for getting on our boat without the mess and avoiding hull scratches. Now we are helping the Great Barrier Reef," Gavin says. "But our focus is still on providing innovative solutions for the boating community. For example, this summer, we'll be launching our new Y-Ski pontoon for jet skis. It's a lot of fun helping people to 'walk on water'."

www.inflatablepontoons.com.au