



BIFROST, mainyard stowed fore and aft, waiting in the Sulphur Point marina yesterday for a fair breeze. Inset: Owner-skipper Andy Griffiths checks the boat's diesel engine.

Picture: Brad Burch C4249-20

Viking trader plots course for Vancouver

By Dave Blanshard

FISHERMEN operating to the east of New Zealand may rub their eyes in disbelief over the next few days at the sight of a 12th Century square-sailed Viking knaar ploughing across the Pacific.

But they won't be imagining things. The Bifrost is quite real, even if it's a most unusual sight in this part of the world.

Briefly in Touring this week while waiting to clear customs for

Canada, the 15.2m boat is ending a six-month visit to New Zealand as owner-skipper Andy Griffiths sets course for his home in Vancouver.

Bifrost (the name means Rainbow Bridge) was built by Mr Griffiths and a partner in Denmark in 1988 based on known dimensions of knaars (Viking trading ships).

The fibreglass-foam sandwich hull on steel frames is shorter and fatter than the Norse longships used by raiding parties. But knaars

routinely crossed the North Atlantic centuries ago carrying livestock and stores to Danish colonies in Iceland and Greenland.

"There are a few smaller versions that have been built in modern times in Scandinavia," said Mr Griffiths, who describes himself as a professional sailor. "But this is the biggest I know about."

For convenience and comfort of the crew Bifrost is fully decked, rather than half-decked like the an-

cient knaars. It also has a large diesel engine, satellite navigation equipment and other modern conveniences like solar panels and electric fresh water pumps.

is by modern wheel and a conventional central rudder rather than sweep oar.

However, the 28-tonne boat features traditional carved dragon stem and sternposts and relies solely on its single square sail for propulsion at sea.

The boat left Denmark in 1990 and travelled through the Atlantic and Caribbean before crossing the Pacific in stages.

It arrived in New Zealand last spring and has spent the last six months in Whangarei.

Because the square sail rig and lack of keel give poor performance to windward, Mr Griffiths plans to run east along the 40th parallel until he can start heading north with winds on the beam.