



# Boat Test

# Outlook 30 Knots - We Get to Thoroughly Thrash

by Michael Rendle

**S**eaforce Marine has 15 years of experience in designing and manufacturing fibreglass boats. The Fisherman 600 has been built to maximise space specially to suit the enthusiastic fisherman. The boat's handling capability under all conditions has shown it's a soft dry riding hull, which has proven itself against other brands in the rough making it the envy of other boat owners."

So says the specification sheet for the boat. It sounds like any other piece of advertising copy you've read for any brand on the market. However in the case of the Seaforce we would show every word to be true by the end of a testing weekend.

This was something of a special boat test. In fact I would go as far as to say it was the ultimate boat test. We couldn't have script written the scenario better if we'd tried. This particular write-up was planned some time ago. We were supposed to have the first test of this hull of any local magazine. The pressure to have the boat ready for the Boat Show in September meant Seaforce Principal Ric Lawrence was stressed right until the last minute preparing it. So, instead of the normal three hour test I asked Ric if we could use it during the annual Police Tournament we fish at Anglers Lodge in October. He couldn't have been more supportive.

### Impressive Presentation

I arrived at Seaforce to collect the boat on the day before the tournament. Ric was glassing up the bowsprit on another model which gave me a chance to see the construction between the hull and liner as well as the huge amount of foam in the hull. The vessel is CPC compliant. Then we went outside to familiarise the editor with his charge. If there was a mark out of ten for presentation, Ric would have



scored an eleven. The boat was fully fuelled, polished and fitted with everything from first aid kit, flares, fire extinguisher through to an EPIRB and stainless steel gaff. All I had to do was throw in my tackle and a few lifejackets and we were set to go.

Ric was crystal clear in his instructions - this is a fishing boat and was to be

like this many aluminium boat builders would rightly be nervous.

A brief look at the hull shows it means business. A deadrise of 24 degrees, no you didn't misread that, and a very deep forefoot with a sharp angle of entrance immediately tell you a story - this is a hull that will handle the rough. The smooth finish at the deck join, high windscreen, well designed rocket launcher and no nonsense transom setup show a boat built for a definite purpose. A look under the transom reveals an innovation Ric made sure I didn't miss, a curved return designed to lift the boat in reverse. This also would be well tested over the coming few days.

I arrived home to load the vessel already impressed with what I'd seen. Barbara gave me some stick about my enthusiasm for a "plastic" boat given my current preoccupation with things aluminium, particularly pontoon models. She forgets that I started my working career in the glass shop at Seacraft boats and that what I'm really looking for is a fishing boat, not a compromise.

Heading for Coromandel I noticed that the normal quick glances from the people I passed were more in the form of long observations. This boat does stand out from the crowd. I've been lucky to test some very good vessels over the last few issues. It shows that the standard of New Zealand construction and

innovation is world class and world leading in some areas. I'll show my cards early in the piece in this review as it will be hard to restrain my enthusiasm for the vessel. This is a very, very, good boat. A recent test in another magazine discussed how they had no spray over the windscreen during their review. We had water round, over but never through the boat, we fished in winds of 30 knots, we jiggled in standing pressure waves of close to a metre and a half and we pushed it through a north-west chop in twenty knots of wind. We never went close to finding the boat's limits.

### First Impressions

The problem with fibreglass boats in New Zealand is that everyone is too scared to build a no compromise fishing vessel. Most builders still want to make a pretty boat with colour co-ordinated upholstery that impresses the punters at the annual boat show. Sure, they may have a stripped out "fisherman" model, but they are never created from the ground up as a fishing boat. The belief is that sales will be limited if they did. There is no question that this Seaforce breaks that pattern. If more glass manufacturers made boats

tested that way. He was also definite in his passing comments that the boat was to be used, not wrapped in cotton wool. However I'm not quite sure that what we would put it through over the following days was what he had in mind. Boy did we test his boat!

### The Rig

The vessel has an overall length of 5.95m and a beam of 2.3m. The big deadrise is supported by a wide chine at the stern that is well turned down. Dry weight is 650kg and the towing weight is approximately





# A Real Boat Test!

## The Seaforce Fisherman 600



this one will receive from wet rope and condensation. It is a simple matter of applying extra protection to the body and making a nice little glass moulding to protect the unit. This excluded the anchoring set up which works very well indeed. While in this area I should relate one anchor recovery which was in lots of wind and breaking whitecaps – not one wave came over the front. If you've been on the receiving end of a drenching you will appreciate this point.

The rest of the cabin is simple. Good if not fantastic side pockets, plenty of under seat storage and vinyl squabs. Let's get real, hands up all those that have overnighted in a boat this size? There is enough room to lie down and sleep, as tested by a large po-

1250kg. Our test vessel was fitted with a 115hp Yamaha 2 stroke which fits in the middle of the 90hp to 150hp recommended range. I personally think it's a perfect match given that we are testing a fishing boat. I'll comment more on this under the performance section. The boat sits on a single axle Voyager trailer which I was pleased to see had light truck tyres fitted. It is of the expected high standard with Submersalites and multirollers that appear well placed.

Ric intends to sell the vessels as turnkey packages. Try this for a list of standard features – anchor, warp and chain, battery isolating switch, wiring loom, baitboard, buoyancy, cabin light, capstan, canopy, cockpit floodlight, cleats, down-rigger, drink holders, EPIRB, fishfinder/gps, fuel filter, fire extinguisher, first aid kit, flares, grab rails, livebait tank and pump, rocket launcher, road cover, rod holders, tackle box, telescopic boarding ladder, two pedestal seats, under floor fuel tank (140l), underfloor storage with bins, VHF radio and aerial, 12 volt socket, washdown pump, walk through transom and probably several other things I've missed. Just add fuel, lifejackets and bait. The whole lot was priced at \$49995.

### The Cabin

Even though this is a fishing boat it retains a useful, if spartan, cabin. From the front, it has a very good anchoring position and a well placed foot switch for the capstan. The access hatch works well and I didn't see a drop of water get past its seal. And we tested it. The anchor well has reasonable capacity for sufficient warp and to fit the Kwene anchor. However I do see a major fault with the positioning of the capstan. It needs protection. Firstly there is potential for the chain to short out the terminals in the wrong circumstances and from experience I can tell you that no capstan, not even the very fine Maxwell unit fitted will handle the consistent drenching



liceman; otherwise it is good shelter and dry storage which, after all, is 99.8% of the requirement. Everything is carpeted and the floor between the bunks has a big plugged drain. Very good thinking.

### The Cockpit

Now we start getting into the makings of a proper fishing boat. The forward half of the cockpit floor is carpeted. It is attached by domes and easily removed if required. The back half is non skid. Below floor is a cavernous area holding two full sized fish boxes. Even with four fishing we had no problem flicking our catch into this area. The side pockets are of a useful size and rod racks are fitted as standard. A pair of pedestal seats is fitted. They were comfortable and swivel to a fishing position. Four stainless rod holders are standard. The rocket launcher is

very well designed (read the angles are spot on for a change – I really hate it when the rods angle back over the cockpit.). Now to the business end. A baitboard with two rod holders is supplied. The livebait tank is built in to the transom at the step. It is superbly placed. However our only other glitch with the boat during the test was the bait tank - it didn't work. Being a third generation plumber in my family and after a dozen years of electronic fitouts, I have a simple solution to bait tank setups. The article is coming. This one failed to pick up adequately, self drained (any system needing a non return valve is bound to fail at some point), and the bait pump appeared to blow a bearing the first day, based on the horrendous noise coming from the back. I will accept the job of showing Ric how it can be improved.

At the side of the transom is a built in tackle locker. There is a remote oil tank filler fitted which is a great touch as there is nothing worse than trying to squeeze a small container of oil in to a tiny gap. Above is a well designed canopy, although I noted a few small holes appearing in the fabric which I don't think we created. The clear panel is easily unzipped and extends right down to the screen. It provides superb visibility and we never removed it all test. We would have been drowned if we had.

All in all a very good cockpit. We managed to fish three various sized policemen and a shorter editor comfortably. That says a lot.

### Dash Layout

This one is a little different. The port side has a bi-level arrangement. In the front side, angled at the driver, is the VHF. This arrangement works well. The GPS antenna was mounted directly above





the VHF. This is a no-no with a powered antenna (i.e. the antenna is the GPS, not an aerial only) and caused major interference to the VHF to the point that we couldn't leave the GPS on. It will have to be moved. In my opinion, the top level of the port dash needs a fiddle around it to make it a useful space. Anything placed there is only there when the boat isn't moving.

The driver's side works well with a combination sounder/gps and the twin gauge setups now common on Yamaha and Mercury motors. The switch panel is mounted with the fuel gauge on the right hand side on a facing panel. While it's not how I would have designed it, probably because I'm more the traditionalist in these areas, it works well. My only criticism is of the installation of the combo unit. The cable entry isn't sealed and one of the cables disappeared in behind the dash when I disconnected the unit to remove it. A minor problem easily fixed.

I liked the driving position. Everything came to hand easily, especially the throttle. I always drive with my hand sitting on the throttle box and this was comfortable whether seated or standing. If I was buying one I'd probably request a seat slider for the driver just to give the optimum position. Driving visibility was perfect.

### Performance

In a word, superb. We covered the full range of conditions over the three days. We started on day one with a simple launching in a dozen or so knots of wind. We motored towards the islands before being waylaid by a number of Orca. Beautiful to watch. There were three of us on board the first day. We had a plan to catch livebaits, which we eventually did but without the opportunity to use them in the rising breeze. We started with a strayline session out of the wind. Several snapper succumbed before we headed for a working mussel barge. The hull wasn't tested in either of these runs. It came onto the plane at what appeared to be about 11 or 12 knots with a definite transition. Remember this is a very deep vee hull. We located ourselves in the farm but not before I tested the reverse at speed. Interestingly I managed to drive right up a row in reverse in a straight line. It works. The stern clearly lifts. Where can I mount a gamechair?

We decided to be more adventurous and headed for the outer islands. We were right in the wind when we decided to jig under a group of working birds. Incredibly we had no trouble drifting and jiggling in the conditions. The waves were close to 1.5m at their worst. There were breaking whitecaps and in the channels there were standing pressure waves. Even when one broke against us we were in no danger or even concern. This is a true fishing platform. It's hard to express this in words, we weren't pushing the limits or over testing the boat even though it sounds like it. The hull handled it with ease. The situation was completely comfortable. What surprised me was the stability. We moved without concern or even having to communicate it. While obviously a step under

a pontoon in this category, it was so good it was conspicuous. Four aboard was slightly different particularly as one policeman was a big boy, but still not an issue. The run home on day one was down-sea and just as comfortable. I didn't push it as hard as I would the next day.

Day two saw deteriorating conditions and an increasing nor-westerly that gave us a dilemma. This direction is directly into the Amodeo Bay ramp. The seas were already sizeable and we were left to wait for a little more water. The rest of the fleet took the safer option of better protected bays. I decided to follow Ric's instructions and test his boat. I figured that we sometimes have to do this without other options. This would be a true test.

Overnight there had been an incident in the camp. One of the boats had been burgled and a fuel tank and tackle had gone. How dumb would you have to be to do that to a bunch of Policemen? Meantime it left one boat out of commission so we acquired a fourth crew member. Mark towed us down to the ramp with the tractor after prewarming the motor. It was an impressive sight of breaking waves although no different really to Raglan's Manu Bay on a moderate day. We waited for a gap and backed away. I'd be lying if I said we didn't take on water. We did, but it was only splashes. The transom did lift in reverse but needs a little speed on to do so. That is obviously difficult with a combination of breaking waves and tilted motor. But, it did work. I can't think of many other glass boats I would have tried that in. That solved problem one. There was still problem three, retrieving the boat, to look forward to.

Problem two was the run of a couple of miles to the islands. The wind was twenty knots or more and there was another concern. Our fourth crew member was local dog handler Dennis Porima. Earlier this year he was attacked and injured. He is still recuperating and wearing a leg brace. Injured crew plus chop plus lots of wind added up to problem to me. Boy was I wrong! This boat eats head seas. It's at its best tackling them squarely on using that superb bow to part the waves. We made incredibly good speed considering the conditions.

Dennis was completely comfortable and there was no way he would have got back into the aluminium boat he had fished the previous day to take another pounding. There was one other very noticeable characteristic of the hull. When we had two waves close together and I had to power down, the nose didn't drop and allow the waves to run over the front. I did this several times to make sure. It kept all the water out. Anyone running bars or taking on nasty, choppy stretches like the run from Motiti to Tauranga will thoroughly appreciate this. By this stage it was hard





not to be completely captivated by the performance of this boat. Everyone was dry and comfortable even though we were wearing plenty on the screen and the odd big one over the top.

After a very enjoyable snapper session, Mark called to say we needed to get back if we were to make the tide. This was frustrating as we were in the middle of a hot bite straying against the cliff. We pushed the envelope a little then had to leave. We experienced another, bigger down-sea run home. I really pushed the boat to look for vices. I think the smile on my face was a giveaway that I was also enjoying myself immensely. I did make it round up slightly at one point but that was my fault. I backed off the power in the interests of discretion. That was a mistake. The next time I tried it the boat blasted through the wave safely.

One other issue was the suitability of the horsepower fitted. Even with four on board the boat seemed perfectly matched to the motor when travelling into the sea. Down-sea I managed to stall progress. Admittedly, it was behind a wave of 1.5m. However, this is a common situation in bar crossings. Personally I felt there was sufficient horsepower there and slightly different propping would change the characteristics a little. Regardless, if I owned the boat I probably wouldn't change anything.

The photo of the sea at the ramp doesn't do it justice. We were pleased to see a couple of extra bodies waiting to help. Fortunately I got close enough at the first attempt and we retrieved without a scratch or nick on the prop.

Day three provided more testing conditions. Again the wind was around to the southwest making launching easier but giving a slight cross sea to our intended destination. The boat handled things without incident although I turned the nose directly into the freshening wind again to prove that this hull really loves a head sea. Mark Bacchus brought the Anglers Lodge vessel across to us later in the morning to act as camera boat for which I am very grateful. He and wife Meg are always very accommodating. That's why we keep going back. Duties completed, we had just started to catch snapper again when it was time to head home.

The final trip back was just a buzz for me. I gave the boat heaps as it seemed we weren't going to do Dennis and his leg any further damage. I kind of took the long way home only to find Mark patiently waiting with the tractor. It was a shame to have to turn off the key.

### Summary

Very simply, this is an exceptional boat. I believe it will have excellent resale value as Ric's production capability is limited and its performance reputation will sell it. I'm pleased I managed to test it the way we did. If we had received the normal couple of hours on the water we would never have uncovered the outstanding performance. I'm not sure whether I am just experiencing a golden run or whether we have selected exceptional models to test lately. Certainly the NZ industry is

in good heart based on the products we have tested so far.

If you are in the market for a vessel of this size where fishing is the priority this boat has to be seen. It will be your loss if you don't. On our Benchmark Comparison scoring system it scores 68. An exceptional result

Having conducted the test on this vessel over several days, it's clear that it will give a truer rating of the boats capabilities. The challenge here is – will any other manufacturer be prepared to put their product forward for testing with the same degree of latitude that Ric Lawrence gave us? Watch this space.

***A week after my test of the boat I went to Seaforce to take a couple of photos in the factory. I found Ric Lawrence already at work making a glass moulding for the winch cover. His dedication to producing the best possible product is very impressive.***



## Our Scoring System -

*a reminder of how it works*

Readers of computer magazines will be familiar with the benchmark scores they use to rate products against each other. We are going to do the same. When we run a test we are looking for a number of key elements. All of our tests are of boats used for fishing. Ski boats and yachts won't feature although both can be fished from. We won't be providing information on top speed or fuel consumption. Neither is relevant to our tests as firstly, we are not comparing motors, although we will comment on them. Secondly, it's of far more importance how the rig runs at the typical 20 knot speed, as most fishing doesn't happen in flat calm conditions. Thirdly, fuel consumption will depend on the motor type and boat use. If a boat is going to be used gamefishing extensively then it's likely the owner will fit a four stroke or new technology injection engine and pay the extra capital cost. The motor can also be propped differently for its end use. This information would only be of use if we could fit multiple engines to the same rig on the same day in the same conditions. Or the same motor to different manufacturers competing hulls.

To make this work, we are comparing the vessels against the standard of their competitors. For example, the Kiwi-Kraft compares against a Senator and Stabicraft, amongst others. A Fi-Glass Lightning would compare to similar products from Buccaneer and Haines Hunter amongst others. So, for example, the stability figure is against its competitors. Put three people on the gunwale of a six metre mono hull then on a pontoon boat and there is no comparison.

We have broken the scoring down into the following categories –

Fitness for Purpose	8
Finish	6
Attention to Detail	8
Anchoring Access/Setup	8
Dash Layout	10
Cabin Layout	8
Cockpit Layout	10
Stability	6
Performance Normal/Rough	10

Performance Smooth	10
Included Features	6
Overall Assessment	10

This gives a score of 100 that is unattainable. A boat that compares exactly to its competitors with nothing exceptional and no major faults would score a 50. A boat scoring a 45 for example, could well be a very good boat but with, say a poorly designed dash and a rough finish. This would be clear from the review. A boat scoring 60 or more is definitely on the "must be seen" list. Breaking 70 is unlikely.

To keep the comparisons right, I will conduct all the tests so there are no differences between personnel. Because of the differences in conditions on the day I will have to use my experience to assess the performance of each rig. Readers will have to accept this and understand that a similar rig set up by a different dealer with different motor etc may improve or degrade the performance we find.

To explain the breakdown, performance gains 26 of the points. The boat itself gets 24 points. This includes the subjective category of overall assessment where I can give my own opinion although this cannot unduly distort the overall score. The Included Features component allows extra points for fitted equipment that might be an additional cost with other manufacturers. The appearance scores 14 points but note that the highest part, 8 points, is reserved for attention to detail which is more important than pretty graphics on the water. That leaves 36 points for the setup of the boat. This is where a boat becomes a fishing boat. Dash layout receives a high score as many manufacturers still ignore this critical area for a fishing vessel.

One further item must come into your own decision. That is, value for money. We have not included this into the scoring because of the variance between the level of specification between dealers. A cheap price may well be a very bare boat and minimal power. We believe an astute purchaser will be able to take the test results and use them in conjunction with the bottom line on the quote.

