

Feel the **FORCE**

Words by **John Eichelsheim** Photos by **Lawrence Schäffler**



“...for a relatively small boat, the Skipa gives a plush ride”

Hamilton's Seaforce Marine has been a small-volume manufacturer since 1986 and the 530 Skipa reviewed here is a new model unusual enough to stand out from the crowd.

It's always a pleasure to review a new model from a New Zealand GRP trailer boat manufacturer. Ric Lawrence's Seaforce boats have always been a little different. The 530 Skipa is no exception with its GRP pontoon design, a safety feature Seaforce first introduced with its 530 Mate model in 2008. The centre console Skipa is the latest addition to the Seaforce 530 Pontoon Series family of boats, which includes the 530 Ute and 530 Mate. They share the same soft-riding GRP pontoon hull providing level flotation should the boat fill with water and great stability at rest.

MODERN CONSTRUCTION
Seaforce boats are manufactured using top-grade isophthalic resins and gelcoats. The Skipa 530 has polyethylene foam buoyancy and fibreglass composite is used for the subfloor beams instead of wood. The boat's most noticeable feature is the fully-integrated GRP pontoon that wraps around the hull. This provides a huge amount of buoyancy and stability when the boat's at rest but lifts clear of the water when she's planing. Another benefit of the pontoon is a very dry ride – a real plus in an open boat.

Where hull and decks join, wide external flanges provide extra stiffness and also anchor a solid rubbing strip which protects the hull from accidental damage when coming alongside. The 530 Skipa also enjoys a full fibreglass liner with moulded shelves, a non-slip floor and a matte interior finish for low glare and easy cleaning.

EASY TO TOW
The 530 Skipa is neither a large trailer boat nor a small one. At 5.65m overall (5.3m hull length), she's close to 19-feet long, which used to be reasonably large boat before the modern era of maxi-trailerboats. It's a useful size: big enough to deal with the conditions on the water if it cuts up a bit but small enough to manage on and off the water, including storage and towing. I hitched the Skipa to a diesel-powered Mazda CX5. The Mazda is a compact SUV but easily coped with the boat's 1000kg towing weight. The boat is supplied on a DMW Premier Series multi-roller trailer that not only tows well but also centres the boat



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nicely. It proved a breeze to launch and retrieve, which is a good thing because I'd missed inserting one of the bungs when I first launched the boat. I only noticed my mistake after parking the vehicle and returning to find the cockpit awash.

I had to rush back for the trailer, winch the boat back on, drain the water and then repeat the launching process, this time with both bungs in place. The bilge pump in the sump under the transom locker proved its worth.

The single-axle trailer is unbraked but comes with a dual

coupling, LED lights, jockey wheel and a dual-speed winch with a polyethylene winch rope.

FULLY WALKAROUND

Before picking up this boat I wondered how workable it would be as a centre console given that pontoon designs always impact on a boat's internal beam. The Skipa's external beam is 2.25m so the internal beam is considerably less, but with its centre console layout and flush floor the 530 still feels spacious.



There's plenty to grab hold of when standing or sitting behind the console, which can easily accommodate large-screen electronic displays. The simple bench-style helm seat has a reversible backrest and space beneath for an 80-litre fish bin. The console seat is hinged to provide a large opening for stowing bulky objects under the seat and inside the console.

There's enough room to walk either side of the console to access the foredeck and the phenomenal stability at rest means you can utilise every square millimetre of deck space. The boat is well supplied with grab rails too, so there's always something to hold onto.

The console is screwed to the cockpit sole and tied into the Ocean South heavy-duty polished aluminium T-top. The tubular uprights provide solid handholds and the canvas top gives protection from the sun and rain, as well as somewhere to mount the LED floodlights fore and aft. An acrylic windscreen screen offers some protection from wind and spray.

The console is a decent size. There's stowage under the seat in front of the console with a large opening that hinges at the top to make storing large objects easier. On the dash there's enough room to flush-mount a large-screen multi-function display, but the review boat made do with a smaller 7-inch Raymarine unit

hooked up to the Honda outboard via NMEA. The VHF radio, speaker, switch panel and Honda engine controls also find space on the console, along with a small glove box for cell phones, keys and other valuables that need to stay dry.

A simple bench seat can accommodate two facing forward or aft thanks to the reversible backrest. A 50-litre Icey-Tek insulated bin slides under the seat. The wheel and throttle control are both within easy reach of the helm seat and a stainless steel footrest is good to brace against.

When seated the wind of the boat's passage whistles overhead barely ruffling the hair. I also spent time standing up to drive, using the T-top supports as handholds, but there isn't a lot of room for your feet between the seat base and the console. I'm size 8 and my feet only just fit.

The easy walkaround really opens up the Skipa's bow, making it a

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'The boat's most noticeable feature is the fully integrated GRP pontoon that wraps around the hull.'

desirable place from which to fish. This is primarily a sport fishing boat and Ric has kitted it out for that purpose. Up in the bows he's fitted a couple of angled rod holders, a 12V power outlet, and a pair of Railblaza receptacles which accept a huge range of brackets, poles and accessories. Railblaza mounts are scattered elsewhere around the boat too.

There's a good-sized moulded anchor locker in the bow, a stainless steel fairlead, a solid cleat and the boat is pre-wired for an electric capstan.

The cockpit's nicely uncluttered. A moulded transom locker holds the battery up off the floor and the isolation switch is tucked up under gunwale on the starboard side. There's another 12V power outlet to service the cockpit, a GRP bait table, moulded corner seats and plenty of stainless steel through-coaming rod holders. There's additional rod storage in brackets along the boat's sides, while the shelves, which step up towards the bows, extend the full length of the boat.



The 530 Skipa gets along nicely with the 80hp engine.

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The anchor locker is easily accessible, large enough to hold plenty of warp and chain, and pre-wired for an electric capstan. Aft, the transom locker houses the battery off the floor and protects it from spray.



MODEST HORSEPOWER, GREAT RIDE

The Seaforce 530 Skipa is rated for outboards in the 75-115hp range and up to 200kg in weight. This boat was fitted with a Honda BF80 four-stroke weighing in at 165kg.

The BF80 is a fuel-injected 1500cc four-cylinder unit also available in 100hp as the Honda BF100. The engine started life in the Honda Jazz range of cars.

The Honda feels strong and pulls well from a standing start. Sea conditions on test day were a bit lumpy and there was a stiff breeze to contend with, making it difficult to determine the boat's top speed, but I saw 39mph (34 knots) on the Raymarine GPS at around 5500rpm. In flat water and without a headwind, you'd certainly get a bit more.



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