

Seaforce 530 Ute



By Sam Mossman—Courtesy of New Zealand Fishing News

The current Seaforce 530 Ute has quite a pedigree - one that is worthwhile outlining here. Its beginnings go back to the early 1980s when fisherman Rusty Borrell, who's usual stamping grounds were off the Raglan Coast, decided that he wanted a trailerboat that could be towed with an average car, would give a good ride, and could cope with heavy weather. Rusty had designer Andrew Howden draw up the plans and the original hull was built in kauri. It was a success and it was not long before a fibreglass mould was made. Rusty was an engineer by trade and with partner Ric Lawrence, set up Hamilton company Fibre Forces to manufacture the Seaforce Utility hull in 1985. I first tested this version of the hull for Fishing News in the November 1991 edition.

Eventually a second version of this boat became available. Based on the same hull, the Adventurer had a layout more suited to family boating than the more hard-core Utility, and featured in Fishing News exactly a decade later in November 2001 - not too much after Ric Lawrence bought out his partner Rusty's share of the business.

Fishing News has featured other Seaforce Boats over the years but I still remember walking around a corner at the 2008 Hutchwilco Boat show in Auckland and being stopped in my tracks by quiet-achiever Ric Lawrence's latest development, a pontoon boat built in fibreglass - the first time I had ever seen this done. The boat was the 530 Mate, the 'family boating' layout on this pontoon development of the old Utility hull. The boat show judges were impressed too, giving it the 2008 Innovation Award.

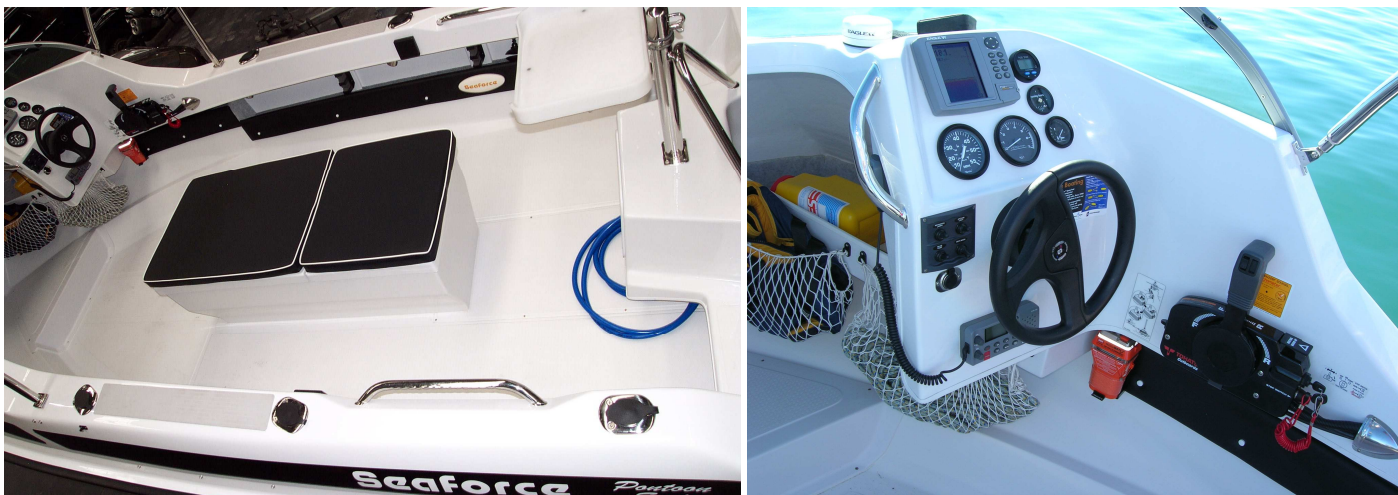
I was keen to trial one of these hulls but had to wait another year for Ric to develop and fine-tune the fishing version of the new hull, called the 530 Ute - the third-generation descendent of the original kauri Utility hull - which went on to take out the award for the GRP Fishing Boat Under 6m at the 2009 Hutchwilco Show. Ric towed this boat up to the Hauraki Gulf and on a calm day in early winter Fishing News staffer Steve Pattullo and I launched it from the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.



A heavy rubbing strip runs right around the hull.

Construction

The pontoon series Ute hulls are 350mm longer than their predecessors and are made almost entirely from fibreglass and



A feature of the Ute is good all round access and plenty of fishing room, electronics, gauges and switching are flush mounted.

other synthetic materials. No wood or ply is involved. The hull itself is a glass and coremat sandwich, reducing weight but maintaining strength. Isophthalic polyester resins are used, favoured by Seaforce for their very high water and chemical resistance. The bottoms are supported by four longitudinal fibreglass bearers, and laterally there is the transom, two under-floor frames, the helm bulkhead and a forward collision bulkhead.

The planing section of the hull features a keel with bonded alloy protective strip; and a single planing strake on each side. The bottoms are 10-12mm thick and above the chines the 'glass is 7-8mm thick. The pontoons sit above the planing sub-hull and add the desired buoyancy and stability while still managing to look stylish. Hand-laid sheet foam fills the pontoons to the gunwale tops, providing about 250kg of reserve buoyancy. The hull is rated for six people and has been swamp-tested, floating level and upright.

Both outer and inner liner joins are glued, riveted and fibre-glassed together. A heavy rubber rubbing strip runs around the outside of the hull. Various seating and storage bin options are offered for the internal layout. The test boat had no helm seats and a double central bin built in. The battery is set centrally in the transom in a protected locker up above the deck.

Hull weight is about 500kg; hulls are CPC approved, with a five-year warrantee.

Power and performance

The power range for this hull is 60-115hp, with 90hp recommended. The test boat had a Tohatsu 90hp two-stroke outboard fitted, swinging a 17"-pitch prop. Fuel was provided from a 70-litre under floor tank; this is a standard capacity but larger sizes are available. The filling port is set outside the transom to avoid any potential spillage in the hull and a fuel filter is fitted.

A test run in calm water with two adults and a full fuel load produced a top-end speed of 56kph (30.4 knots) at 5400. A cruising speed of about 40kph produced a fuel usage figure of 24 litres per hour. During the four hours or so we spent on the water (a mix of running and drift-fishing approximating a normal Hauraki Gulf snapper-fishing trip) the engine used 12 litres of fuel - pretty cheap fishing.

Although there was little wind at the time of the test, the hull shape threw the spray flat and well back, indicating a fairly dry-running hull. In places we struck a half-metre chop and the Ute also proved itself to be sea-kindly, the 17° deadrise cutting quietly through the chop with ease and landing softly. An excellent ride.

The battery is centrally placed in a protected transom locker The central storage bins double as seats and worktops.





Anchoring access is through the hatch in the foredeck, a forward platform with non skid finish is fitted to stand on while pulling the anchor.

Anchoring

With the dodger set well forward it is relatively easy to duck under it to get to the large hatch which provides access to the bow. A short foredeck makes it an easy reach to the stainless fairlead, set on a small bow sprit. The anchor well, although unhatched, is of decent capacity. A chromed-brass bollard is screwed to the foredeck and a rubber protection strip fitted to prevent chain flogging. For the bowman, a platform with a non-skid finish makes standing in the hatchway, pulling the anchor easy. A capstan winch can be fitted.

My one criticism here is that the low, on-piece bow rail would not be easy to fit a decent-sized anchor under. Spilt bow rails dropping down hard on either side of the fairlead would cure this, as well as constraining the warp and making a lock pin unnecessary in the fairlead.

Layout

The first thing that struck me about the layout of the 530 Ute is how much internal work space there is, especially considering that it is a pontoon hull – a design which tends to eat into internal space. By accepting that this is a workman-like day boat from the start and avoiding the temptation to fit a cabin and berths, the dodger can set well forward, leaving lots of cockpit space. The test boat avoided helm seats too, opting for stand-up driving, while having a central island of two joined seat/bins built in. Various internal layout options are available; another useful one is a single bin and individual pedestal seats.

Aside from the large central bins (dry and with drainage bungs fitted) stowage space includes two wide side-shelves and a couple of useful hanging net bags in the forepeak. An internal light and hatch access into the back of the console are other useful features up in the pointy end.

The helm position is protected by a curved polycarbonate 'screen, which serves as a base to run a canopy up to the rocket launcher. Both rocket launcher and canopy are optional. The canopy can be set up as a bimini top to keep the sun off; with sides; and with forward clears that have a zip-out section for the helmsman. The rocket launcher is hinged so that it can be folded down for storage.

Grab rails are fitted and switching; gauges and electronics are flush-mounted. Electronics choices are up to the individual; the test boat was fitted with an Eagle Fish Elite 500c Sounder/GPS and Eagle EVR 150 VHF. Ric had also added a fire extinguisher and an EPIRB in a handy, but out-of-the-way position beside the helm.

The sealed deck has an anti-skid finish and drains to a sump under the transom from where water is removed with a 1500gph bilge pump. Lined side pockets run the length of the cockpit with two pole/rod racks built in each side.

Forward sections of the gunwales have Decktread panels fitted, making a handy place to perch; towards the stern grab rails are fitted. The stern corners feature cut-way sections that allow access to the stern corners; squabs can be fitted here or they can be used as a step over the transom wall.

Other fittings include isolation switch, wash-down hose and pump, stern cleats, drink holders, fold-down boarding ladder, grab rail, optional cockpit spotlight, and a ski pole/bait board mount.

Fishability

The Ute is an excellent fishing platform. The central bin layout gives heaps of storage space for gear and catch, as well as providing seats and work surface; all without blocking access to the sides and transom. If you prefer, a smaller bin can be fitted, or no bin at all if you prefer one of the excellent removable after-market ice boxes available today.

The hull is stable; two of us big lads standing on one side of the boat induced a modest heel, but once the pontoon hit the water it went no further. The deck has a non-skid finish, giving good footing. There is no toe recess, but it is not hard to lean on the side should you wish to while fishing, with support just above the knees.

The optional rocket launcher provides storage for six rods. Fore and aft rake is modest; this is good as the rods don't intrude over the cockpit to any great extent. The rocket launcher holders do have a sideways fantail flare which puts

the tops of the end rods outside the line of the hull; vulnerable if coming alongside a wharf or other boat. This is an easy thing for the makers to correct at manufacture stage and like the bow rail mentioned earlier, Ric Lawrence intends to sort this with the makers for future boats.

Six metal through-gunwale rod holders are fitted along the transom and a bait board is mounted on the ski pole. Another nice touch of Ric's was to fit a series of dome clips that allow a section of outdoor carpet to be rolled over the side, protecting the gel-coat from being knocked around by Cray pots etc.

As mentioned, there is plenty of fishing room - Steve Pattullo and I drift fished with soft baits and slow jigs for a couple of hours without ever tangling a line. We struck a nice patch of pannie snapper, trevally and dory that provided non-stop action and allowed us to try the layout under fire, as it were. Drift fishing with two anglers was ideal and at anchor you could fish three or four without trouble. We dropped a chilly bin inside one of the central units for the catch; the second compartment was handy for tackle boxes. With fishing layouts when nothing is annoying or frustrating you while fishing you know that the makers have got it pretty right.

Trailer

The test boat was carried on a DMW Premier Series trailer; a cradle A-Frame-entry bay design with a single axle and zinc-protected leaf-spring suspension. Four pairs of wobble rollers per side plus a keel entry roller support the hull.

Other trailer features are galvanised rims, submersible lights, dual-ratio manual winch, wind-down jockey wheel and dual coupling. Tow weight is around 1000kg.

All in all

This is a neat fishing and diving boat that has stayed true to its ancestry. Stable, with good load-bearing ability and plenty of work space for its length, it is well finished, has good reserve buoyancy and is a great little sea boat to boot. Easy to tow and relatively cheap to run, it ticks all the boxes for coastal fishing and offers a great choice for those who appreciate the advantages of the pontoon concept but prefer fibreglass over aluminium.

Specifications

Model.....	5.30 Ute
Material.....	Fibreglass
Configuration.....	Pontoon
LOA.....	5.65m
Beam.....	2.25m
Deadrise.....	17°
Fuel capacity.....	70 litres
Recommended HP.....	60-115hp
Test Engine.....	Tohatsu 90 two-stroke
Propeller.....	17" pitch
Trailer.....	DMW Premier
Tow weight.....	1000kg approx.
Max. No of persons.....	6



A bait board is mounted on the ski pole. The cutaways to either side can be fitted with squabs/



A fold down ladder and grab rail aid boarding.

Dual compartments in the central bin were useful to store tackle bags and the catch.

