

This Boat's a Winner!



The Seaforce Winna was one of two category winners for Hamilton boatbuilder Seaforce Marine at this year's New Zealand Boat Show. As has been typical with tests from Seaforce we weren't allowed the boat until principal Ric Lawrence had things just right.....

This test did not start well. Back before the Auckland Boat Show we were promised the first test on the new Seaforce Winna. The boat went on to take a gong during the Show Awards Dinner and the clamour from other magazines wanting to get their hands on it gained volume. Principal Ric Lawrence held them all at bay (including the magazine that said "but we only need it for two hours". A boat test? Yeah right.). That was until October. When we found another write up had been printed we were a little miffed. After all, we had gone to print stating we had it first.

Our reaction was to leave it for another time and test one of the others we have waiting. A bit more thought (and an apology from Ric) saw the knee-jerk reaction replaced by another – lets do it better than anyone else by doing two coasts in two days and pushing it as hard as we could. I'm pleased we did. Before we hit the "pleased we did" point, there were a few more small dramas. The good news is we would finish the test with nothing but praise for the boat.

First Impressions

I'd already formed an opinion of the boat at the Auckland Show. So did the judges and so did many purchasers. I agreed with them. This is a boat whose time has come. With the ever increasing spiral upward in boat size, the smaller sizes have been ignored, unless you want a 14' tinny. When you look around and see how many 30 year-old 13'6" and 14'6" Sea Nymphs and Fleetlines are still in use, its clear there is room for an affordable small glass boat. There is precious little on the market that's not made from metal.

The Seaforce team had a written design objective for the project. Quoting from their fact sheet, they wanted a "quality, stable, dry boat, safe, with particular attention to good buoyancy". It had to "be able to be towed by most small to medium cars", and "be able to perform with lower horsepower outboards". If these things were written and ticked off a list, the score would be 10/10.

The boat has an overall length of 4.3m, while the beam is 1.7m. Sitting aboard its Dunbier trailer it weighs around 550kg. It doesn't look all that big, and in reality I suppose it isn't. The performance belies its size. As usual, Ric had everything ready as a turn-key package, right down to sounder, flares, ground tackle, first aid kit, flush muffs and bait board. Polished and ready to go, I got it home to find the next problem; no number plate. Ric soon had it run around to us.

The Rig

I'll quote once more from the Seaforce product sheet as they have described their product well. Then I'll pick it to pieces!

"The stability of the boat comes from the tunnel gull design in the hull. This design enables the chine beam to be carried forward to the centre of the boat and with its reverse chines and gull wing sections makes it very stable at rest. The bow has a fine entry leading into the tunnel making the ride soft and dry with little or no hull noise. A generous free board keeps the water out and the children in. Safety aspects of the 430 are almost second to none. The boats design allows for 80% of the buoyancy foam to be distributed above the floor. The result of the foam placement will make it float in an upright position in the event of the boat being swamped. This has been proven correct when a marine surveyor carried out his inspection for the CPC Compliance certificate. The boat has a fully moulded liner and holes can be drilled without compromising the buoyancy integrity. The performance of the 430 is responsive and planes easily with outboard motors in the 20-40hp range. A 30hp will have a speed of 45-50kph and a 40hp, 60-70kph. The fibreglass construction uses top of the range Isophthalic resin (chemically resistant) and gel coats. The laminate design has the approval from Composite Engineers for the C.P. C Certificate. Starting at the front, the boat has a generous fairlead and an anchor locker that holds a decent amount of rope and chain. A cleat is inside the locker to attach the end of the anchor rope. On the foredeck there is a large chrome cleat to tie off the anchor. Each side of the anchor locker are rails to help hold the boat when needed. Access to the anchor is through the opening Taylor Made windscreen and below the screen under the dash is a generous shelf to hold canopy side curtains, flares etc On the left side of the dash is a glove box, handy for the keys, first aid kit and sunscreen. In the centre there is a recess to mount a fish finder and below that a flat to mount the VHF, if fitted. On the left of the steering wheel a 12 volt accessory socket is fitted and on the right a four-way BEP Marine switch panel and loom. There is room on the dash to fit four gauges. There is a moulded panel with the remote housing on the driver's side and a grab rail on the passengers' side.

Seating in the front is made up of two swivel seats with removable upholstered seat cushions mounted on storage pods and in the rear two upholstered removable bin seats. In the cockpit are side pockets with rod clamps, one to hold the telescopic pole light and the other a spare. There are also grab rails positioned on the gunwales for extra safety. The 430 has four rod holders and two drink holders located within easy reach behind the swivel seats. Being CPC Compliant the 430 has full navigational lights, a bilge pump, a battery isolating switch and strap to secure the

fuel tank. Two rear cleats and a step either side of the motor well make up the standard layout. A heavy-duty rub rail is attached to protect it from bumps into jetties and wharves. An attractive set of decals finish the boat off making a tidy unit that anyone would be proud to own."

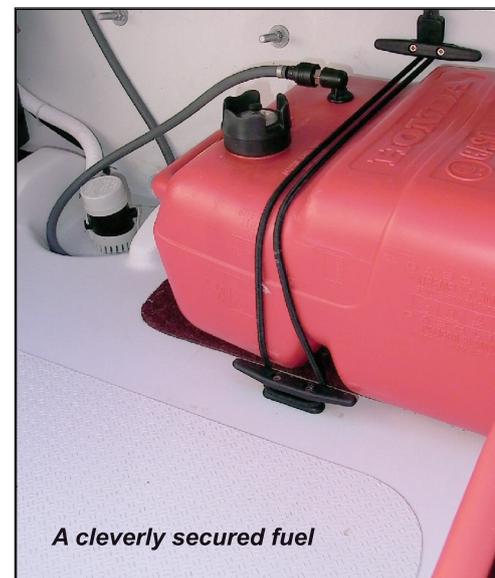
Sounds perfect! I want one. Add to the above the hull deadrise which is 12 degrees and a free-board measurement of 600mm. The maximum rated horsepower is 40hp. The Honda 30 fitted weighs in at 69kg.

The Test Day 1

With a benign west coast, and big snapper turning up, I was keen to run the boat to Raglan for a day. Ric wasn't so happy. His statement was that this was outside the design brief. With that in mind we decided to head to Coromandel and a meeting with Mark Bacchus to have a last trip before the handover of Angler's Lodge to the new owners. After all, this is exactly the sort of area the boat was intended for.

A stop at Thames for fuel caught the next potential problem. The "almost full" fuel tank proved to be less than ¼ full. Still, that's why you check everything before a trip. I arrived at Amodeo Bay in sublime conditions. There was a welcome caffeine fix as I met the new Lodge owners. Places such as these are made or broken by the personalities involved. It was good to see that there would be no major change in direction. Richard Hooker, one of the new proprietors, joined Mark and I for the day.

We launched into a calm sea and trickled out past the breakwater. The boat had comfortably



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swallowed all our equipment, Richard got the rear seat. I put the hammer down but nothing happened. Well that's not quite true. The motor revved away but we couldn't get the boat past jogging speed. Actually 6.5kn, I checked it on a GPS. We changed trim, we shifted weight, but nothing changed the situation. We had little more than 5kn of wind on the nose and a small chop to contend with. A hurried change of game plan saw us meander across to the closest islands.

The discussion across the gap was predictable. Clearly the boat was underpowered. There was plenty of room for the three of us (and the other two were no midgets) as well as seat bins, chilly bin and tackle boxes. We certainly weren't pushing the capabilities of the rig. Our first straylining session was a no go, the tide and wind competing and making the spot less than fishable.

The whole day was thoroughly enjoyable from my perspective. Mark spent the time imparting several years of knowledge to Richard as we did a round trip through the islands. I just took it all in. Spot two was a drift and jig session. You may find it hard to believe but three of us stood up in the boat jigging. I'm not kidding. The stability is better than exceptional. There wasn't even any need to telegraph movements around the deck. I managed to jig one snapper but it was quickly becoming apparent that it was to be one of those days.

We elected to take some photos from an island. Mark had no problem at all in landing me amongst the rocks, remarking on the great manoeuvrability of the rig. It was also obvious that it was a different beast two up. It looked pretty good as the boys made a couple of speed runs past my perch.

We chased some gannets working in the distance to do some more jigging. This time I

managed to get the boat to plane. Eventually, I actually counted out a full two minutes on one run before it got up and running. When it did, something else became clear. This boat is deadly quiet and very soft riding. More than that it felt like a very good sea boat. I decided we were Raglan bound regardless of what Ric thought.

Another fishing spot was ruined for us as a turkey ran up our berley trail, then proceeded to spend fifteen minutes driving around the reef before finally stopping and getting out their dive gear. It was one of those days. We drifted and jigged another spot, again remarking at the vessels stability, before running back. I managed to get a speed reading of around 17 knots at its peak. It still needed a couple of minutes to wind up though and any drop in speed meant repeating the exercise. We decided to cut our losses on the fishing front. I dropped Mark and Richard ashore and gave the boat a one up run. It jumped up on the plane, held in beautifully in tight turns and couldn't be tripped by anything I tried. Safe, sure and predictable. You can't ask for more. I got a GPS speed of around 22 knots flat out.

We cleaned the boat and caffeinated again before I headed home. I asked the boys to summarise, and ignoring the power question, the same points were raised; exceptional stability, surprising room, everything well placed and very well thought out handrails. Refuelling the boat I was surprised to find that we had only burnt 10 litres of fuel even with all the full throttle displacement work we did.

Day Two

I was joined by a new acquaintance, Andy McGrath from Cambridge. He has recently purchased my baby, so while it was away having trailer springs done, I decided his introduction to big Raglan snapper should be closer to the conditions than the 7m hull would place him. I'm sure he was questioning my sanity as I told him we had a bit of a run out to the 50m mark.

It was an easy launch at the second attempt after I remembered the

bungs. The Honda started instantly and we trickled out past the low swell. I guess it was with a degree of trepidation that I pushed the throttle down. That was more to do with whether I'd judged my feelings right about how good the hull was. We were about to find out....

While the boat didn't leap on to the plane, it did wind up a little quicker than the previous day and we maintained a 12-16 knot speed most of the way. As we cleared Woody head into the open Tasman we found more wind than I wanted. It was enough to ensure there would be no drift fishing and there were whitecaps around us. A customer later described it as "a bit snotty" on his way out. He has a six metre pontoon boat! I can't overstate how well the boat handled the outward journey. It wasn't close to being stretched. It landed softly, never once banged and was impressively quiet. I've been in alloy boats over five metres that are pounding pigs in conditions less than we experienced.

We arrived at our selected depth of 47m and dropped the anchor. Twice actually as the standard issue didn't reach the bottom. I had planned for that eventuality. I explained to Andy the drill; big baits on the bottom, wait for the passing waves of fish, it probably wouldn't take long. Within three minutes of starting I pulled a small gurnard. The replacement bait was taken in a more determined manner and the rod folded over. At three kilos it was but an average fish for this time of year. My crewman was even more impressed when my next bait went the same way.

What followed was a very good session of quality west coast snapper fishing. We filled a couple of boxes with snapper, covered the boat in blood and bait and generally tested the fishability of



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the rig. That, after all, is the idea of a boat test. For any other magazine testing it later, or for its eventual owner, the record snapper currently stands at a little over five kilos....

The fishing slowed as the tide hit low and at the same time the wind increased. It was a steady 10 to 12 knots with the odd gust of 15. We decided to head in. This was an untidy, sloppy sea, typical on the coast with the wind from the SW. Again to put it in perspective, there were 5.5m glass boats, and bigger, who also went in at the same time because it was too sloppy for them as well.

How well the hull travelled on the way in is best described by two incidents. One, Andy actually dozed off on the way. More impressively maybe, an empty ginger beer bottle had been left in a drink holder. The top retaining ring hadn't been folded down so it was sitting just on the lid. It was a full ten minutes into our return journey before it fell off. The boat blasted through the chop without fuss and not once banged a wave. There was a tendency for the chine to catch when pushed down a wave, pulling the bow a few degrees off course. It didn't broach whether quartering or directly behind the wave. Obviously it needs to be driven with proper consideration for the conditions. If I thought the boat handled the drive out well, it was superlative on the run home.

The Layout



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After two days on the water we found the layout and fitout of the boat to work well. The two big storage areas under the seats are a boon. They are sealed dry and get wet weathergear and other important things out of the spray. Even the flat areas they create beside the seats are great; somewhere to put a hook or a bait while rigging up. The wide side decks were great to sit on. The legroom up front was very good. The seat/boxes were fine although we only took one out each time, replacing the other with fish box and chilly bin. If you owned the boat the next purchase would undoubtedly be a proper insulated central box. The retaining strap over the fuel tank worked exceptionally well. Our trip for the day used barely half a tank of gas. I carried a small container as a spare but seldom would a second tank be needed. To be picky, the battery box could be turned sideways to give a bit more storage space near the transom. The



I love it when the fish don't fit the bin...

side pockets are really somewhere to put spare jigs or a short rod. We left our main rods in the side rod holders.

The dash works about as well as can be in a boat this size. The opening windscreen, which didn't leak during the test, is above the sounder although the latter didn't get in the way while anchoring. There is room to flush mount a VHF.

The instruments all fit but there was limited space for a compass and none for a GPS. It is still a small boat. I had to remind myself of that. The driving position was okay. I sat forward to see through the screen in the spray that was being tossed around without being a contortionist.

Anchoring was okay. It's a very long reach to the fairlead and it would be easier to have the anchor in place and the pin through to save a long reach. It could alternatively be retrieved over the side. Even with both of us forward during anchor retrieval in the slop, no water came aboard. The canopy was a cinch to use; I particularly liked the superb way that the plastic overlapped the zip on the front clears, meaning I stayed completely dry. I can find nothing to constructively criticise. Any changes are individual custom alterations.

Summary

The performance of this hull is superlative. If you own a tinny of less than 5.5m don't ride in this boat or your world may never be the same again. It needs more power. At least 40 hp, probably fifty since the weight will be near the same. The penalty from 30hp to 50hp is less than a tank of fuel. It can handle more weight astern without compromising the performance. I've been in enough of the older hulls I mentioned at the beginning to know that this will blitz them on the water. The family friendly, multi-purpose adaptability of this boat will endure it to many parts of the boating community.

A real boat test!

Seaforce 430

Its strengths of ride, quietness, safety in the rough and excellent freeboard will see it used on the lakes through to the open sea. I can't praise the performance too highly.

Nor can I come up with a score for this vessel because I'm not sure what else it compares to. It would certainly be well ahead of anything else and probably off the scale with some more horsepower. Check one out. You won't regret it.

