



# Seaforce Skipa 530 GRP pontoon

**Hamilton's Seaforce Marine has been manufacturing well-regarded fiberglass trailer boats since 1986. John Eichelsheim and photographer Lawrence Schäffler took Seaforce's new model, the Skipa 530, for a trial on the Hauraki Gulf.**

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, and 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 great stability at rest and level flotation should the boat fill with water.

### 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 the way it turns aside spray, resulting in 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 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-foot long,



*Above left: The forward seat lifts to expose stowage space in the front of the console. Above right: Switching, instruments and electronics are all flush mounted.*

*The hatched anchor well is easy to access.*



Left to right: The full walkaround configuration opens up the bow to fishing. A 50-litre ice-box fits under the helm seat. The transom locker houses the battery system in a secure position. There is plenty of room between the console and side.

#### Specifications

LOA:	5.65m
Beam:	2.250m
Draft:	approx 0.4m
Deadrise:	18° at transom
Construction:	solid GRP
Towing weight:	1000kg approx
Engine:	Honda 80hp four-stroke outboard
Fuel:	70 litres
Cruising speed:	22-27 knots
Max speed:	34.0 knots
Packages from:	\$37,000
Price as tested:	\$47,995.

Manufactured by Seaforce Marine, web [www.seaforce.co.nz](http://www.seaforce.co.nz). Boat supplied by Seaforce Marine Ltd, email [info@seaforcemarine.co.nz](mailto:info@seaforcemarine.co.nz) phone 07 856 3336.

rig cruises comfortably at 30mph (26 knots), at which speed the 70-litre under-floor fuel tank should provide a reasonable range.

For a relatively small boat, the Skipa gives a plush ride. A fine entry and 18-degree deadrise at the transom cuts through the water, while wraparound pontoons provide plenty of reserve buoyancy in the bows and turn down spray.

The Skipa's ride and handling really impresses. I often think centre-console models ride better than cuddy cabin or runabout styles, probably because of the weight distribution and helm's central position. It would be interesting to contrast the Skipa's ride with other models in the Seaforce Pontoon Series range.

#### Good value

I came away from my solo spin aboard the Skipa 530 impressed with the package. It looks somewhat unconventional, although the pontoons are nicely integrated with the rest of the boat's lines. As a fishing boat the Skipa has a lot going for it: walk-around decks; great stability at rest; lots of casting room; outlets for electric reels fore and aft; plenty of rod holders; Railblaza receptacles; good storage for the catch; and easy-clean decks. It also provides a soft, quiet ride that's pretty dry as well.

Seaforce Marine offers a comprehensive list of standard features and quite a few optional extras. As reviewed, the boat and motor package comes to \$47,995, including the trailer and electronics; drive-away packages start at \$37,000 ex-factory with two-stroke Tohatsu power.

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 nicely. The Skipa proved a breeze to launch and retrieve, which is a good thing because I'd missed inserting one of the bungs before launching the boat.

I only noticed my mistake after parking the vehicle and returning to find the cockpit awash. This saw me rushing back for the trailer, winching the boat back on, draining the water and then repeating 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.

#### Full 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 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 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 cellphones, 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 Icy-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 console. I'm size 8 and my feet only just fit.

The easy walkaround really opens up the Skipa's bow, making it a 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 under the 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-gunwale rod holders. Additional rod storage is provided in brackets along the boat's sides, while the shelves, which step up towards the bows, extend the full length of the boat.

#### 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 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 determining the boat's top speed difficult, 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.

In the middle of the rev range the engine is a good match for the boat, which holds plane right down to 10 knots or so. The