

Seaforce 430 Winna

The big little boat

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A ride in the Seaforce 430 Winna begs the question: why aren't small glass runabouts still being produced in New Zealand? They are just as practical as they always were and the Winna reinforced my view that small boats get people boating with a minimum of hassle. When a small boat is as well appointed and capable as the 430 Winna, it is even more attractive.

Boating NZ towed Seaforce's award winning baby on its Dunbier trailer from Hamilton to the Bay of Islands hoping for a weekend of boating fun. In the event atrocious weather restricted us to a couple of hours between showers on Auckland's Waitemata on Friday and perhaps two more during the calm before the storm at Russell early on the Saturday morning. But it was enough to confirm that the 430 Winna is a great little package harking back to small, easily handled fibreglass runabouts that were once so popular but are now nearly extinct.

In recent years fibreglass boatbuilders have moved away from the less cost-effective small boat end of the market, leaving the field for aluminium builders. But Seaforce, a Hamilton-based manufacturer, has produced a popular small fibreglass runabout for years, the Seaforce Scout, which continues to sell well. The 430 Winna is a logical successor to the Scout, incorporating many big boat features, a totally different hull profile, good quality resins and a fully moulded liner. It is designed to work well with engines from 20 to 40hp, is equipped with a proper outboard well for safety and has enough reserve buoyancy to accommodate heavier four-stroke engines if desired.

The layout is simple but practical. Freeboard is generous for a small boat, which – coupled with exceptional stability courtesy of an exaggerated tunnel-like gullwing design aft – contributes to the Winna's seaworthiness, fishability and safety. Runabout layouts ensure plenty of cockpit space and the Winna's cockpit/deck wouldn't disgrace a much larger boat. It's generally safe to stand and move around in the boat and we experienced no dramas boarding three kids in the surf.

In the water the boat has so much reserve buoyancy it floats like a cork.

Foam buoyancy is 80% distributed above the floor, so the Winna will remain upright if swamped. A bilge pump disposes of any water in the cockpit and the moulded liner means holes can be drilled inside the boat without compromising its integrity. The cockpit floor is flat, except for the sump aft, and texture-moulded to be non-slip.

A couple of swivel seats on moulded fibreglass pods are complemented by two portable storage-bin/seats, which can be positioned anywhere in the boat, or removed altogether.

The fixed seats have removable squabs; squabs on the bin/seats are permanent.

Storage comprises a shelf under the dash, a lockable glove box, seat pedestals, which feature hinged hatch covers, and side pockets. We found the bin-seats indispensable, using them to store clothing, but one or other could easily be used for fish, bait or wet storage. One-piece fishing rods can be stored in the side shelves with the tips slid up between the seats and the hull. Two-piece rods fit on the shelves.

The windscreen is big-boat-like: curved, alloy framed with a central opening panel aiding access to the anchor locker on the foredeck, cleat and good-sized stainless steel fairlead.

The canopy is easy to raise and can be quickly removed. Once fitted it is best left up – when folded down it interferes with helming the boat. A zip-out clear section ensures adequate visibility and allows the driver to stand when it's rolled up. However, in such a small boat a canopy does restrict movement and forces the occupants to remain seated if they want shelter.

We were grateful for the canopy on both days we used the boat. It does a good job of keeping the worst of the rain at bay. Side curtains are also supplied.

Seaforce has given some thought to handholds for passengers. There are stainless steel grab rails on the gunwales, a grab rail beside the passenger's seat and meaty bow rails, which were used to spin the boat around and hold it into the waves when we came into a beach through low surf.

Seaforce supplied this boat with a four-gang BEP switch panel, a Tournament sounder, two drink holders, four rod-holders, a baitboard, flares, anchor and warp, flush mufflers and a first-aid kit. As the boat is CPC compliant, it has a bilge pump, navigation lights, a battery isolating switch and a strap securing the tote tank under the transom. The battery sits on the floor, housed in a plastic battery box.

The Winna reviewed here is fitted with a 30hp Honda four-stroke. It's a new model and had less than an hour showing on the Honda hour meter when we picked it up. The engine is right in the middle of the horsepower range for the boat; one of the design criteria for the Winna was that it must perform adequately with relatively low horsepower engines. The Honda 30hp does a creditable job of pushing the Winna along, although top speed is modest – we clocked around 45kph with a tight engine. The response is good, in part due to the hull design, which gets the boat up onto the plane quickly. Once up, the boat exhibits responsive, crisp handling, although with just the driver aboard it tended to lean to starboard.

Leaning over is not an issue with two people, which balances the boat, and even with three adults, or one adult and three children, the performance was surprisingly good. Certainly the engine is pleasingly quiet throughout the rev range, but especially at idle, smooth and vibration free.

The Winna's chine is carried all the way forward. There's a pronounced reverse or gullwing starting at the bow and widening towards the stern. At the transom the gullwing is so wide it's more like a tunnel hull. A single strake adds lift.

In the turns the boat tracks well and doesn't lean over excessively. The engine could be left trimmed well out – the boat goes best with the motor trimmed out near its maximum. Steering effort is light. Lumpy sea didn't seem to effect the handling much, or throw the boat off line, making the 430 feel like a much bigger boat than it really is.

The ride is good with none of the banging or pounding associated with small aluminium boats. A fine entry helps the Winna into a head sea and the chines ensure the boat stays dry. We experienced a variety of sea conditions, including a couple of feet of wind against tide chop that would certainly have bothered many a small aluminium craft. The Winna coped well, provided I didn't push too hard, and the hull has so much lift it holds the plane at low speed, allowing the driver to pick his way through the rough stuff.

We landed the boat on a Northland beach through low surf, turning it around, loading it with passengers and heading out again through the breakers. We didn't get a drop of water over the bows on the way out, but on the way in a slow turn around resulted in a beached boat and a couple of waves slopping over the transom. Some heaving and

shoving quickly had the bow around into the waves and the bilge pump took care of the water in the cockpit.

The fact that we had no qualms about putting the boat on the beach, manhandling it into the water again and working our way through the surf break is a testament to the Winna's handiness. Because it's small, light – around 350kg in seagoing trim – and doesn't draw much water, it is easy to beach launch and to shove around in tight situations.

In Auckland I launched and retrieved the boat alone from a narrow concrete ramp into deep water. I had a crosswind and an annoying surge to contend with but at no stage struggled with the boat. However, I was thankful for the heavy-duty rubbing strip protecting the boat's waist, which allowed me to tie it alongside the wooden seawall while I parked the vehicle. The Dunbier trailer with its combination of keel and wobble rollers did its job well, centring the boat and ensuring it came on straight despite the wind and surge.

Up north we launched into a shallow tidal bay, using the Winna in much the same way I would a small tinnie. A full length metal rubbing strip protects the hull along the keel line and the Dunbier trailer is fitted with an extendable jockey wheel which made hitching and unhitching the trailer easy and allowed us to walk boat and trailer into deeper water for launching. Two adults were able to accomplish this without undue effort.

The transducer is mounted under the hull on the edge of the chine on the starboard side. It works well: the sounder still shows bottom at 40kph, but I wonder about its vulnerability to damage on ramps and beaches.

The Seaforce 430 Winna won Fishing Boat of the Show under 5m at the New Zealand Boat Show in Auckland earlier this year. It's not hard to see why.

This boat was designed to compete with small tinnies on their own terms. But the Winna has the advantages of fibreglass boat handling, ride and cosmetics; it's light, easy to tow, easy to move around on the trailer, easy to store and handy enough for one person to launch and retrieve. It should appeal to people wanting to get into boating at relatively low cost, newcomers to boating, older folk moving out of boats that have become too big to manage and anyone else wanting an easy-to-manage, safe and stable fibreglass runabout.

Seaforce haven't called it 'Winna' for nothing.

model Seaforce 430 Winna
designer Seaforce Design Team
builder Seaforce Boats, plug by Graham Harrison
construction GRP
loa 4.3m
boa 1.7m
deadrise ??
horsepower range 20-40hp
fuel capacity tote tank(s)
length on trailer 5.5m
boat weight 250kg
trailerable weight 550kg approx
boat supplied by Seaforce Boats

price as tested with Honda 30hp \$22,995
packages from ???

ENGINE

make Honda
type Four-stroke
horsepower 30hp
cylinders three?
max rpm ??
propeller Honda ?? inch
price

Boat supplied by Seaforce Boats

TRAILER

manufacturer Dunbier
braked No
suspension leaf spring
rollers keel rollers, two wobble rollers
features fully galvanised, nylon winch strap, submersible lights, tie downs, jockey wheel

Package includes canopy, side curtains, anchor warp and chain, flares, first aid kit, flush muffs, baitboard and Bottomline Tournament 1101 fishfinder.