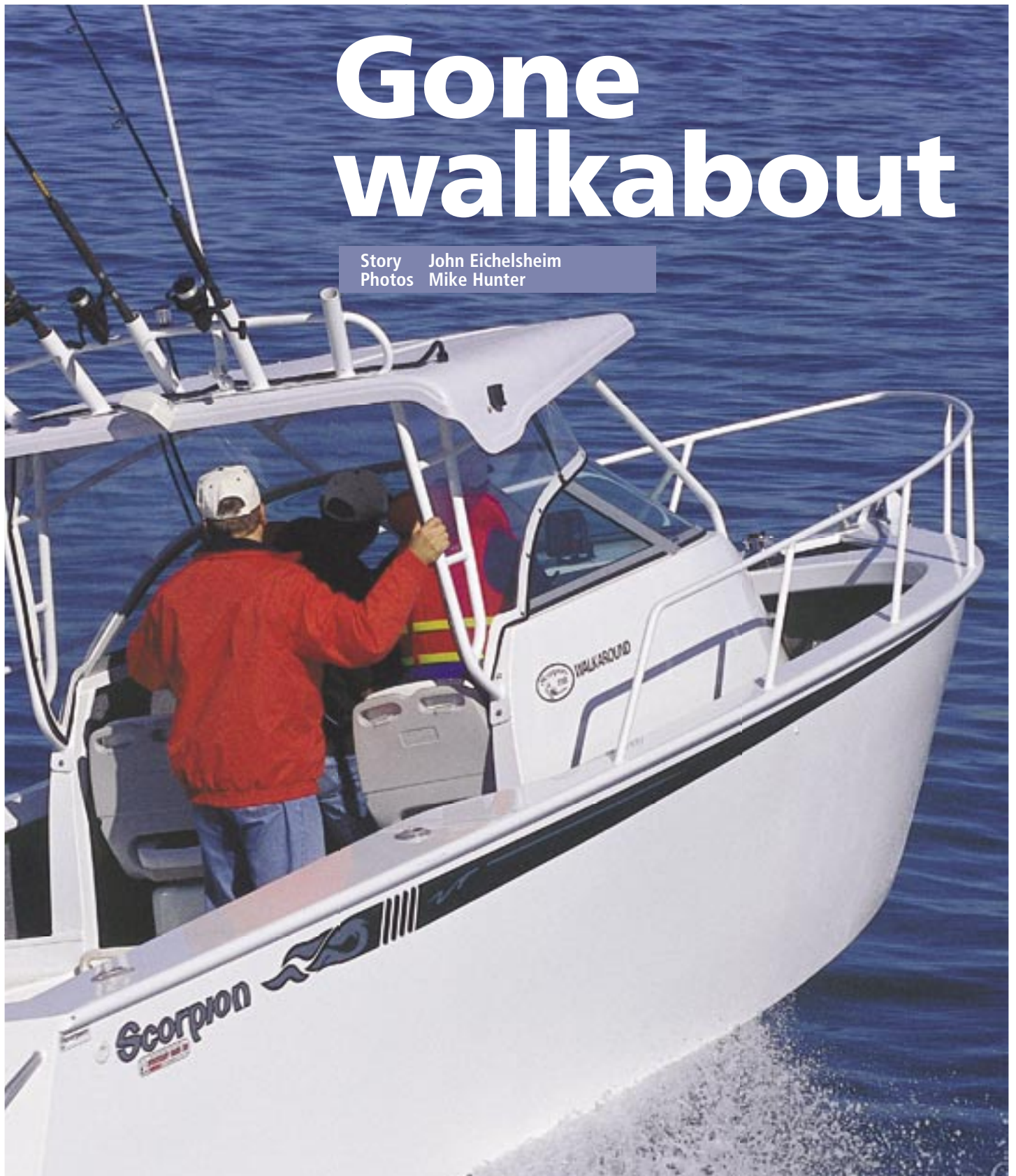


Gone walkabout

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If fishing is your aim, getting on the water at 11am is probably not the best recipe for success – especially on a brilliantly fine, windless, winter day.

And that's what we had on the morning Jamie Black and his friend pulled up at Halfmoon Bay launching ramp after towing a new Scorpion 730 Walkaround from Sportcraft Boats in Morrinsville.

The 730 hull comes in a number of guises, including this deeper vee version. It was equipped with a plastic targa top bolted to aluminium supports, which are bolted to the

boat's standard cabin. The white top matches the review boat's paint job – it works well and looks good.

There's a 6m version of the Walkaround, also available with a plastic targa, and an enclosed wheelhouse model using the 730 hull. There are a standard versions of both hulls, too, with slightly less vee at the transom for even more stability at rest.



The layout is uncluttered and the cockpit is one of the biggest in the business.

Walkarounds are fishing boats, so that's what we thought we'd do with the 730: go fishing. Black also loaded some dive gear in case we got the opportunity to grab a few scallops. Laden with four adults, dive gear, fishing gear and a nearly full belly of gas, it was a realistic load for the boat.

For the purposes of this review, the Scorpion was fitted with a pod-mounted Mariner 140hp. The boat will accept engines up to 200hp and Black said this motor is near the bottom of the boat's recommended horsepower range; he who was pleasantly surprised at the rig's performance. He noted,

however, that this engine is a 2.5-litre V6; he wasn't sure a 140hp V4 would do as well.

Response out of the hole was good and the two-hour-old engine gave an indicated 45mph on the Mariner speedo at 5200rpm. In the flat-calm conditions it was difficult to gauge how the boat would go in a bit of chop. Across the wakes of other boats, and those of the ubiquitous Auckland ferries, the landings were soft enough and the boat appeared dry.

There's quite a bit of shelter under the targa and behind the curved windscreen. Clears are fitted so the occupants remain

out of the wind and weather. Two folding, plastic Rae-line helm seats are mounted on moulded fibreglass pedestals with storage inside. There is a grab-rail for the passenger, a footrest for the helmsman, but standing passengers make do hanging onto the back of the cabin and the rocket launcher.

Inside the necessarily narrow cuddy cabin, narrow to accommodate the walkaround side-decks, Scorpion has still managed to squeeze in full-length berths. Squeeze is the operative word as most of the length and width of the bunks are underneath the boat's side- and foredecks. An adult will fit, but he wouldn't want to be too bulky.

The cabin is lined; there are full-length side shelves and limited storage under the bunks. Sitting headroom is available near the entrance.

The cockpit is huge: 2.5m long from the back of the seats to the transom, ideal in a fishing boat. Scorpion has handled the transition up to the side-deck well, with a single wide step, under which proved a useful spot to store our tackle boxes. The alloy floor is self-draining through generous scuppers aft; it's covered in washable, loose fitting marine carpet designed for easy removal and cleaning after fishing, and the wide coamings make good seats while fishing. There are sealed flotation chambers running fore and aft under the floor all the way to the bow with the 180L fuel tank making up a third sealed chamber between the two.



The second spot produced the odd snapper.

Across the transom are two plastic hatches accessing plumbing, batteries and fuel filters, all housed up off the deck for safety. The whole transom panel, hatches and all, can be unbolted and removed if necessary. There is room underneath for fish bins and other items. Side pockets on each side are deep but too short for most rods; drilling holes at the ends would solve the problem. Another slightly strange anomaly is the upturned lips at the aft ends of the side-decks – there is no way for water to drain away and it's bound to collect there.

Apart from the five-rod rocket launcher there are four alloy rod holders, two a side, riveted in, though welded rod holders are an option. A Bermuda Accessories bait board slotted into holes in the transom and a plumbed Bermuda plastic bait tank was mounted on the starboard side swimstep.

Accessing the ground tackle is easy on a walkaround. Anchor and warp are stored in a self-draining anchor locker in the bow. There's no lid on the locker, but it's not really an issue on a boat of this type – if you get a wave over the bow on a walkaround, you get it in the whole boat, just as you would with a bowrider.

Our first fishing spot proved to be lacking fish, so we upped anchor and moved on. Black raised the anchor, sitting on the flat in the otherwise curved foredeck to operate the Anchormate electric capstan. The foot switch is mounted on a simple welded alloy plate, which leaves the wiring rather exposed to the elements.

The Scorpion is a true walkaround: the side-decks are wide enough to negotiate while playing a fish and aluminium rails ensure the angler is safe. The foredeck is big enough to fish a couple of anglers and perfect for flyfishing or lure casting. The boat is stable, too, so moving around the deck and using the walkaround doesn't upset it's equilibrium. At one point we had all four anglers on one side of the boat fishing from the bow, side and cockpit. The Scorpion's heel was minimal.

Our second spot out by the Aahas produced the odd snapper and we stuck it out in the hope that the fishing would improve as light levels fell. A couple of reasonable fish in quick succession had us hoping for better things, but the tidal stream began to drop off as we neared low tide and bites became few and far between.

Black decided it was time for a dive and retreated to the bow to don his gear out of the way of the rest of us. This was the signal for a couple more good bites and a nice snapper, which had Black back at the stern in his wet-suit with rod in hand. Every time he made up



The walkaround side decks and foredeck are usable.

his mind to go into the water, he'd get a bite and soon it became too late for a dive.

Towards dusk the boat swung with the breeze that sprang up, forcing us to all fish along one side, reinforcing one of the walkaround's many advantages. All four of us could keep fishing without getting in each other's way, despite the awkward position of the boat in relation to the current.

Bites dried up as it became dark. A commercial fishing boat set its longlines all around us, criss-crossing back and forth and hemming us in with floats, hooks and traces.

It was time to call it quits. In the bin were 10 reasonable snapper – not a great afternoon's fishing but the result of perseverance and hard work. Each of us was able to take home a feed and we had certainly used the 730 as it is intended to be used.

On the run back to the ramp in the dark, we again appreciated the protection offered by the targa and the clears, though distinguishing navigation marks against the lights of the city was difficult. Unzipping the clears for better vision is always an option in these situations.



Working the ground tackle is easy on a walkaround.



The Scorpion is a true walkaround with useful space in the bows.



Back at the ramp we winched the boat onto its trailer without difficulty and pulled it up a slippery ramp at low tide with a rear-wheel drive vehicle – again, without difficulty. The rig weighs 1940kg all up including full fuel tank, so it's a fair proposition behind a six-cylinder car despite its bulk.

Conclusion

The Scorpion 730 Walkaround continues the Scorpion theme of producing practical, no-frills, big volume aluminium craft equipped to a basic level and sold at competitive prices. The 730 Walkaround is a purpose-built sportfishing machine and is well suited to that application. Requiring only moderate horsepower, it should be an economical runner at cruising and trolling speeds.

The layout is well thought out and totally uncluttered with one of the biggest cockpits in the business. The walkaround side decks actually work and the cuddy cabin would overnight a couple of people at a pinch. The targa top looks good and works well, though outriggers would have to be mounted on the supports rather than onto the roof.

General finish is good with all visible welds nicely executed and the boat's construction seems strong enough: 5mm plate-aluminium is used for the hull and 4mm plate on the sides.

But Scorpions are built to a price and some of the detailing, like riveted rod holders, the capstan switch plate and its exposed wiring and the too-short side pockets, suffers by comparison with some more expensive craft.

On the other hand, the 730 is a lot of boat



Jamie Black fishes from the bow after the tide changed.

for the money and a keen owner can always kit it out to whatever specification level he wants. The base boat, unpainted, with navigation lights, bilge pump, switch panel, 140hp Mariner engine and tandem braked trailer retails for \$59,000. Non targa versions are available for even less.

As reviewed, fully painted and fitted with carpet, bait tank, baitboard, spotlight, cockpit lights, anchor winch, Navman sounder and VHF radio it retails for \$68,059 – still a sharp price for a nearly 7.5m boat with this level of equipment.

Keen anglers might consider welded rod holders, stainless steel rocket launcher, additional rod holders in the bow and across the transom, full-length rod storage in the side pockets and a portable toilet.

Specifications

loa	7.30m
beam	2.45m
internal beam	1.7m
weight on road	1940kg
hull thickness	5mm
side thickness	4mm
fuel capacity	180L
engine	Mariner V6 140hp two- stroke
trailer	tandem braked
price as reviewed	\$68,059
boat supplied by Sportcraft Boats	