

DUAL PURPOSE

By Freddy Foote



The owner of this Bluefin 780 Weekender was initially looking to buy a caravan for his family holidays but then realised he couldn't take a caravan fishing. Freddy Foote takes a look at the Bluefin 780 Weekender, a caravan on water.

BOAT TEST

BLUEFIN 780 WEEKENDER

▼ *The Bluefin 780 Weekender off the coast of Tauranga.*



The 780 has been part of the Bluefin model range for some years now and has proven to be a popular model. In the last year, Bluefin has made some design changes to all of their hardtop models from the 665 upwards. Initially, Sportcraft (the parent company of Bluefin Boats) were only updating the cosmetic appearance of their Bluefin offshore range, but also took the opportunity to improve some performance characteristics. They have increased the beam and the length of the hull and also added a slight increase in hull height. This has lead to improved stability at rest and the boats plane easier. Cosmetically they have gone to a fully curved glass screen with updated side windows, which has given the

boat an updated look and increased the visibility dramatically. The 780, the largest model in the Bluefin range comes in two configurations; a Wheelhouse model, and the Weekender. Boats of this size you usually expect to be mostly custom builds, but this is a production model, with many features fitted as standard.

The base Weekender package comes standard with a separate toilet shower box and includes electric toilet, hot and cold water, 80-litre water tank, shower califont and an external sink. The owner of this 780 Weekender wanted a versatile boat, one that could accommodate the family for overnight excursions on the water, and with a well-appointed cockpit for a day's fishing.

This Bluefin 780 Weekender is powered by twin Mercury 90hp four-stroke outboards.



▲ ***A live bait tank is built into the transom walk through.***



▲ ***The interior of the helm and cabin is light and airy and well finished.***



▲ ***Wide side shelves and a sink are a feature of the cockpit.***

COMFORTABLE INTERIOR

In the forward cabin, there is very spacious full-length vee berth with centre infill and storage space under. The inside of the cabin and wheelhouse is fully lined with carpet and has a tidy and warm feel. Seating in the saloon/cabin area is minimal, with a single pedestal seat for the skipper, and another for the passenger. I'd be inclined to position a single bench seat to port so that more than one passenger can be seated and still able feel part of the action.

What is noticeable is how large the dash area is. It leaves you sitting quite far back from the windscreen, giving plenty of visibility all around. The dash is fully carpeted and on our boat featured a Raymarine 9" MFD, trim tab controls, a switch panel and engine instruments, with the dual Mercury throttles alongside. Though only a small display was specified for this particular boat, there is plenty of room above to mount much more should you wish.

Plenty of airflow is gained by not only the main access door but also via sliding side windows, plus a foredeck hatch providing extra

light and ventilation for the cabin. Behind the helm seat is a 50-litre Waeco fridge with a two burner gas stove above.

The hardtop roof has been designed with easy access from the side decks and also comes with rails, which make a good tie down point to store a small inflatable.

TIME TO FISH

Separating the interior and the cockpit is an aluminium door that opens outwards into the cockpit in two sections. In the forward port corner of the cockpit is the enclosed shower and toilet unit. A califont is also installed, fed by an 80L water tank.

This separate toilet unit is a great feature of the boat and means that when overnighting you don't have to sleep inside by the toilet and it also gives you proper privacy to the shower. Built into the coaming to port is a small cockpit sink and below that a storage locker for the gas bottle.

Storage is quite plentiful; dual carpeted side shelves provide great

The cockpit is sizeable with plenty of features.



▲ *Wide side decks allow you to navigate to the foredeck when needed.*



▲ *A full width boarding platform is fitted with a guard rail.*

storage options for rods while above there is a rocket launcher. Additional rod storage is available in the coamings with six holders and an additional six on the bait station.

Aft the batteries and oil tanks are located up off the floor behind two very large lockers built into the transom. Across the transom is a full-width boarding platform complete with railing system, so that you can fish off the platform should you need. There is a transom walkthrough located to port and a live bait tank with a viewing window.

DUAL POWER

One of the most notable features of this Bluefin 780 is the twin outboard set-up. This rig is fitted with two 90hp four-stroke outboards. The hull is rated from single 175hp outboards through to 300hp.

In the very calm and glassy waters of Tauranga's inner harbour, the twin 90hp Mercury four-stroke CT's (Command Thrust) pushed

the 780 along to 36 knots at 6100rpm, the two motors using 64 lph combined.

At a cruise speed of 21.5 knots at 4000rpm, you'll see a fuel use of 30.8 lph, the two engines combined.

I was very surprised that the outboards were just 90hp each, given the performance that they delivered. Why this package works so well is that the engines are the Mercury Command Thrust models. Thrust models use the same bigger gearcase housing as the Mercury 150, but with an all-new 2.38:1 ratio, which is ideally suited to bigger and heavier boats like the Bluefin. These boats benefit from the gearcase's ability to lift a hull quickly out of the water, resulting in greater acceleration and ability to hold the plane at slower speeds. With one engine tilted up out of the water, it was interesting that the boat could get up on the plane and reach 24 knots.

I found the engines to be relatively quiet, as we cruised the inner harbour and outside the entrance with the cabin doors open. Shut the doors themselves and it becomes very quiet.

The twin rig 90hp option is around \$5000 more expensive compared to fitting a single 200hp four-stroke, and although modern day outboards are very reliable, it does give you peace of mind to have the twins.

Driving the 780 was comfortable. In calm conditions, you can sit in the big helm seat, or choose to stand and helm when needed. We ventured out through the harbour entrance where there was a decent swell rolling through. The big 780 handled it well. The ride was good and overall the boat was very easy to drive. Trim tabs are fitted and these will be needed when it starts to blow.

A base 780 Weekender with a 200hp outboard starts at \$NZ103750, and this one as tested was \$NZ144543. This represents fantastic value for money given the number of features our boat had fitted.

Overall I enjoyed the 780 Weekender. It has a great layout, many great features and the performance on the water was pretty good. For anyone who is looking to upgrade their vessel and doesn't have a huge budget, but wants a lot of great features, then a larger Bluefin model like the 780 Weekender should be looked at. ⚓



▲ The cabin doors can be held open with a latch.



▲ A sizeable dash area provides plenty of room for an array of onboard systems.

SPECIFICATIONS

<i>Model & Model:</i>	Bluefin 780 Weekender
<i>Priced from:</i>	\$103,750
<i>Price as tested:</i>	\$144,543
<i>Type:</i>	Hardtop
<i>Construction:</i>	Aluminium
<i>LOA:</i>	7.8m
<i>Beam:</i>	2.5m
<i>Deadrise:</i>	17 degree
<i>Height on trailer:</i>	3.05m
<i>Trailerable weight:</i>	2000kg
<i>Test Power:</i>	2 x 90hp Mercury
<i>Propeller:</i>	17P Enertia
<i>Power options:</i>	Single/twin outboards
<i>HP Range:</i>	175-300hp
<i>Fuel capacity:</i>	240L
<i>Trailer:</i>	Sportline, twin axle

PERFORMANCE DATA

<i>RPM</i>	<i>Knots</i>	<i>L / h</i>
1000	5.5	4.4
1500	6.5	7.4
2000	8.1	11.4
2500	10.0	14.4
3000	14.0	19
3500	18.5	26
4000	21.5	30.8
4500	27.0	38.2
5000	28.0	41.2
5500	32.0	48
6000	35.0	62
6100	36.0	64

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Notable Standard Items

Separate toilet shower box, electric toilet, hot and cold water, 80 litre water tank, shower califont, external sink.

Notable Options on Test Boat

Twin 90hp Mercury four-stroke outboards, fridge, remote spotlight, transom cage, 2 burner gas stove, Raymarine multi function display, live bait tank, wash down system.

Manufacturer

Sportcraft Boats, www.sportcraftboats.co.nz

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