

Boat Review: **Sportscraft Bluefin 769 Wheelhouse**

Big blue lure



Boating New Zealand photojournalist **Mike Hunter** returned from the review of the latest alloy offering from Morrinsville's Sportcraft Boats with an unusual twist on the age-old story of the big one that got away.



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Barracouta love things bright and shiny, as we found out when we put Sportcraft's new Bluefin 769 Wheelhouse to the test off Tauranga.

The blue-sided boat didn't deter one of the biggest examples of the species any of us had ever seen from munching on my very light soft-plastic. You'll have to take my word for it though, because the slippery blighter escaped our grasp – the line snapped, just as I dived for my camera to get a winning smile of the toothy monster of the deep. Talk about the big one that got away.

Fortunately, we had our hands on the 769 for a little longer.

The Bluefin name has been around for more than two decades; they were a line of aluminum boats built by the late Peter Emerson. Sportcraft Boats bought the naming rights and now design and build them in-house, starting at the 620 mark. Sportcraft also do a complete range of their aluminum Scorpion brand, from a four-metre centre console up to 8.5m.

Our review boat was a show demonstrator which differed from the stock-standard \$72,750 model by having

plenty of optional extras added, including the aforementioned painted topsides. There was also a back-drop road cover, hardtop extension, washdown pump, auto capstan windlass with anchor warp and chain, twin batteries, freshwater tank and pump, sink and cooker unit, a CD player and speaker, as well as Navman 4600 sounder and 5600GPS chartplotter with New Zealand chart. This still comes in at under \$90,000 – a package representing good value for money on the braked trailer.

Underway

The roar of the fuel-injected 200hp Mercury EFI launched the big blue alloy boat onto the plane and we were off. Leaving Tauranga Harbour behind, we shot across the slumbering waves to our first fishing spot. Shutting the wheelhouse doors cut out the noise from the growling engine and made the cabin cosy.

The horsepower range recommended for this two-tonne boat is 150hp to 225hp. The 200hp fitted seemed a good match, giving plenty of performance and speed at the top-end, with a good cruise of around 30mph at 4000rpm. With a little



The 200hp EFI Mercury seemed a good match, giving plenty of performance and speed at the top-end; helm and galley are basic, but functional.



bit of trim out the boat felt balanced, the noise levels were more than acceptable, and the steering was light.

We managed a top speed of 41mph at 5250rpm with three big boys on board. Although we had some turbulence at the entrance to Tauranga Harbour, the downturned spray rail didn't have to work, with the windows staying dry throughout the day.

Wheelhouses, like hardtops, create a

handling effort all of their own, especially in a side breeze, but on this day there was none to speak of. Past experience though, has reinforced the need for trim tabs on these boats. This Bluefin wasn't fitted with any, but I'd certainly recommend it.

Visibility from the helm is good and the driving position is user-friendly. Being someone who prefers to stand for the entire performance, I found the helm and throttle position good, with the seat



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The helm station featured a
Navman 4600 sounder and 5600
GPS-chartplotter.
Below, l-r: The fully lined cabin; the
anchor windlass is easy to reach from
inside; batteries and oil reservoirs are
well protected in transom lockers; the
shiny lines of the Sportcraft Bluefin 769.



actually being expertly positioned when I
did want to sit. There are big, bulky bars for
footrests, which also felt just right.

Interior

The cabin is fully lined in Fronrunner
fabric, which does a good job of hiding any
blemishes. That said, this boat has been
well put together and there were no ugly
lumps and bumps anywhere.

The tray on top of the dash has a
good-sized lip and provided good shelter
for mobile phones and sun-glasses. The
driver's console had the two Navman
units set side by side, with the Mercury
Smartcraft gauges nestled in between.
The speedo wasn't working on the review
boat but the revs were reading. The VHF
radio is set below and to the right of the
steering wheel.

On the passenger's side is the

stereo head unit and a 12-volt socket for
floodlight or other accessories, with a
battery charger underneath. The 'glove
box' is a small hatch which I could easily
slide my professional-sized camera
into, and there was room for more. It's a
wonder it doesn't have its own light – it's
cavernous.

Aft of the passenger position is a small
galley set up under a loose-fitting squab.
The corner of the galley unit was sharp
and jabbed me three times with a sharp
jab before I learned to stay away from it.
Lifting the squab up left you wondering
where to put it down, so I opted for the
dash area – it was big enough. The galley
cooker and sink were low down, but did sit
on top of an aluminium unit big enough
for a gas bottle and dry storage of galley
supplies. There was also a splashback in
vinyl behind the cooking zone which would



make it a lot easier to keep clean than the Frontrunner used elsewhere.

A suggestion with the fitting squab would be to make it a bit bigger, fasten it round the sharp corner piece and lock everything into place.

There is an identical unit opposite and behind the helm seat which could be used to house a fridge or a chilly bin for cool stowage. Between the two seats is the stowage cavity ahead of the fuel tank. The lid was a surprise – it has no hinges or handles. It just sort of sat there and relied on its weight, it seemed, to stay in place.

The windows have two little rubber bungs fitted in them, in case a new owner wants to fit windscreen wipers. According to Alan Solly from Sportcraft Boats, our owner's representative for the day, "some do and some don't". The side windows slide open and give plenty of fresh air.

They're even big enough to lean out of, so you can admire the very wide side decks, which are an excellent walkway to the bow.

The anchor windlass is set up on top of the fore cabin and can be easily reached from the front hatch if needed. The bow roller is a man-sized beast and lets the plough anchor go without any hesitation, as well as making for easy retrieving.

The cockpit

The cockpit, measuring 2.25m long by 1.85m wide, is a great workspace. The sole is fitted out in checker plate, which could get a little hot for bare-footed fishermen in the summer but gave us great grip nonetheless.

The transom lockers have twin batteries. The on-off switches and oil reservoir are all set high above the sole.

Lined side pockets go the full length of



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the 2.25m cockpit and make for good rod stowage. There was a wash-down pump fitted, which had to be turned on and off at the dash but it did the job well.

Fishing in this cockpit was a comfortable experience with heaps of room for three of us; a fourth angler would not have cluttered the space at all. And with two of us leaning over one side the stability in the calm conditions was good – even when we were both involved in tagging and releasing a big barracouta!

The foot position was well taken care of, with the slope of the hull leaning away from the shin area. The thigh-high coamings gave good support when fishing and also added to the feeling of security.

Outside of the cockpit, the boarding platform and its fold-down ladder would make a diver very happy, although the high transom would take a bit to get over. However, a walk-through transom is optional and would sort out that concern.

Construction

The hull bottom is 5mm aluminum, sides are 4mm and the topsides 3mm. Six full-length bearers and a keel bar provide

What we liked

The performance and driveability of the boat and the position of the helm. The fishing was good, too, in the Bluefin's roomy cockpit. I thought this was a lot of boat for the money, admittedly with all the extras fitted.

What we didn't like

That sharp corner on the galley unit and the sloppy stowage cover of the cabin locker.

the framework for the hull. Transversely, there are five full bulkheads, including the transom. The hull design has a fine entry running back to a 17-degree deadrise at the transom. There are no planing strakes, and at the chine there is a small downturn achieved by welding an extrusion at a slight downward angle along the full length of the hull.

Underfloor buoyancy runs the full length of the cockpit, either side of the built-in 200 litre fuel tank, which has a large stowage cavity ahead of it, running into the cabin. In the cabin there is a

plastic 50-litre water tank fitted under the port berth and inbetween the vee of the twin berths is another cavity, which could be used for fitting a chemical toilet. The starboard vee berth has more stowage, which could be used for another freshwater tank if desired.

Trailer

The Sportline trailer supplied with the 2000kg Bluefin was an A-frame, multi-roller design, which launched and retrieved the boat with little fuss. It was also made by Sportcraft Boats Ltd.



Sportcraft Bluefin 769 Wheelhouse

loa	7.69m
beam	2.5m
tow weight	2000kg
deadrise	17 degrees
max hp	225hp
height	3.050m
trailer	Sportline, braked
Price as tested	\$90,000
Packages	\$72,750
Engine	Mercury 200hp EFI

Boat supplied by Sportcraft Boats Limited, Morrinsville and Tauranga.

