TRAILERBOAT TRIALS

By Sam Mossman
Photos by Mike Hunter and Sam Mossman

Scorpion 470 Centre Console

Sportcraft Boats, a family-owned business, has been around for about twenty years now.

Headed by Jamie Black, Sportcraft has grown steadily. The Morrinsville yard spread to several adjacent lots, and in 2001 a new yard was opened in Hewletts Road, Mount Maunganui. This was outgrown in a couple of years, and the company soon moved to new premises in the same road.

Originally dealing in existing brands, they headed off on a somewhat different tack and began to design the sort of aluminium boats to best serve their customers' needs at a price they were prepared to pay, having the hulls constructed under contract. One line of hulls Sportcraft established is the successful Scorpion range, which come with a selection of fit-out options to suit the customer.

The current attitude of economic caution, tempered by the high price of fuel, and then added to the growing popularity of inshore light-tackle fishing with soft-plastics and 'slow' jigs, has produced a demand for smaller, specialist sportfishing boats. Sportcraft's Scorpion 470 Centre Console is such a craft, and in early spring I got the opportunity to take one for a run at Tauranga.

Construction

This aluminium hull has 4mm bottoms and deck, and 3mm sides and topsides. There are six longitudinal supports, plus keel bar, along with nine lateral supports. The Scorpions are assembled by butting bottom and side plates into specialised aluminium extrusions at the keel and the chines, then fully seam-welding them.

The test boat had been kept fairly basic to allow later fit-out options, and Sportcraft will do custom fit-outs where possible. Customising the centre-console is a regular thing. One idea is building in a raised casting platform in the bow, which would have the additional benefit of adding weight up there (see below) as well as providing more buoyancy and/or under-deck stowage.

The sealed chequerplate deck drains to a sump under the transom, from where it is removed by a bilge pump. No reserve buoyancy figures for this rig were available at the time of publication.

Power and performance

The Scorpion 470 has a recommended maximum engine rating of 60hp, and the rig I tested was fitted with a standard Mercury 60hp two-stroke outboard. This test boat had little in the way of instrumentation or electronics, leaving the set-up to a future owner. Without rev-counter or GPS, I had to estimate the performance figures. Top-end revs for this outboard are listed at 5500rpm, and during a quick squirt in sheltered waters I would estimate our speed at 35-40 knots – certainly pretty nippy.

At 4.7m in length, this is not a big boat, but a centre console encourages the occupants to move around the hull a lot, especially when fishing. To achieve the stability required to do this, the 470 has been designed with a lot of beam (2.3m) and possesses a relatively flat deadrise. This is listed as 10° at the transom, but

The bin in front of the console offers storage and seating.

is curved on the bottom and variable to a reasonably fine entry at the bow, avoiding the worst excesses of pounding. Overall this design is a fair compromise between stability and sea-keeping, with the added benefit of shallow draft for inshore work.

We took the test boat out of the Tauranga Harbour entrance for a few miles, encountering a chop of about half a metre. Without the weight of the forward superstructure found in the half-cab version, I found that the boat rode a little bow-high, and I had to keep the engine trimmed in hard most of the time to maintain a reasonable attitude at cruising speed. This could be cured by a combination of things: wedging out the top of the outboard and shifting the battery from its current position under the transom to inside the console are two of them. Sportcraft has made this battery shift in some customised versions of this layout.

By and large, though, at cruise speeds around 20 to 25 knots we got a pretty reasonable ride, considering. The large console and screen provided shelter and we took little spray in the 10 to 15 knot beam winds.

Anchoring

One of the big advantages that centre consoles have is easy access to the bow and the anchoring gear. The 470 Centre Console has a substantial bow-sprit with a modest anchor-well built into the bow. This is sufficient for the lake, estuary and coastal work the 470 is designed for.

Other foredeck furniture includes a crucifix bollard and substantial bow rails, which could be used to fit spray screens to the bow if wanted.

When pulling the pick, the curve of the bows keeps you back a little from the well, making you either coil the warp in your hand and then periodically put it in the well, or drop it at your feet and pick it all up later to place it in the well. Not a big deal in shallow water, but fitting an optional bow platform (mentioned above) would reduce this problem, and/or allow a hold to be fitted under the platform into which the warp could be dropped.

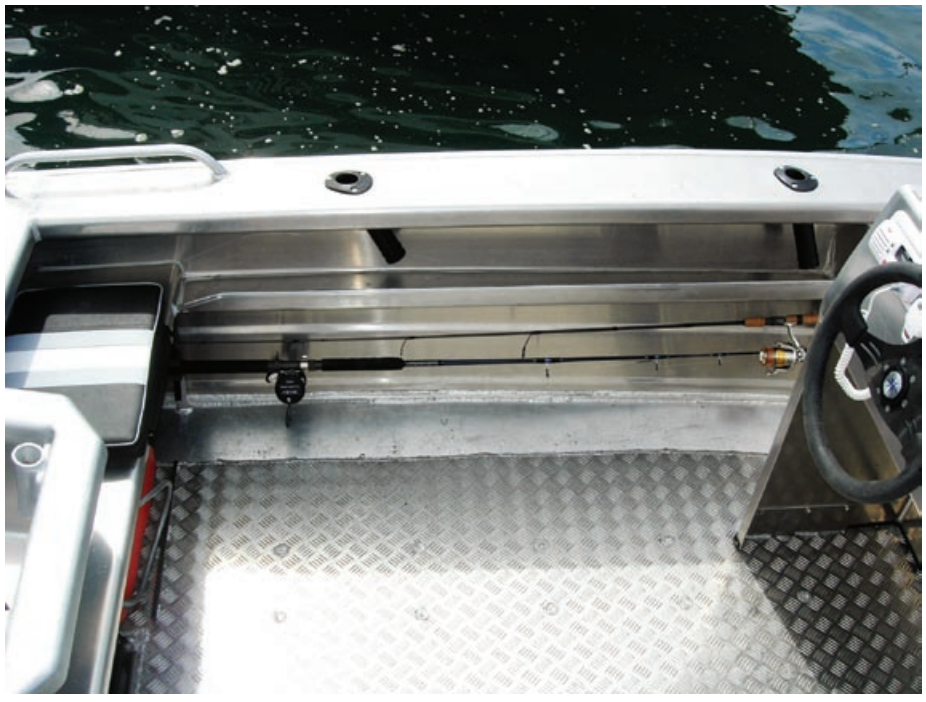
No doubt a hatch could be added to the anchor-well as an extra; this is something I like to see for several reasons. I heard of an incident some years ago when a boat crossing a bar took a big wave. The bow movement was extreme, causing the anchor to be tossed from the (hatch-less) well and over the side, and when the trailing warp became wrapped around the prop, the boat was left crippled in a hazardous situation.

Another scenario is burying the bow in a wave and filling the well with water, which takes a little while to drain. In the meantime the lift of the bows is reduced, increasing the odds of swamping. Obviously sensible boaties do their very best to avoid dangerous situations, but in my opinion the extra bucks spent to fit a hatch to an anchor well is money well spent.

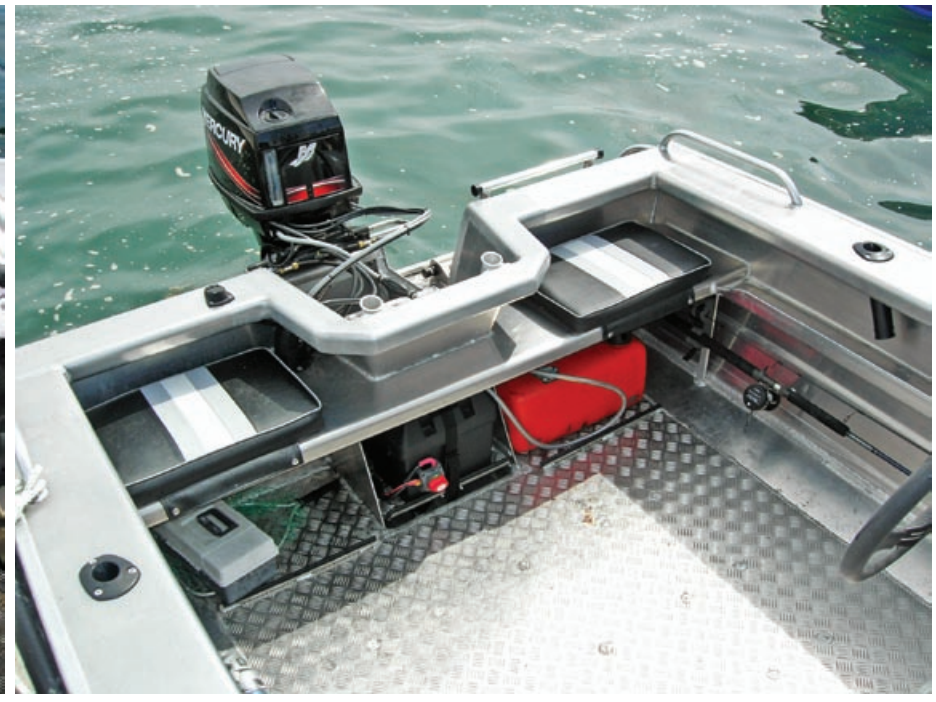
Layout

This is a simple boat. The centre console is large with a polycarbonate ‘screen to provide some shelter when underway. Shelter is hard to come by

This beamy hull offers good work space for its size.



The side pockets have rod racks built underneath.



Tote tanks and battery box are set under the transom.

in a centre console, and the extra console width is appreciated in this regard, and because it offers extra internal storage space. The wide console does make it a little harder to get around when moving to the bow though. Recognising this, Sportcraft has done several fit-outs using a binnacle throttle/shift on top of the console, rather than the side-mounted version used here.

Shelves are often fitted inside the console. This would be a more protected spot for the battery than low under the transom – where it was on the test boat – and would also help with the balance of the hull. A chilly bin also fits inside, while doors would provide more cover for items stored there. Some versions of the boat have bimini tops mounted off the console for sun shelter. These features, and more, can be fitted by Sportcraft on request.

The outside of the console provides a mounting point for navigation lights and VHF antenna. The large top is covered with decktread and surrounded by a grab rail. A sounder is mounted here, and there is plenty of extra space. The VHF radio and switching gear is flush-mounted on the front, and there is room for further instrumentation.

A large fish bin with an upholstered top provides seating and dry storage, or a place to keep the catch. In the test boat we kept the bin/seat in front of the console, but it can be fitted behind to allow seating at the helm. Two further squab seats are set into the transom to either side of the engine well. Two tote tanks fit under the transom with the battery box on

The single boarding platform is fitted with a fold-down ladder and grab rail.

The large console provides some shelter for the helmsman. More elaborate console constructions are available.

The best thing about centre console layouts is the fishing room they offer. Sam works a kahawai around the bow, while Sportcraft's Mike Tumbridge boats a gurnard from the stern.

a low platform between them. Those who like the battery in a more protected position can have a position set up in the console, as mentioned, although it must be remembered that raising the centre of gravity in a boat can reduce stability.

Side shelves are run about half a boat length along each side. A mounting for a stern riding light is set into the transom top. Over the stern on the port side is a chequerplate boarding platform with grab rail and fold-down ladder to make boarding easy for divers and swimmers. A separate transducer bracket is mounted on the stern so that mounting the transducer does not pierce the hull.

The wide beam and centre-console layout makes for plenty of room in what is essentially a small boat.

Fishability

Centre consoles are all about fishing. Essentially you give up a lot of shelter and stowage space in return for more room and all-around access. This is particularly useful when fighting a fish, as I found out when we stopped to drop some baits. Amongst the pannie snapper and gurnard, a pretty decent kahawai hooked up on my light spin rig and took me around the boat a few times. Easy access to the bow allowed me to quickly and easily clear the line around the anchor warp. The ability for anglers to fish from the bow as well as the cockpit makes centre consoles particularly suited to drift and cast fishing.

Considerable effort has gone into providing stability in this hull, with the decks and battery-mount kept low so the centre of gravity stays equally low, while the relatively flat deadrise and wide beam add to the stability.

The chequerplate decks provide good footing but do not reach right to the line of the gunwales, the rising sides preventing anglers from leaning on the sides when playing a fish. The answer to this is to lean back on the console.

Six through-gunwale nylon rod-holders have been fitted, and there is room for plenty more. Two fittings in the engine-well serve to mount a bait-board.

Racks for two rods on each side are fitted under the side shelves, and there are plenty of places to install vertical racks for carrying rods. Although one fish bin is supplied as a seat/stowage unit, it is tempting to install a second insulated box as a helm seat and to store the catch.

The test boat has only a basic fishing layout, but like a blank canvas it is loaded with potential to set up as a neat sportfishing and diving rig.

Trailering

The test boat was carried on a trailer from Sportline Custom Marine Trailer Systems. It was a cradle A-frame design built from galvanised box section. The single axle has zinc-protected leaf-spring suspension and galvanised rims.

Other fittings are moulded-plastic wheel arches with steps, submersible lights, dual-ratio manual winch and wind-down jockey wheel. The boat is carried on three pairs of wobble rollers per side and comes on and off nicely. Tow weight for the rig is about 640kg.

All in all

This is a useful boat, handy for inshore sportfishing (especially soft-baiting), casting for trout and diving in particular, with heaps of potential for a top fishing layout.

It represents excellent value for money, with the base key-turn packages (including 50hp two-stroke engine, sounder, VHF, bait-board and ground tackle) starting at $23,950.

Specifications

Material	aluminium
Configuration	centre console
LOA	4.7m
Beam	2.3m
Bottoms	4mm
Sides and topsides	3mm
Decks	4mm
Deadrise	10° variable
Max horsepower	60hp
Test engine	Merc 60hp two-stroke
Tow weight	640kg
Base key-turn price	$23,950
Price as tested	$25,800

Test boat courtesy of Sportcraft Boats.