

# Bluefin 700 Hardtop



Readers who have been around the boating scene for a while will probably remember the name 'Bluefin'.

The original Bluefin Boats was built into a successful firm by Peter Emerson, who eventually sold the company and retired to a life of fishing at Whangarei Heads. Unfortunately Bluefin eventually fell on hard times and founded.

Sportcraft Boats, based in Morrinsville and now also Mount Maunganui, is a family-owned company that has come into the marine sales business from a somewhat different tack to the norm.

Originally a boat sales company dealing in existing brands, they began designing aluminium boats for the perceived market, establishing the successful Scorpion marque, and having the hulls constructed under contract. Scorpions were designed for wide appeal as an all-rounder, but manager Jamie Black and designer Spencer Black were looking to supplement them with a more hard-core fish and dive boat. To avoid confusing the

new line with the existing Scorpions, the rights to the name 'Bluefin' were bought and a new range of hulls designed by Spencer Black.

The new range includes the 540, the 620 HT, the 700 HT (the subject of this test), the 769 HT, and the 769 Wheelhouse. The Bluefins, particularly the 700 HT, have been selling very well, and to speed production, no customising of basic construction is possible, but the fit-up and layout (such as seats, transom walk-through etc.) can be altered to suit the customer.

On an overcast summer's day I drove to Mount Maunganui to rendezvous with Jamie Black and Jayson Hurley of Sportcraft Boats, to put the Bluefin 700 HT through its paces.

## Construction

The hull bottoms are 5mm aluminium, the sides 4mm, and the topsides a mix of 4mm and 3mm. Six full-length bearers, plus a keel bar, support the hull.

Laterally there are five full bulkheads (including the transom).

The hull design incorporates a fine entry running to a 17° deadrise at the transom. No planing strakes are necessary and modest down-turned chines are formed by seam-welding an angled extrusion-cap over the butt welds that join side and bottom, while a total of four full seam-welds at each chine provide some lift.

The keel assembly is achieved by fully seam-welding the two bottom plates together, inside and out, then adding an internal keel bar, again with two full-length welds. These welds look to be strong and well executed, while the overall quality of the finish is fair and the paint looks sharp.

Buoyancy is provided by two large sealed air tanks running up each side of the hull under the decks, separated a 184-litre underfloor fuel tank aft and twin holds further forward. The buoyancy chambers are sealed and pressure

tested – when I pulled one of the bungs at the end of our run, I felt a rush of air exiting the chamber, caused by its expansion in the warming temperatures.

Buoyancy figures were not available at the time of writing.

## Power and performance

Recommended outboard horsepower for this seven-metre hull is between 150 and 225hp. The rig can handle up to 250hp, but this level of power is not necessary for normal use. Inboard versions are available on request.

The test model was fitted with a 200hp Mercury EFI two-stroke swinging a 19" pitch prop. This set-up produced a maximum speed of 43 knots (80kph) at 5400rpm with two adults on board. Top end 'book' revs are 5800, so there is room to drop to a 17" prop if you value pick-up over speed for, say, water skiing or bar work, but there is probably not a lot in it. The big rig cruises nicely at around 21 knots (39kph).

Tauranga Harbour was calm, but the strong tide running in the entrance produced steep standing waves of up to a metre and there was a half-metre swell running outside. I found the 700 HT to be a good traveller, landing softly (having no planing strakes is always an advantage here) and taking the swell well with its fine entry. The down-turned chines pushed the spray away from the hull, but spray is not really an issue with a hardtop, anyway.

Hardtops on moderate-sized mono-hulls can often result in them heeling over in a crosswind. The fix for this is to fit trim tabs. The 700 HT has mount-







Front-opening hatches access the transom locker.



Flush-mounted instruments make for a tidy helm installation.



Separate plates allow fitting of trim tabs and transducers without drilling into the hull.



A permanently mounted anchor and electric capstan make light work of anchoring.



The hardtop design offers shelter from spray and sun.

ing plates for tabs and are offered as an option – one that is advisable to take.

Downhill, the boat had the ability to run on the plane at low speeds with its bow trimmed high. This, added to good acceleration, is a great advantage when working your way through steep seas, such as bar entrances. The HyDrive Admiral hydraulic steering was nice to use, and visibility from the helm was good while seated or standing.

Overall, an excellent performer.

#### Anchoring

Nice wide bulwarks and substantial bowrails aid access around the cabin

sides to the bow. Aftermarket non-skid panels can be added on request. Access to the bow and the Quick warp and chain capstan can also be gained through the hatch in the cabin roof – useful if you want to activate the anchor winch's freespool facility for pinpoint anchoring.

The capstan feeds the warp through the foredeck into the anchor-well, which can be accessed through a hatch in the forward bulkhead should you need to sort out a chain tangle or some such. Capstan controls are at the helm.

A permanently mounted plough anchor sits on a short bowsprit, also fur-

nished with a heavy alloy bollard.

A straightforward, labour-saving anchoring set-up.

#### Layout

The forecabin roof and sides are lined. Berths sleep two (comfortably) or three adults (passionately), with the infill fitted. There is stowage space under the berths and room in the middle to fit an optional toilet. The step-down drains to the bilges and a cabin light is fitted. A screw-off panel allows access to the wiring and steering in the back of the console. The cabin entry is a reasonable size and a locking cabin is available. An

alternative is a canvas privacy screen.

Out under the open-backed hardtop is a large dash with a rear lip and grey marine-carpet lining. This helps prevent items from sliding around and also cuts internal reflection on the 5mm toughened-glass forward windows. Wipers can be fitted as an option. The side windows are polycarbonate.

The helm is well set out with a Navman Trackfish 6500 sounder/GPS (an upgrade option), Sitex VHF and white-dialled 'retro' Mercury instrumentation, all flush-mounted. On the passenger side is the sound system and a large, waterproof, hatched glove box.



A clean, open cockpit design aids fishing.



A boarding ladder, grab rail and platform are a boon for divers.





The seats fitted to the test boat were padded, rotationally-moulded swivelling types on fibreglass pedestals (with internal stowage). Footrests were fitted and other seat options are available.

Grabrails were attached right around the rear edge of the hardtop. Centrally between the seats is an underdeck hold, open to the bilge.

The sealed chequerplate decks drain to a sump under the transom, from where water is removed by an 1100gph bilge pump. Large-capacity, lined side pockets are approximately 2.5m long. Wide gunwales make a comfortable perch while fishing. Another option fitted to the test boat was a removable canvas extension to the hardtop, further increasing the shelter from sun and spray for the boat's occupants.

The transom locker is accessed through two front-opening hatches, and it houses two batteries with isolation switch and an oil reservoir. The fuel port on the demonstrator was sited on the transom top, but this has since been moved outboard to prevent any fuel spillage into the hull when filling the underfloor tank.

Over the transom is a large chequerplate boarding platform with grabrail and fold-down boarding ladder. Separate mounting plates for trim-tabs and transducer are fitted to the stern.

A nice clean layout with plenty of working space.

#### Fishability

The hull has good stability at rest, while the chequerplate floor affords firm footing, and there is good toe room all

around. The good-sized cockpit has clean lines, and flat gunwale faces offer the angler support at the top of the thigh. The sides are fairly high – many see this as an advantage with kids on board.

Eight through-gunwale aluminium rod holders are fitted, with the two on the transom used to mount a bait station on the test boat. A five-position rocket launcher on the hardtop offers further rod stowage. The test boat was fitted with an optional canvas hardtop extension, which offers increased shelter to the cockpit. It does, however, make access to the rocket launcher difficult.

Divers will appreciate the wide chequerplate boarding platform and fold-down ladder. The standard boat does not feature a walk-through transom, but they are available on request. Many divers are quite happy with a full transom anyway, and use it as a place to sit while doing the final kit-up, or when stripping their gear after a dive. The side pockets are large and look like they will take dive tanks; the hold offers further stowage for dive gear.

Fishing options offered include wash-down pump, livebait tank, outriggers, and electronics upgrades.

The basics are all there to make the Bluefin 700 into a good fishing and diving platform.

#### Trailer

The trailer supplied with the Bluefin is a cradle A-frame design with entry bay and gusset strengthening. It has tandem axles and the leaf-spring suspension is protected with a zinc finish.

Six pairs of wobble rollers per side support the boat. Other features include: a wind-down jockey wheel; two-speed manual winch; dual coupling; hydraulic trailer brakes (optional); and submersible lights. The boat came off and was reloaded easily at the ramp. Tow weight for the rig is given as 1600kg, dry.

#### All in all

This hull looks sharp, makes a good fish and dive machine with overnighting capacity, travels well, and its tow weight is not over the top. A lot of boat for your dollar.

#### Specifications

LOA	7m
Beam	2.5m
Bottoms	5mm
Sides	4mm
Topsides	3 and 4mm
Rec. HP	150-225hp
Base package (200 EFI Mercury)	\$54,750
As tested	\$66,500

*The cradle A-frame trailer with entry bay makes for easy loading.*

