

TRAILER BOAT TRIALS

By Sam Mossman

Bluefin 720L Hardtop

Sportcraft Boats, a boat company with yards in Morrinsville and Mount Maunganui, moved from selling other brands into manufacturing hulls designed to suit their perceived market.

They first established the successful Scorpion marque before rights to the name 'Bluefin' were purchased and a further range of new hulls were designed. The Bluefin range

represents good value for money and consequently sells very well.

Scott Black, from the Morrinsville side of the operation, towed the Bluefin 720L (for lock-up) test boat to Auckland for the trial, accompanied by Ross Hubbard from Sportcraft's associate company, Sportline Trailers, which turns out the trailers for Sportcraft boats.

Construction

The Bluefin 720L is a development from the popular Bluefin 700. The hull has been lengthened by 200mm to allow for a lock-up cabin (as opposed to an open-backed hardtop) while preserving the cockpit space of the original 700. Sportcraft will customise these hulls for owners, and design ideas from the owners of *Still Cruzin*, Barry Wright and his wife Penny, have been incorporated into this particular boat.

The bottoms are 5mm aluminium, the sides 4mm, and the top-sides 3mm. The hull is supported by six full-length bearers, plus a keel bar. Laterally there are five frames and the transom assembly. The hull design incorporates a medium entry running to a 17° deadrise at the transom. No planing strakes are necessary and this helps give a softer ride.

Wide, flat chines at the stern taper out at the shoulders. Chines are formed by seam-welding the plates inside and out, then adding an aluminium capping over the outside of the join, which is also fully seam-welded.

Buoyancy is provided by four sealed buoyancy tanks providing about 200kg of reserve buoyancy. The buoyancy chambers are sealed and pressure-tested.

The standard fuel tank is a 200-litre underfloor model, with the

fuel port set on top of the transom. A sealed chequerplate deck drains to a sump under the transom, from where water is removed by an 1100gph Rule pump. Twin batteries with an isolation switch are set up in a protected position in the transom locker.

Power and performance

Sportcraft's recommended power range for the 720L is 175-250hp. The test boat was pushed by a Mercury Optimax 225hp swinging 19-inch pitch Mirage prop, producing a top-end performance of 49mph at 5500rpm. 'Book' top-end revs are given as 5000-5750rpm, so the prop and engine set-up for this rig is right on the money.

Taking the rig for a spin on the Hauraki Gulf I found it to be very responsive to trim – both the tilt-and-trim of the outboard and the excellent Bennett trim-tabs. A single touch was all that was needed to correct any heel caused by wind or loading. Likewise, the engine-tilt allowed the bow to be trimmed right up for free running in calm conditions, or to push the bow down when sloppy, enabling the entry to cut cleanly through the sea for a smoother ride.

Initially it was a pretty calm day on the Gulf, but such is the shipping and ferry traffic, there was plenty of heavy wake activity to be found.



The leading edge of the helm seat can roll back to make more space for a standing helmsman, providing a backrest at the same time.



Bow access is aided by Decktread panels and a substantial bowrail.

Later in the day, a sea breeze sprang up, lifting a small half-metre chop. Not much of a sea trial, I will admit, but enough to show me that the Bluefin 720L is a soft rider, and of course the crew remain snug and dry in the wheelhouse, regardless of the conditions.

Visibility is good all round through 6mm toughened-glass 'screens. A pair of TMC wipers is fitted, with a control for the passenger as well as the skipper. Hydrive hydraulic steering makes control of the big outboard easy.

Helm and passenger seats are upholstered with a fold-back padded roll at the front edge (allowing more space and forming a back rest if you prefer to travel standing up). They are mounted on Softrider gas-shock pedestals. Foot rests are also fitted to make this boat a comfortable traveller.

Anchoring

Easy access to the bow around the cabin sides is facilitated by Decktread panels and substantial bow rails. In reality there is not a lot of need to get out on the bow (for anchor duty anyway), as there is hatch access through the top of the forecabin and controls for the Lewmar Freefall Profish anchor winch at the helm. A large Sarca anchor is permanently mounted on the bowsprit, with a

handy warp and chain counter fitted so you can tell how much warp is out. Access to the anchor well is through a hatchway in the forward bulkhead.

Layout

The forecabin can sleep up to four adults with the berth infill fitted. Beneath this an electric macerating toilet is fitted. The bi-fold aluminium frame cabin doors are fitted with tinted reflective glass to give privacy when the toilet is in use. Two large side shelves supplement the under-berth stowage in the forecabin, and a cabin light is fitted.

Out in the wheelhouse a three-tray dash is lined with grey marine carpet, cutting internal glare on the 'screen and stopping items from sliding around. A decent-sized glove compartment with internal light adds to storage space, further supplemented by an under-deck hold between the seats. Grab rails are in the right places.

Electronics fitted are Navman Trackfish 6500 GPS and Lowrance X515C DF sounder. A Sony Marine Sound System with iPod connection, along with a GME GX600 VHF, is mounted overhead. The cabin is completed with sliding toughened-glass side-windows and the bi-fold doors already mentioned, providing a lockable cabin.



The saltwater basin set in the gunwale top is useful for washing hands while fishing.



Sound system and VHF are set overhead.



The customised transom lockers hold the batteries and provide further stowage space.



Grabrail, ladder and chequerplate platform make boarding easy.

Specifications

Configuration	Lockable hardtop
Material	Aluminium
LOA	7.20m
Beam	2.50m
Bottom	5mm
Sides	4mm
Topsides	3mm
Deadrise	17°
Rec. power	175-250hp
Test engine	Mercury Optimax 225hp
Trailer	Sportline tandem
Tow weight	2000kg approx
Key turn package (Merc 200 EFI)	\$63,750
Price as tested	\$95,000
Test boat courtesy of Barry and Penny Wright	

Out in the cockpit, large shelves run the length of the sides. Side lights are fitted along the gunwale faces, and a saltwater hand basin is set into the gunwale top, running off the wash-down hose intake. Overhead, a retractable canvas top supplies a bit of extra shelter to the cockpit. Other cockpit furniture includes a pair of removable seats that hook onto the side shelf when required, and stern grab rails that double as tie-off points for mooring.

The transom locker can be accessed through three different hatches, and a shelf is added above the batteries to provide more storage room. Over the transom is a large chequerplate boarding platform with a fold-down ladder. Separate mounting brackets for transducers are welded onto the stern so there's no need to drill holes in the hull.

Overall, a nice clean layout with plenty of fishing room.

Fishability

A reasonably stable hull with a chequerplate deck provides a good work platform. The cockpit is a decent size and has clean flat gunwale and transom faces that give comfortable top-of-the-thigh support and plenty of toe room so you can lean on them while still on balance.

Eight aluminium through-gunwale rod holders are fitted, two of which mount the bait-station at the centre of the transom. A further two rail-clamp rod holders are fitted on the trailing edge of each bowrail; we found these to be the ideal spot to store the landing net – out of the way of those fishing from the cockpit, yet to hand when needed.

Further rod stowage was available in two brackets mounted in each side shelf (taking four rods in total) and a five-position rocket launcher on the hardtop. This is a bit more difficult to access when the cockpit canopy is extended.

A Keep Alive livebait tank (see

the tackle test in our February 2009 issue) is mounted on one side of the boarding platform, while the bait and catch is kept on ice in a large aftermarket ice box, which can be positioned anywhere that is suitable.

An uncomplicated fishing setup, uncluttered and well-suited to basic fishing and diving, it would not take much to set it up for blue-water work or to add tank racks for divers.

We paused to do some drift-fishing along the Tiri' Channel, casting soft-plastics and boating a dozen pinnie snapper, to give the boys from Morrinsville a feed of fresh fish to take home as a reward for braving the Auckland traffic.

Trailer

As mentioned, Sportcraft Boats now produces its own trailers through allied company Sportline Trailers, run by Ross Hubbard. The trailer carrying the 720L was a cradle A-frame, tandem-axle design. The boat is supported by eight wobble-rollers per side. The trailer is fitted with plastic wheel guards, hydraulic brakes, wind-down jockey wheel, submersible lights and Bearing Buddies.

To make life easy, the trailer was also fitted with an electric winch, the battery for which was padlocked in a box under the winch post. A pair of leads are attached when required.

Scott Black estimated the tow weight as around 2000kg.

All in all

The Bluefin 720L is a comfortable boat to travel in and has the added advantage of a locking cabin. This is a good, practical fish and dive boat, with only modest overnighting capacity (due to no in-built galley, fresh water or refrigeration systems). The basics are all there and the boat can be customised to suit individual owners. What's not to like? 