

review

**Surtees 540
Workmate
Hardtop**

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The Workmate perfectly embodies the Surtees philosophy – a basic, practical boat that gets the average fisherman on the water at a reasonable price.

A

fter 25 years in the game, Whakatane's Surtees knows a thing or two about what New Zealand boaties want. And since the first 5.5m hull rolled off the production line back in 1996, this model has consistently hit the sweet spot with buyers.

But the company never takes anything for granted and despite the winning formula the designs continue to improve and evolve. There are now six different hull sizes in the Workmate range, with four of these available in a choice of either the fixed hardtop option or with a 'garageable' folding hardtop and clears to reduce overall height.

The 540 hardtop is the latest evolution of the range, and it reflects the modern demand for more cockpit space while remaining compact and manageable. So the new 540 hull has a wider beam of 2.19m, 4cm



BEATS WORKING

more than the 5.5 Workmate Hardtop which it replaces, while also being 10cm shorter. The new hull also boasts a 5mm hull thickness – in keeping with the ethic of being a practical and tough boat – yet has managed to shed more than 50kg in overall weight.

The end result is a boat that remains easy to tow and launch while delivering an enlarged fishing area, without compromising on any of Surtees' renowned stability and seaworthiness. The smallest hardtop in the Surtees range, the 540 Workmate Hardtop is also one of the smallest production hardtops available in the country.

This doesn't come at the expense of any of the Surtees innovations – dubbed the "Surtees IQ". Chief of these is the well-known Stability Ballast technology, also known as water ballast.

With a capacity of 190 litres in the case of the 540 Workmate, this provides stability at rest as the keel compartment fills with

water and the boat settles down slightly. Under acceleration it drains rapidly, allowing the boat to ride higher and more efficiently, reducing fuel consumption.

A shutoff gate allows you to hold on to this extra ballast when additional stability is required, or it can be closed off while empty to facilitate trailering the vessel in shallower water.

Fully-sealed safety flotation compartments are positioned under the deck and, together with the six, full-length welded under-floor stringers, provide a super-rigid hull. Like all Surtees models, the boat will also carry the European CE safety rating.

Other Surtees features are less obvious, like its industry-leading 10-year worldwide hull warranty, while its 'Quik-hitch' trailer catch system makes single-handed launching and retrieval possible even in less-than-ideal conditions.



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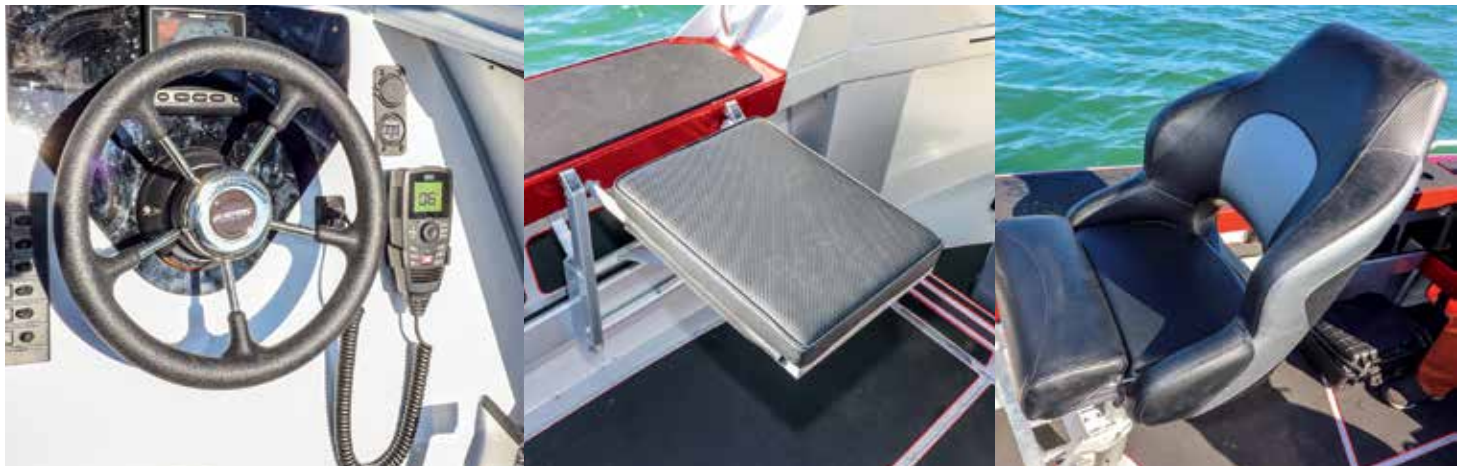
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The new 540 Workmate Hardtop not only looks good, it has continued a proud tradition of winning boat show awards. The original 5.5 Workmate won no less than five Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show awards, and the new 540 Workmate Hardtop got off to a good start by taking out the 'Specialist Fishing Boat up to 6m' category when it was launched at this year's show.

I jumped aboard this vessel just after the show and was mightily impressed. Decked out in a fetching burgundy paint scheme, the review boat was somewhat at odds with its no-nonsense, tough heritage, but she's scrubbed up well. The standard of workmanship on the boat is high, with neat, high-quality welds that

don't need cosmetic grinding.

This is, of course, a day boat, so the forward cuddy space is for storage rather than sleeping. A large hatch provides stand-up access to the anchor well, from where the anchor can easily be set by hand.

A removable Icey-Tek bin with two-part lid provides a place for the bait and the catch, and this is easily removed for cleaning. Although the bin can be moved back into the cockpit to provide additional seating, the gunwales are so wide and comfortable, with non-slip EVA pads to provide cushioning, this would seldom be needed.

The helm position continues the feeling of quality, with a luxuriously-upholstered skipper's seat in dark grey,

ABOVE (L-R) A clean, functional display around the helm; the fold-out seat; a helm seat fit for a serious angler.

OPPOSITE Honda's 80hp outboard is a happy match for the boat.

LOVE YOUR TIME ON THE WATER

THE NEW FRESH LOOK BF80, BF90 and BF100 next generation Honda outboards have been appearing on transoms up and down the country and with good reason. The redesigned and distinctly aggressive "Crouching Form" engine cowlings make these outboards stand out amongst a literal sea of alternatives.

The updated mid range outboards also provide easier main-

tenance and servicing functions, provide best in class charging performance plus even more improvements to Honda's ECOmo fuel efficiency and BLAST™ torque technologies.

What do those terms mean for you? Simply put, cheaper running costs. Less fuel used means less fuel purchased. Honda engines have never been the type of engine to make a lot of noise about it though.



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with a fold-down footrest and comfortable armrests. A section of the front cushion flips up to provide back support (and more standing room) if you prefer to stand, while in the folded down position it is a superbly soft and comfortable perch.

The passenger is not quite so lucky, with a folding seat (another Surtees innovation) providing a place to sit when needed but folding down and completely out the way when the fishing action's hot.

Being set up for the boat show meant that this boat had more options installed than most boats are lucky enough to get. A 7-inch Garmin Echomap SV colour chart-plotter with CHIRP sonar provided clear navigation plus a clear view of what's below the boat.

Engine instrumentation was courtesy of another Garmin unit – the GMI 20 Marine Instrument – which provides a visual display of RPM, fuel consumption and other engine specs on a bright 4-inch colour LCD.

Other accessories included a large wiper covering almost the entire width of the windscreen, navigation lights, a GME VHF radio, 12V powered socket for charging devices, underwater lights below the stern, desk washdown pump, live-bait tank in the transom with viewing window and circulating pump, and a floodlight illuminating the entire cockpit.

This model is rated for five occupants, and the cockpit's big enough for all of them to fish at the same





time. Wide, flat gunwales have rounded edges and are covered in cushioned foam pads to make a comfortable seat, and the gunwale and transom abound with rod-holders.

A broad parcel shelf under the gunwale provides space for all the requisite fishing gear. The 100-litre underfloor fuel tank takes up the central space, with Surtees' simple but effective fuel gauge fixed in the middle of the floor.

The transom's dominated by a custom-made bait board with three built-in rod-holders. This bait board is cleverly raised off the transom, with a useful tray built underneath. It not only provides a comfortable working height for the board but also creates a perfect place for keeping sinkers, bait knives and the like ready to grab while out of the way.

A live-bait tank, with viewing window and circulating pump, is located under the port step-through door. Rather than being removable, this door simply drops down into a recessed slot, solving the usual problem of where to store it when you open the door. The starboard side has a useful open locker, while the battery and other electrics are kept dry behind a water-tight hatch in the middle of the transom.

One of the best features of the Workmate has always been the open space under the transom, and this model continues it. Divers know that scuba tanks on board often result in stubbed toes – this space is perfect for storing the tanks out of the way.

The review boat had another great feature on the starboard side – a rolled-up, insulated catch bag, big enough for a large tuna or kingfish. It could even be used to protect the body of a marlin or broadbill and reflects the fact that a surprising number of people go game fishing in their Workmates.

A great hull demands a great powerplant, and this boat carries a Honda BF80 four-stroke outboard. Like the hull, this engine abounds with innovations – Boosted Low-Speed Torque for better holeshot performance, lean-burn control for improved fuel economy, trolling control for precise low-speed operation and full NMEA2000 compatibility.

Although the hull's rated for up to 100hp, the BF80 is more than adequate, with good acceleration even with three adults and the 100-litre under-floor fuel tank half full. Maximum speed just nudged 30 knots, and

TOP LEFT A snug, waterproof locker for the battery and switch.

ABOVE A full tank and all those fish waiting to be caught.

RIGHT LEDs below the waterline will attract inquisitive fish and lure them to your jigs.



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the Surtees
25 years
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Protection from
the hardtop

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 5.40m

beam 2.19m

construction 5mm aluminium hull, 4mm sides and 3mm top and cabin

engine Honda BF80 four-stroke
fuel 100 litres

towing weight 1100kg approx.

maximum load 627kg (5 people)

height 2.99m on trailer,
to top of hardtop

PERFORMANCE

RPM	SPEED	FUEL
RANGE	KN	NM/L
1000	3.7	2.47
1500	4.8	1.78
2000	5.7	1.36
2500	6.5	0.90
3000	8.4	1.08
3500	14.8	1.54
4000	18.5	1.69
4500	22.4	1.33
5000	25.5	1.15
5500	27.8	1.05
6000	30.5	0.94

at the most efficient speed of 20 knots she was using just over 11 litres per hour. This gives an effective range of around 150 nautical miles, well beyond the limits of most day trips.

Alongside the engine is a modest but very usable swim platform, again with padded non-slip mat and a dive ladder that folds away. There's clear access past the engine – so both sides of the platform are usable.

Speaking from personal experience, when the fishing's on, the spot of choice is sitting on the transom with your feet on the swim platform. Hidden under the platform is a set of underwater lights, great for night fishing – or just to wow your mates.

Hitting the water on Auckland's Waitemata Harbour, I was impressed by the 540 Workmate's smooth ride and great stability

at rest. There is no discernible lag at power-up while the ballast empties, and the boat responds quickly to the helm.

The hardtop provides great protection from the elements – very welcome in the winter months. The Honda BF80 has plenty of power, and unless you're regularly loaded to the maximum it's probably more than adequate. Fuel consumption figures also prove that this will be a very economical boat to own and operate.

It is easy to see why the 540 Workmate Hardtop took out that award at this year's boat show, and Surtees has certainly managed to improve an already great boat. While the review boat was 'pimped' out to the max, when you see how smart the boat looks and the benefits of all those features you'd have to ask – why not?

A great addition to the Workmate stable. **BNZ**