

trailer boat trials

BY SAM MOSSMAN

WINNER
ALUMINIUM FISHING BOAT OF
THE SHOW UNDER 6M
(NZ BOAT SHOW 2001 & 2002)



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SURTEES 5.5 WORKMATE

Edgecumbe boat builder Neil Surtees produced the first of his 5.5m model hulls in 1996. The concept was to produce a practical, basic boat that would get the average diver or fisherman on the water at a minimal price. Severely functional, these were certainly 'no frills' boats.

Sales of these hulls were excellent, but market demand persuaded Neil to offer a much wider range of options and extras for these boats, right through to fully fitted out key-turn models.

Neil Surtees is a very clever designer, and has come up with some great fitting out ideas. Some may have seen one of his boats at an Auckland boat show in the past with a side door and wheelchair access. Neil's test boat was near-fully specked up, although on further consideration this can never be really true, as he will put into a boat whatever the customer wants!

Construction

This 5.5m aluminium boat has a 4mm hull

and 3mm sides and topsides. It has a fine entry and a 17 degree deadrise at the transom. In common with many of the best performing sea boats, there are no strakes under the hull and a short flat chine, with a down-turn welded on the bow section to push the spray aside.

All of the Surtees boats I have tested have one design feature in common - a self flooding ballast tank. This is formed by welding a flat plate across the hull up above the keel, forming a separate chamber that is open at the transom and runs the full length of the hull, venting up through the anchor well. The idea is to let you have the best of both worlds: a deep V hull which takes a sea well, is reasonably light to power and tow, but which has

good stability at rest. In practice, the design delivers the goods on all these aspects.

As well as the hull support provided by the ballast tank construction, there are six full length stringers. These are full welded on one side and skip-welded on the other. Cross-ways there are 24 gussets. The fully welded floor forms two large buoyancy tanks to each side of the 60 litre under floor fuel tank and two storage tanks set along the centre line under drop in hatches.

The workmanship looks good, and Surtees offer a five year hull warranty.

Power and performance

These hulls are rated 70-90hp, and the test boat was powered by a 90hp Yamaha outboard swinging a 17" prop. This was supplied by East Bay Yamaha in Whakatane. We took the Workmate for a run over the Whakatane bar. Although the wind was down to about a 15 knot westerly, there were one metre standing pressure waves on the bar, and outside, a two metre northerly swell had a steep three-quarter metre westerly chop stacked on top - a nasty confused sea, and a good one to test the performance of this hull.

At rest, the ballast tank comes into play, and stability is excellent. With three adults



The helm position with the seats folded down and the hardtop in the closed position.

lined along one gunwale and the boat beam on to the sea, only a very moderate list was achieved. When taking off, the tank seems to drain instantaneously, and there is no lag coming on to plane.

Although the sea never let us develop full speed, I suspect a top-end performance in the realms of 38-40mph.

The Workmate delivered an impressive performance. Even in a dirty sea like this, we were comfortable at 20 knots, the boat cutting through the steep chop softly, and taking virtually no spray aboard. It planes at a relatively low speed, and is responsive with no handling vices. The steering gear was a standard cable rig and did the job nicely. Picking our way through the pressure waves on the bar was fun with a boat like this.

This is a top-bracket performer for its size and weight.

Anchoring

Access to the bow of the Workmate is via

the large, easy-to-get-at hatch in the front of the cabin. This allows the cabin to go right out to the gunwales, giving more cabin room, and turning aside any water taken over the bow.

The hatch is comfortable to work out of, and the fairlead is an easy reach, especially if you stand on the berths. A crucifix bollard is welded to the foredeck, and in front of this is an open top anchor well. Ordinarily I like to see a hatch here, as in a bad situation the sudden addition of the weight of a hundred litres of water can help hold the bow down into the next big wave. In this case, water is drained away rapidly via the ballast tank.

Split bow rails help control the warp in the fairlead. Neil had fitted an electric anchor winch. It is designed to pull 90kg, and is fitted with a thermal overload switch. It was mounted on the side of the cabin - a little unorthodox - and you sit in the hatchway facing astern, dropping the warp into the well back behind you. In practice it seems to work very well.

A well designed, practical anchoring set up.

Layout

There are a lot of clever design features built into this boat. Neil thinks outside the square, and the result is a whole lot of "why didn't someone think of that before?"

The berths are made up of modular units, and will store two tote tanks, and two dive tanks underneath, with room to spare. At a pinch, two adults could overnight, especially if a centre infill is added. There is full seated head-height room for two adults. Two side pockets add to the storage and bungee cord straps along the face of the pockets allows stowage of life jackets out of the way, but accessible. Console wiring is concealed behind a screw on plate.

The two forward seats are of Neil's own design. They are fold-away models - solidly built and self locking. I found them comfortable, and it was nice to be able to fold them out of the way when you wanted to travel on your feet. In addition, the upholstery could



With the hardtop in "up" position a space opens above the 'screen' for improved ventilation and vision.

be peeled off, revealing a Deck-grip finish that could be used as a step to reach the rocket launcher (if you are vertically challenged), a work top if you are sitting on the cabin berth, or somewhere secure to boil up a cuppa. Excellent design.

The 'screen is toughened 4mm safety glass. Visibility was good sitting and reasonable standing, but this last can be easily improved by - clever design number two - lifting the hardtop! Supported at the front by two gas shocks, and pivoting at the back, the whole hard-top lifts at the front opening up a 300mm gap above the screen, great for instantly improving visibility and ventilation. Permanent clear side curtains give shelter from beam winds. This worked very well indeed.

The dash is a little enlarged from the original model, and most LCD sounders, GPS units etc. could be fitted there, although at the expense of some through-screen visibility. There are other mounting options lower, and to the side of the helm, or under the cabin roof. Dark carpet on the dash cuts internal reflection and stops items rolling around.

Another neat little nic-nac is a magnetic fuel gauge. No wires involved. Just drop a small gauge into a low-profile mounting on the floor and a magnet on a float arm inside the tank will turn the gauge.

Under the chequerplate floor is a 60 litre fuel tank, with two stowage tanks behind. One of these will take two dive tanks, and the other can be used as a kill tank, or the space converted to an extra 50 litre underfloor fuel tank. Hatches are simple and solid drop-in types - no latches or hinges to break.

Full cockpit length side pockets would easily take a seven foot rod, and are wide enough to take dive bottles. Extra wide gunwales are good to sit on, and finished in Deckgrip panels.

Back in the transom wall, there are more cunning stunts. The gaff is clipped into a recessed panel, which folds down to disclose the battery shelf (nicely positioned up off the floor), and becomes a stern seat. More storage space here, and room for oil reservoir, filters, isolation switch etc. This can be made lockable.

The floor is drained by a sump and bilge pump.

A transom cut-out with a perspex drop door makes for easy access into the boat via a sturdy dive ladder and chequerplate boarding platform. Handrails-come-tie-off points are fitted over each side of the transom. The sides and topsides of the boat have a powder coated finish.

Neil Surtee's design ideas have made excellent use of space, and his fabrications are solid, simple and practical. But wait, there's more...

Fishability

The stability afforded by the ballast tank gives a stable platform to work from. Relatively wide gunwales still leave a reasonably large cockpit, but also make room for a toe recess all the way around, and a flat,



comfortable gunwale face giving good mid-thigh support. This will be a very comfortable boat to fish from.

Four plastic rod holders are fitted as standard, but more, and/or heavier duty models can be fitted easily. These have been installed with nylon screws, to avoid electrolysis problems. Probably a more substantial unit and installation is a good idea if you are going to fish the big rigs, but the units as fitted are fine for general bottom bouncing.

There are options for fitting a livebait tank under the swim step, or a larger unit in the outboard bracket. A bait board was fitted on the transom wall. This position can also be used to mount a ski pole.

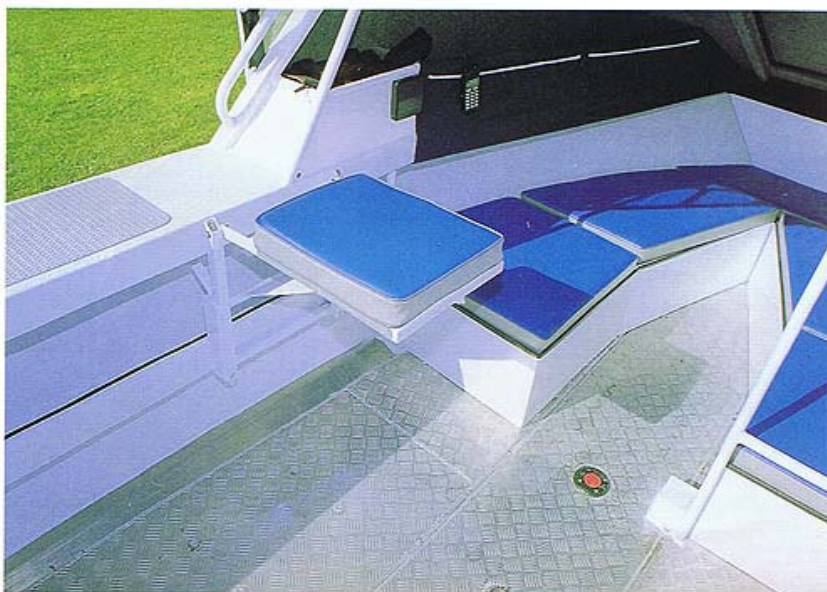
Other fishin' fittings include a five position rocket launcher on the hardtop, a berley pot

through the boarding platform. Surtees are quite happy to do any custom fitting out you may want.

Trailing

Surtees trailers are made by Neil's dad Alan, himself an engineer. They are a solidly made cradle A-frame design with a single axle and leaf-spring suspension. The hull is supported by eight pairs of wobble rollers. The main-frame box section is left open at each end so that when it is dipped in the zinc, it gets galvanised inside as well.

The hull weight is around 412kg (depending on customising), and rig towing weight about 950kg. Neil considers it easily towable by the average 2.0 litre, four cylinder family car.



Fold out bench seats are strong and practical.

Another clever Surtees design is a drive-on, drive-off trailer clamp. The driver climbs in the boat, it is backed into the water, the engine started and given a little forward squirt. The clamp unlocks, and the boat is reversed off the trailer. When landing, the same thing is done in reverse, the boat driven on until the clamp locks, then pulled out with the vehicle. No more wet feet and mucking around!

All-in-all...

This boat had been fairly heavily specked up as a showcase for many of the available options. But even at its basic level you have a solidly made, excellently performed sea boat that offers the best of both worlds in travelling comfort and stability at rest. For fishermen



The transom face folds down to form a stern seat.



A cleverly designed trailer catch allows drive-on, drive-off boating

and divers, the layout has all the right ingredients, and still plenty of work space. Add to that Neil Surtees' clever design ideas, quality workmanship, and the very reasonable price of these rigs, and you have a real winner.

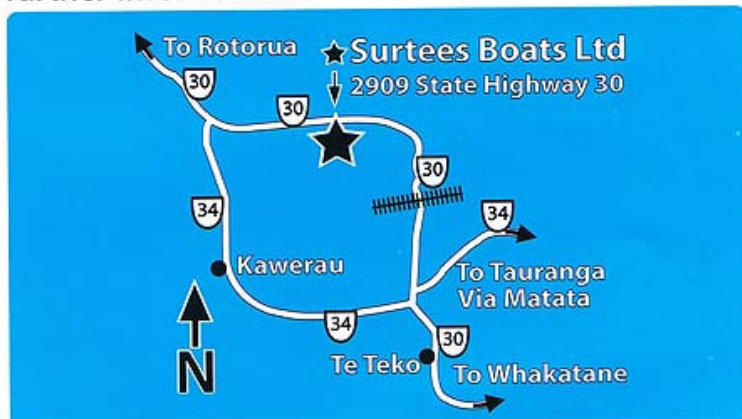
SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	5.5m
Beam	2.15m
Hull weight	412kg
Deadrise	17 degree
Rec HP	50-90hp

SURTEES BOATS LTD



Surtees Boats are available as a Bare hull or a turn key package contact Neil and Jan Surtees for further information.



Ph: 07 322 8461 • Fax: 07 322 8482 • Mob: 027 274 2838
 boats@surtees.co.nz • Website: www.surtees.co.nz
 2909 S/H 30 RD 2 Whakatane