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# trailerboat fisherman

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- Surtees 5.5 Workmate**
- Stacer 569 Ocean Runner**
- Crestliner 1700 Super Hawk**
- Quintrex 530 Cruiseabout**



From across the Tasman comes a tough, mid-sized fishing tinnie that provides both hardtop roof cover and stability to go after big pelagics offshore. Test report by JAMES HILL.

# Surtees 5.5 Workmate



**T**he hardtop trend is so strong in offshore fishing at the moment that boat buyers are seriously looking at hardtops, even in boats below the six-metre size range where they're usually found.

Getting hardtops to function in a boat under six metres is not easy, you're effectively trying to get a high 'lid' structure on boat, which may be less able to support the windage and pendulum effect of weight high up.

However, not surprisingly, the Kiwis across the Tasman have been able to achieve this with some of their smaller boats. One of the best I've seen is the Surtees 5.5m Workmate. This was a new design that hit the Kiwi market last year and has since come across the Tasman to Australia.

And I think you'll agree this big-little plate alloy boat looks a beauty on the trailer and afloat. There's no hint of the hardtop looking too top heavy, or ugly. The builders have cleverly incorporated a true hardtop by keeping it very small, not too heavy and beautifully matched to the lines of the boat.

And, of course, the real secret of why it works is the water ballast system that is standard in Surtees boats. This system ensures this boat has terrific at-rest stability and will be safe to use offshore. That said, the more compact size of this boat makes her ideal for the buyer wanting a mix of estuary and close-coastal fishing. The Workmate is not a maxi and can therefore be trailed on a single-axle trailer and launched on small ramps and beaches.

We tested this boat up the Parramatta River because it's the kind of boat you would fish upstream estuary systems in as well as harbour entrances and out offshore. Its size enables her to poke into the smaller river arms you wouldn't take a really big boat!

Surtees has gained quite a good reputation since establishing a dealership here in Australia. It's one of the biggest and most respected Kiwi brands and has won a number of awards for its water-ballasted boats.

The Workmate series first came out as a cuddy and centre console version before the factory decided to make a hardtop version as well. And the Hardtop has certainly been an instant winner from the word go; especially since the factory cleverly designed the



The test boat was supplied by Western Sydney dealer, Watersports Marine, which has been doing very well with Surtees since taking on the brand. This package included the new Mercury EFI 115hp four-stroke, Dunbier trailer, Lowrance HDS-5 Gen colour sounder/GPS chartplotter, VHF radio, shade extension, transom door, rear bait station, deck wash pump plus under deck and cabin LED lights. Cost is \$55,690 ex-Sydney with rego and inshore safety pack.

**Design:** Like all the Surtees models the Workmate is designed for hard-core fishing and so made from plate alloy. The company prides itself on building boats that keep on fishing hard without a worry!

The styling is quite angular and smart with well-raked bows, high freeboard and smooth topsides matching the straight sheer and recessed, fastback transom.

The hull is 5.5m overall, including the small snub bowsprit and the fastback transom. Beam is 2.1m on a hull that has quite a deep Vee deadrise especially in the bow area. The Vee graduates towards the stern but is still 18-degree at transom to ensure a very soft ride in rough water.



hardtop so it could retro-fit to previous cuddy models.

The hardtop is a great feature for cold days like the winter day when we took this neat Surtees for a run. It's not only good for protecting you against the rain, spray, etc but also provides nice big, clear windows that give you better vision than the usual low windscreen and vinyl clears combination.

As the name suggests the Workmate is a boat that's not afraid of hard work; whether that's catching big wahoo offshore, hauling big snapper from the deep or hauling crab pots. The checkerplate flooring of the cockpit and the clean, no-nonsense interior tells you this is a boat that would readily suit professional as well as recreational fishing.

The smaller size makes the Surtees 5.5 Workmate a better proposition for towing and it's going to be good news for those boat buyers who already own a medium-sized soft-roader wagon.

One of the strong selling points of the Surtees boats is a 'locking' system so you can, if you wish, trap the water ballast in the boat. This is done by a spring-loaded transom trap door and means the Surtees remains heavier, and therefore more stable in the water. The latter is only done in really rough conditions when you want the boat to sit more solidly in the water and not quite as fast.

Unlike most Aussie plate boats the bottom is kept smooth and free of lifting strakes. It seems the hull relies on the lift generated by the Vee'd bilge panels and small deflecting chine lips. All this makes for a true 'non pounding' craft in rough, bumpy water.

Looking closer you see a slight down deflection the chine lips, plus an extended spray lip around the bow chine area. The upper bow sections are also quite full in volume to ensure the Workmate will not nose-dive, or be inclined to broach when running down-sea, or crossing bars.

I think many boat buyers will be happy with the 'shed' addition to the deck, which incorporates a very short roof and small but useful side windows.

Access aboard is made easy by a folding alloy ladder at the transom and a Portofino landing deck. Also our test boat had the optional rear door that provides direct access into the cockpit. You'll also notice there is rubberised, non slip finish on both the rear and side deck areas.

The cockpit features quite good freeboard and drains to a bilge sump where water is quickly removed by an electric bilge pump. The cockpit floor is a tough checkerplate alloy and there is total seating for up to four adults with the pedestal seats and a rear, fold-out rear bench aft. The latter is not super flash but more than adequate for a fishing party heading out for a day's fishing.

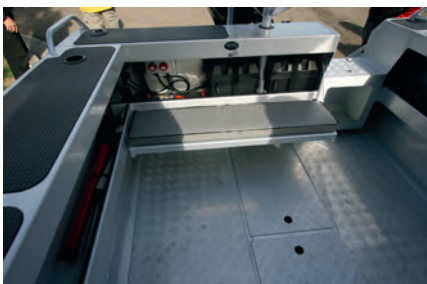
And talking of fishing trips, the Workmate is rated for a maximum of five people or total load of 675kg, which seems about as much as you want.

The cockpit floor is fully sealed to the hull and forms large buoyancy tanks either side. You also have six

fully welded stringers, an internal floor chassis plus 3mm bottom and side alloy 'plate' panels. The boat is also backed by a six-year hull warranty.

With a hull weight of 550kg the total trail weight of the Workmate was a quite moderate 1200kg including a full tank of fuel, hardtop, extra personal gear and electrics. This is a very do-able load for many popular vehicles on the road today including the Holden Sports Wagon (1600kg), Toyota Kluger (2000kg) and Mitsubishi Outlander with 1600kg rating.

This Workmate is also easier to garage than most with a total road height of 2.31m. Trail length is approximately 7.2m.



**Performance:** With not much happening offshore that day we were happy to test this new Surtees on the quieter waters of Sydney's Parramatta River. At least we were able to find some decent boat wash from commercial craft and even some extended rough patches to simulate some offshore action!

Having said that, this was a pretty relaxed boat test and also helped reveal the soft-side of the Workmate in being able to cruise estuary waters like these.

A few facts came out of this test. Firstly, the Surtees Workmate is a size of boat that's quite easy to trail despite the high hardtop. It's much easier to maneuver than her bigger, heavier sisters. At the same time we were really impressed with the ride and the way you could sit back and really relax at high cruising speeds. You honestly



get the impression this is a six-metre plus boat that's being wrongly sized!

However, because she's not a super heavy boat the Surtees Workmate comes quite quickly to the plane, especially with the Mercury 115hp four-stroke on her tail. She comes out faster than most deep Vees and yet not jerky either. You get a nice, smooth power delivery as you push the throttle down and she tracks spot on at speed.

Taking the boat through various turns and over different patches of bumpy water we found her just as well mannered as her bigger sisters. And most pleasingly the boat sits quite well and quietly at speed even with the obvious windage of a hardtop.

We didn't try the locked in ballast, having tried it in the previous 6.1m model but its there if you ever wanted added stability and safety.

**Power:** This Surtees is rated for single outboards 70-115hp, however, I doubt if you would want to go smaller than the 90-115hp power range judging by our test.

The pod transom ensures the Surtees can happily carry the heavier four-stroke motors and she certainly was comfortable with the Mercury 115hp, which is a straight four-cylinder motor pumping out 1732cc of power. This is definitely one of the best Mercury motors I've tested and seems



to be a lot better priced than the Verado four-strokes.

Performance results with this motor were as follows:

3500rpm	18 knots
4500rpm	26 knots
5500rpm	35 knots
6000rpm	38 knots

As you can see, the four-stroke is delivering the power in a flatter, smoother pattern than a two-stroke but you still end up with a very impressive top speed.

I assume you'd lose a few knots off this top speed with the water ballast locked in, but otherwise still get good speeds for a return trip in rough water.

She could run a 100hp or 90hp motor but I'd suggest the 115hp is the best choice for all round economy and keeping some extra power up your sleeve for bad home trips.

The Workmate comes standard with a 100-litre in-floor fuel tank, sender kit and fuel gauge. It's also supplied with in-line fuel line filter, twin batteries, isolator master switch as well as LED



not only close but share a very similar lifestyle and love boating and fishing! Some might complain we're letting their boats into our market too easily, however, I don't agree. In Auckland last year I was amazed to see how well some Aussie boats, especially Riviera, were doing great business. So, it's only fair Surtees should sell a few boats here to balance the trade!

This clean, well presented craft suits our coastal fishing scene and especially southern states like Victoria and Tasmania. The build quality is impressive and she is easy to trail.

While essentially a fishing machine the 5.5 Workmate will have good family boating application as well and would be great for camper cruising holidays. My only criticism is the cabin wings could extend back to give more side protection for the pedestal seat occupants. However, it's good to see Surtees do include side grab rails here, plus side clears for extra support.

By the way, there's a range of topside colours to choose from so if you can't come at the All Blacks colours there are other choices, including Aussie blue!

navigation, cabin and under coaming cockpit lights.

Factory wiring and non-feedback steering is world-class and confirms why Surtees has won so many awards in their home country.

**Deck layout:** The 5.5 Workmate has all the deck gear you would expect for coastal and offshore fishing. This includes an anchor bowsprit with split rail to easily deploy the anchor out front. There's also a self-draining anchor well with option to fit an electric anchor winch.

From within the cabin forehatch you can reach the anchor without needing to stand on bunk cushions. They purposely keep the cabin full-width so you have no side decks but can work the anchor from the hatch.

Further back is a wedge-style cuddy topped by a neat alloy framed hardtop with plenty of headroom for big blokes. The three-panel windows are also tinted to counter glare on sunny days.

Within the helm station you find two very comfortable bucket seats with shock-absorber pedestal bases. These seats are fully adjustable and also matched by footrests.

There is a modern dash panel with plenty of room for motor instrumentation, VHF radio and Lowrance combo sounder/GPS chartplotter. The dash also gives you a shallow well to dump small items like paper maps and sunglasses. The passenger also gets a side pocket for personal gear.

The cockpit has raised side pockets for your fishing gear and an in-floor kill tank. There is also a bait-preparation station on the rear deck with cutting board, knife holder and two extra rod holders.

Other fishing gear includes a berley bucket on the transom; aerated livebait tank with clear Perspex window to keep an eye on the bait.

The fold down rear seat is no more than a basic seat, however, it can also

be used as a raised casting deck. This will be particularly good for those times you do fish in the estuary rather than offshore.

Up front, the cuddy provides decent headroom and two Vee seats. These seats aren't big enough for sleeping however well enough for a nap and for getting out of the weather for a hot cuppa. Cushions are provided too.

**Verdict:** Like many Aussies, I believe we've been sold down the river by too many free trade agreements. However, New Zealand is one exception. They're

tbf

## BOAT TEST ANALYSIS

Boat supplied with Dunbier braked trailer, Mercury four-stroke EFI, hardtop with rod rack, transom door, live-bait tank, raised bait station, berley mulcher, VHF radio, Lowrance HDS colour combo sounder/GPS, dual batteries, painted sides, safety pack, rego. Price \$55,690 from Watersports Marine phone 02 9676 1400.

## SPECIFICATION CHART

	Surtees 550	Seatamer	Quintrex	Extreme	BarCrusher
Model	Workmate HT	Triton5	510Spirit	570GameKing	575HT
Material	alloy	alloy	alloy	alloy	alloy
Style	hardtop	cuddy	cuddy	hardtop	hardtop
Length	5.5m	5.3m	5.4m	5.7m	5.7m
Beam	2.1m	2.3m	2.2m	2.2m	2.1m
Rated power	115hp	115hp	100hp	150hp	115hp
Power as tested	Mercury115	Yamaha100	Evinrude130	Yamaha115	Yamaha115
Hull weight	550kg	660kg	550kg	670kg	n/a
Fuel capacity	100L	100L	95L	80L	110L

## STAR RATING

Finish	★★★★★	Helm Set-up	★★★★★
Fitout	★★★★★	Fishability	★★★★★
Ride	★★★★★	Safety Features	★★★
Dryness	★★★★★	Value for Money	★★★★★

\*Data ESTIMATED by the TBF team when accurate information is unavailable. Maximum star rating 5 stars.