



The hardtop is a strong trend in large trailer fishing boats as witnessed by the latest Surtees 6.1 Gamefisher HT from Kiwi-land. Test report by JAMES HILL.

Surtees 6.1

“Put a lid on it son,” was once a term of admonishment from your dad, but these days it’s something that will put the smile on the face of a boat dealer as more trailer boaties take the hardtop alternative.

The hardtop trend is strong across the whole offshore scene as more boaties realise its benefits for either fishing, or cruising. And it makes sense really when you realise how much it improves steering vision, crew comfort and user-friendliness of a boat.

Kiwis have been at the forefront of this trend no doubt due to their cooler climate, but Aussies are now strongly following the trend as they see how hardtops improve the driving experience and protect them from the sun.

Boats like the stylish Surtees 6.1 Gamefisher HT from New Zealand are scoring quite good sales here in Australia thanks to their practical hardtop and stylish design.

We mightn’t have the same level of sheltered cruising grounds as our Kiwi cousins, but it’s still nice to have a hardtop for the really hot days as well as the very cold. Especially as we get on in years, we can appreciate the all-season appeal of these boats with a lid!

Not just better shelter from the weather, the hardtop with big, clear windows provides better helm vision than the typical combo of low windscreen, clears and canvas canopy. Let’s face it – vinyl clears get cloudy and frayed within a few seasons and are costly to replace. The hardtop with proper glass windows lasts for the life of the boat!

Before Christmas I had the pleasure of putting the new Surtees 6.1 Gamefisher HT through its paces. As the name suggests she is a boat you can take bluewater fishing whilst keeping your crew snug and dry.

At the same time the Surtees 6.1 is not a huge beast and is still within the tow capacity of most popular 4WD vehicles.

Almost on cue our test day was rainy and overcast. It was one of those stay-at-home days but thankfully, the hardtop made it most bearable and we took a run along Sydney’s western waterway. As the rain squalls blew over choppy grey waters, we sat snug and dry within the Surtees wheelhouse. Stephanie, Anthony and I hardly needed our windcheaters in this boat.

What you notice on these occasions is you’re more inclined to go out because the boat is comfortable. Secondly, you not only stay dry and comfortable but also get a better view from the helm than the conventional boat with clears.

We also noticed how much easier it was to see the screen of the sounder/chartplotter because the hardtop gives you natural shading and there’s spray drops the screen! In fact, we just wished we’d had some fishing lines to follow up the promising signals off the HDS.5 Lowrance colour screen.

Back at the ramp over a convivial coffee, we all agreed hardtops are a

good idea. OK, perhaps on a warm, sunny day you might like the open-air experience but how many days are really that good?

Hardtops give you good ventilation, and are often combined with side-sliding windows. However, this model didn’t need these because the cabin structure is fairly short.

As you can see from the photos they have the proportions of this ‘shed’ pretty right. And the hardtop enables you to mount useful stuff like overhead rod racks, spot lights, aerial etc.

One of the issues you might face with a hardtop is the extra top weight in the structure. However, because Surtees boats run a water-ballast system they have great stability at-rest. Indeed, the added stability means Surtees is able to offer a hardtop range extending down to hull lengths as small as 5.5m!

In this particular model the hull automatically takes on 350 litres of water ballast once launched. This ballast is dumped in a matter of seconds as the Surtees jumps onto the plane, but just as quickly it drains back in once she slows to trolling speed.



Gamefisher

Surtees recently added a 'locking' system so owners can trap the water ballast into the boat. This is done by a spring-loaded transom trap door and means the boat can be made heavier and more stable when required.

Our test boat was supplied by Western Sydney dealer, Watersports Marine. Dealer principal, Anthony McEnally, is a top notch race boat driver and took on the Kiwi brand because he was so impressed by the build quality and performance. He has since found a ready market in Sydney, especially for the hardtop models.

Anthony has sold several of the bigger Surtees models and says buyers are impressed by the price and good range of factory options. Our test boat is a good example. She was just delivered to her owner and came with a large screen Lowrance colour sounder/GPS chartplotter, Fusion sound system, gamefishing outriggers and raised bait-pre station. Sitting atop a dual-axle Dunbier trailer she looked very stylish with her two-tone metallic paintwork. Price for this package was \$72,000 ex-Sydney.

Whilst this price tag is beyond most fishos it does raise the question whether two fishing mates could pool their dollars to get into this craft. It would get them into a true bluewater boat without the big outlay, and shared costs would be less than the cost of two smaller boats.

Design: The Surtees brand is highly regarded in its homeland. From the outset it's being designed for hardcore fishing and built from plate alloy. The company now produces about 200 boats a year at its Whakatane plant on the Bay of Plenty, North Island.

This model is the second smallest of the Gamefisher range and seems just right for serious game and tournament work. She has an overall length of 6.2m including the snub bowsprit and the fastback transom. Beam is 2.35m so making the Surtees 6.1 road legal for night and day trailing in Australia.

The solid plate alloy construction features smooth topsides apart from two spray crease lines. There is a noticeable chine lip but the bottom panels are smooth and finish in a deep 20-degree Vee transom. This bottom



shape ensures the Surtees is a true 'non-pounding' craft in rough water.

Looking a bit closer you notice the Surtees has a slight down deflection of the chine lips, plus an extra spray rail around the chines at the bow.



The upper bow sections are also quite full to make her more balanced and less inclined to broach when running down-sea, or crossing bars.

Like all good offshore boats the bow shoulders are pushed well for'ard and this enables the Surtees to support the forward cuddy/wheelhouse.

Overall, our test boat looked a real treat with her James Bond Moonraker sharp bows and two-tone, dark blue colour scheme.

Access aboard is made easy by a folding alloy ladder at the transom and a Portofino landing deck. A rear door gives you direct access into the cockpit and there's no worry of slipping with rubberised non-skid underfoot.

The cockpit features a deep 73cm 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, counting the two pedestal seats for'ard and the fold-out rear bench aft.

The Surtees 6.1 is rated to take a total load of six people in all.

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 5mm bottom and 4mm sides.

Underway, the Surtees certainly feels solid and justifies why her builder can offer a six-year hull warranty on all new boats sold.

Trail weight of our test was approximately 1500kg, including fuel. Allowing for say an extra 100kg of personal gear it still falls pretty nicely within the towing range of vehicles like the Mitsubishi Outlander with 1600kg rating. Others that would suit include the Ford Territory, Toyota Kluger and American Jeep Cherokee.

OK – the only real drawback of this beaut offshore boat is she just might be too high to park under some garages. Total road height is just on three metres so it has that limit. Then again, a solid hardtop makes it very easy to add a storm cover over the rear cockpit area, thereby sealing the boat up for outside stowage. With some specially designed 'wheelhouse' covers you could keep the boat looking fresh for years.

Performance: With rough seas predicted offshore we diverted our test to the western waters of Sydney Harbour. The small amount of wave chop we did encounter was hardly a bother to the big Kiwi and we ran virtually at full speed everywhere.

This test only reminded me what we miss on this coast – the large extensive network of sheltered waterways the Kiwis enjoy. In essence, in places like Sydney, enclosed waterways are not that large and on bad days offshore conditions are simply too rough to fish.

That said, we actually enjoyed our cruise up and down the Parramatta



River tributary. The odd rain squalls weren't a bother and with few craft on the water except for ferries we had the place to ourselves. And if we'd had some lines I dare say the fishing would have been most productive!

The big Mercury 150hp four-stroke was a really nice match for this boat, pushing us easily to the plane and feeling good right across the rev range. Like the bigger 6.7m Surtees I'd previously tested in Queensland this boat ran nicely from the displacement to

flat out speed. Most noticeably, you don't see any awkward struggle to get onto the plane or any noticeable change of ballast.

Running the Surtees at various angles to wind and wave chop I found her well mannered and balanced. There didn't seem to be any noticeable wind-affected heeling that you often get with deep Vee boats.

On the way home we tried running the boat with the water ballast filled. This was a really interesting exercise because the Surtees speed didn't drop quite as much as expected. Running dry we were getting a maximum of about 37 knots but with the water ballasted the speed was still a quite reasonably quick 33 knots.

My guess is you would see higher fuel consumption with the water ballast, but it would be a smaller price to pay for the added stability and safety. The water ballast does slow acceleration, however, it also makes the ride feel even smoother. So, if you're taking the older relatives out for a spin – put in the water ballast!

Other than that, the only times you might use it is in extremely rough water, especially running home with a following sea. The added weight would settle the craft down and make her less inclined to overrun the waves for a safer, easier ride.

Power: Surtees rates this model for single motors between 100-150hp but from our experience I would say the ideal range would be 130-150hp.

The pod transom ensures the Surtees can happily carry the heavier four-stroke motors and she certainly was comfortable with the Mercury 150hp four-stroke used on our test. Even heavier motors like the Honda 150hp shouldn't be a problem either.

Our performance with the Mercury 150hp four-stroke were as follows:

3500rpm	19 knots
4500rpm	27 knots
5500rpm	34 knots
5800rpm	37 knots



Offshore fishing enthusiasts will find these figures pretty spot-on for what they would want to achieve. It's a rare occasion when they're going to be doing 30 knots offshore, however, it's always nice to have the extra power up your sleeve for those times you have to battle home against strong head winds and tide. That's when you will want a 150hp on the transom.

The Surtees 6.1 is also available with twin motor transom, if you wish to go that way.

I was also pleased to see the Surtees comes standard with a generous 170-litre in-floor fuel tank. This should deliver a pretty good range with the economical four-stroke motor. The test boat also came with an in-line fuel line filter, twin batteries, isolator switch as well as navigation and interior/cockpit lights.



and are finished in a nice patterned fabric. There are no backrests but the cushions are certainly comfortable enough for a snooze.

Verdict: Surtees has become a popular offshore fishing range since being introduced to Australia a few years back. It's up against some pretty good Aussie plate boats but with competitive pricing, nice build quality and strong fishing features, it's doing well in our marketplace.

As the name implies, the Gamefisher series is pitched at the big pelagic angler, however, that's not to say you couldn't enjoy the Surtees 6.1 just as an inshore/estuary fishing boat. She is very comfortable and with that hardtop virtually an all-year round proposition. Indeed, with a few more added creature comforts like a camp stove, chemical toilet, etc., you can make this a very comfortable family cruising boat.

Other options on this boat include tubular rubber mat flooring, window wipers, toilet, fold-away side seats and a PVC extended cockpit awning. Coupled with features like a decent stereo sound system, portable DVD player and you'd have a great weekend escape machine.

The factory wiring is also first-class and all electrics are neatly covered up within the cabin.

Deck layout: The Surtees 6.1 has all the deck gear you'd expect for coastal and offshore fishing. This includes an anchor bowsprit with split rail to easily deploy the anchor out front.

You also have a recessed well for the anchor to be carried on deck plus room to add an option electric anchor.

The Surtees also gives really good access to the anchor via the cabin. Without moving cushions you can reach the anchor from the safety of the cabin. Side decks are too narrow for crew use, however, there's a large fore hatch large for easy access from the bows.

Further back is a wedge-style cuddy topped by the fixed hardtop with plenty of headroom for a big guy. I'm 5ft 10in and there was still a good hand-height above my head.

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 Fusion stereo sound system. However, large sounder/chartplotters need to be mounted on the dash above. The same dash provides a shallow well to dump small items like paper maps and sunglasses.

The passenger side provides a side pocket for personal gear.

The cockpit has raised side pockets for you fishing gear and an in-floor kill tank back aft. There is also a bait-preparation station on the aft deck that has a cutting board, knife holder plus three holders. Under this is a set of tackle drawers that will be very handy.

Other fishy items spotted here include a berley bucket on the transom and aerated livebait tank under the

transom doorstep with clear Perspex window to keep an eye on the bait.

The slide-out rear lounge is no more than a hard platform, however, it could be used like a raised casting deck, especially with the bait preparation station removed. This might suit the anglers up north who fish with estuary systems for barramundi!

Up front the cuddy cabin provides decent headroom and two Vee berths suitable for sleeping. These berths have an optional double-berth in-fill



BOAT TEST ANALYSIS

Boat supplied with 150hp Mercury 150hp 4-stroke, SS propeller, dual-axle trailer, Lowrance HSD colour sounder/GPS, VHF radio, deluxe cutting board, safety pack. Price \$72,000 Watersports Marine NSW ph 02 9676 1400.

SPECIFICATION CHART

	Surtees 6.1	Quintrex	Bar Crusher	Extreme	Aqualine
Brand	GameFisherHT	610Legend	615HT	570GameKing	590HT
Model	alloy	alloy	alloy	alloy	alloy
Material	hardtop	cuddy	hardtop	hardtop	hardtop
Style	6.1m	6.1m	6.1m	5.7m	5.9m
Length	2.3m	2.4m	2.2m	2.2m	2.3m
Beam	150hp	175hp	150hp	150hp	175hp
Rated power	Mercury150	Mercury175	Suzuki150	Yamaha115	Evinrude115
Power as tested	650kg	760kg	n/a	670kg	675kg
Hull weight	170L	120L	140L	80L	150L
Fuel capacity					

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.