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Surtees 8.5 Gamefisher

— does my beam look wide in this?

Having first tested a Surtees boat 20 years ago, it has been interesting to see the marque progress from a one-man, one-boat-a-month operation, to become one of the largest, top-level alloy boat manufacturers in New Zealand, with a strong export trade and over 40 employees.

This is the result partly of good management, but primarily stems from Neil Surtees' original ballast-keel design and clever fit-out ideas, along with the company's reputation for robust manufacture, which led to Surtees products winning numerous boat show and export awards.

In the middle of last year, the Te Teko (it's near Whakatane) based company launched its largest hull, the 8.5m Gamefisher with a 2.5m beam. But Surtees doesn't stand still, and a request for a custom version of this hull from across the Tasman spawned an 8.5m Gamefisher 'wide-body' with a 2.8m beam. Surtees Boats have been delighted with the result and have now adopted the wide version as standard.

Surtees Boats' genial Managing Director Phil Sheaff gave me a call to come and check out the first wide-body off the line. Time was tight as the boat, *All Good II*, was booked on a

ship that would take it to its new owner in Sydney. Fortunately, despite the generally poor equinox conditions, a fine-weather window popped up, and I hustled down to Whakatane to have a run in the new machine.

Settle down

With an overall length of 8.65m and a beam of 2.8m, this is a large trailerboat that, with its trailer slightly narrower than the hull, just squeaks under over-width restrictions, although extra side flags are required.

The boat itself is beautifully crafted with a modestly rising sheerline, strong, even welding, neat trimming, and a smart paint/Nyalic finish. Its practical layout is suited to its new Australian owner, who wanted a cruising boat for the Sydney area. Aside from the increased beam and the extra space this



The big Yamaha 350hp four-stroke provides ample power for the rig.

Yamaha 350hp V8 and Surtees 8.5m Gamefisher

Speed (kph/knots)	Revs (rpm)	Fuel use (km/litre)
12.0/6.5	1700	1.2
35/18.0	3400	0.9
45/24.3	4000	0.9
64/34.5	5700	0.5

provides, the most notable feature is a bow-thruster the owner specified, required to aid manoeuvring in narrow confines where the owner has a private slipway with rails and cradle.

With 6mm bottom plates, 4mm sides and 3mm cabin, this hull boasts the usual robust Surtees construction, including a flat plate above the keel which forms a strong triangular section along the keel line, and also the flooding keel-line ballast chamber that aids the stability of the hull when filled. This is an important aspect of the Surtees design, allowing a relatively deep 'V' hull (18 degrees at the transom in this case) that cuts through the sea softly, but the ballast chamber fills when the boat settles, ensuring stability at rest. In addition, this chamber has a closable gate that can hold in the water ballast when the boat is on plane, further improving the ride in sloppy conditions. Operating the gate is done manually on

smaller Surtees hulls, but in the case of this 8.5m it is controlled hydraulically from the helm. The capacity of the ballast chamber is 200 litres, putting 200kg of ballast where it is most effective – right on the keel – when required. Surtees Boats quote a reserve buoyancy of 864kg, the rig being rated for a maximum of 10 people.

Getting along

With a hull-only weight (dry) of around 2200kg, the 8.5m needs some reasonable horsepower to push it around, so is rated for 250-350hp. The test boat was fitted with one of Yamaha's 350hp V8 four-stroke outboards, which crouched like a big grey beast on the outboard bracket. The business end of this is fitted with a three-blade, 15-inch pitch stainless prop. Power-assist steering made helm easy. The fuel capacity is 450 litres, with a fuel port on the rear of the transom and a built-in surge chamber to prevent blow-back or weeping.

With Surtees' Sales Manager Cliff Schick and his new offside Adam Dyke aboard, we headed out over a benign Whakatane Bar where about a metre of wide-open, lazy swell was lifting, but not breaking. Outside it was similar: decent swells from the north, but with plenty of space between peaks. All-round visibility was good through toughened glass windows and, like the venerable E-Type Jag, the 8.5 Gamefisher had three wipers fitted.

The big Surtees just ate the sea and produced a very soft, even ride, even without deploying the trim tabs or using the ballast system when underway. Excellent!

Maximum speed was 34.5 knots at 5700rpm – pretty good for a two-and-a-half tonne rig. More economical cruising was to be had at 4000rpm with 24 knots. (See the sidebar for more data.)

We had a play with the bow thruster at the Whakatane ramp, where the side-current mimicked the situation that had prompted the boat's new owner to have it installed. It was ideal for lining up the boat with the Surtees multi-roller drive-on, drive-off trailer, which is fitted with Surtees' innovative trailer catch. It is unusual to fit a bow thruster to a boat of this size as they are seldom really needed in usual circumstances, add 40kg of weight to the bow, and throw spray around when travelling at



Left: The helm is comfortably laid out, with instruments and controls flush-mounted. Right: The dash allows plenty of space for storing odds and ends; the roomy forecabin can sleep three; and toughened glass windows with individual wipers provide good visibility.

planing speed (although with an enclosed hardtop, this is not an issue). The new owner clearly considered the plusses of a bow-thruster outweighed the minuses.

The trailer was a tandem-axle model from Surtees Trailers with leaf-spring suspension, electrical braking and the usual fittings. This was a lighter trailer than Surtees would normally use, but specified by the owner, who didn't plan on doing much towing. Tow weight of the rig is around 3,250kg, dry.

The nuts and bolts

Some other interesting features have been fitted to this boat by request. Anchoring is made easy with a Stressfree drum winch and permanently fitted Sarca anchor set into the bow and controlled from the helm. On the hardtop sits an array of high-quality solar panels, set to keep the batteries topped up at all times, ensuring that the satellite TV doesn't fail at the vital

moment in the next All Blacks-Wallabies game.

The large forecabin, with berth in-fills, will easily sleep three and there is an electric toilet set under the starboard berth. Two levels of side shelves and under-berth space take care of stowage and LED lighting (including a red night-light option) is fitted throughout the forecabin, wheelhouse and cockpit (with flood lights added to the latter).

The wheelhouse is fully lined and nicely finished with a large dash and comfortable bolstered helm seat (that also provides useful back support while standing). The large dash houses Yamaha instrumentation, Garmin autopilot and GPSmap 7012 plotter/sounder, Raymarine VHF, Vetus bow thruster trim tab, winch controls and Fusion sound system (in the companionway). The helm seat has a fridge underneath, and behind is a galley with hot and cold running fresh water, two-hob gas burner, cup rack above and cupboards beneath. To port are bench seats (with two cupboards and internal stowage) around an adjustable table that drops to form an additional berth.

The rear bulkhead features a lockable, folding aluminium-framed door and a window that slides down into the bulkhead, leaving plenty of ventilation and enabling easy helm-cockpit communication if gamefishing.

Out in the cockpit there is a bench seat on the bulkhead wall that houses a calfont, gas bottle and pull-out hose and nozzle for hot freshwater showers in the cockpit – something divers really appreciate after climbing back aboard. The boat has a 100-litre freshwater tank. A second, single fold-down seat is to starboard, and a third, long, bench seat is created across the transom by opening the transom locker. This locker houses a three-battery system with isolation switching and fuel filter. A removable overhead canvas canopy offers sun and spray protection.

The cockpit space benefits from the added beam, and the Tread Plate deck drains to a sump under the transom fitted with a 3750gph bilge pump. Large side shelves provide stowage, and the transom step-through with fold-down door gives access to the large Tread Plate boarding platform with grab-rails. The new owner had elected to fit his own boarding ladder after delivery.

Show us the fish!

This is a lot of boat, but how is it suited to fishing? Obviously a big open cockpit, stable hull (thanks to the ballast chamber), good footing and toe recess, added to high sides and nice flat



Above: Folding doors and a window that drops vertically into the bulkhead provide ventilation and communication with the cockpit, while still allowing security and shelter when closed. Right: The port-side of the cabin has bench seats and an adjustable table that can be reconfigured into a berth.





The spacious cockpit provides top-of-the-thigh support for anglers; a transom battery locker/bench seat, transom step-through and bait station are other features.

gunwale faces, provide a very decent basis for a fishing platform.

Rod stowage is important, too. There are eight alloy through-gunwale rod holders, six of them with cup/sinker holders. Another four are mounted on the back of the bait station, and eight more positions are provided by the rocket launcher on the hardtop. That is a total of 20 without using the side shelves – pretty good.

The just-mentioned bait station is ideal – not so high that it makes fighting hooked fish around the boat a problem, but at a nice level to fillet the catch. Along with the four rod holders just mentioned, it also features fresh and saltwater taps, a removable wooden cutting board, knife slots, two cup/sinker holders, a rear gutter that drains overboard, and a towel rail.

A final bit of kit is a plumbed mackerel-sized live-bait tank set into the transom step-through. The catch can be kept fresh by adding an after-market ice bin. It would not be hard to add outriggers if you wanted to do some blue-water fishing. Overall, an excellent fish and dive setup which could be taken a lot further by further customisation to suit whatever aspect of fishing you are into.

This is too good a story not to tell: usually we ‘ground-test’ the fishability of a boat but I was told that as this hull was to be exported new, fishing would not be allowed for bio-security reasons, amongst others. We did take some rods and reels along to ‘dress’ the boat for its photos (but no hooks, bait or lures), and when we pulled up near Whale Island to shoot some layout pics, I asked Cliff and Adam to dangle some unarmed lines over the side, just for the look of the thing.

Cliff tied an empty juice bottle on his line, filled it with water to take the line down, and then dropped it over the side. In seconds a decent kingfish loomed out of the depths and was all over the bottle – a sitting duck for any kind of lure with a hook in it, just when we didn’t need it. Bugger! Murphy strikes again!

This is an excellent boat with a high level of finish, good sea-keeping and a nice ride. The increase in beam from 2.5m to 2.8m may not seem much, but adds a great deal to the space available in the cabin, wheelhouse and cockpit, and the layout is practical, with everything you need in a comfortable top-of-the-line stay-away cruiser with a strong fish-and-dive bent. 📍

Specifications

Material:	aluminium
Configuration:	monohull enclosed hardtop
LOA:	8.65m
Beam:	2.8m
Deadrise:	18degrees
Bottom:	6mm
Sides and topsides:	4mm
Cabin:	3mm
Recommended power:	250-350hp
Test engine:	Yamaha 350hp V8 four-stroke
Prop:	Saltwater Series stainless 15" pitch
Fuel:	underfloor 450 litres
Fresh water:	100 litres
Max people:	10
Trailer:	Surtees tandem, braked
Tow weight:	3,250kg dry
Key-tum:	\$285,000 (300 four-stroke Yamaha/Suzuki)
Price as tested:	\$315,000
Test boat courtesy of:	Surtees Boats

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