



SURTEES 540 WORKMATE HARDTOP *less is more*

A standout at the recent Hutchwilco Auckland Boat Show was Surtees Boats' new 540 Workmate Hardtop, winning the 'Specialist Fishing Boat up to 6m' class. Once the dust had settled from the Auckland show, Sam Mossman took the 540 out on the water – just before it was shipped off to the Melbourne Boat Show.

There has been a noticeable trend in recent times for five-metre class alloy boats in hardtop configurations. I have reviewed several in recent times, and the challenge for the manufacturers is to incorporate the shelter provided by a hardtop into a smaller hull without compromising its stability.

Surtees' model 540 Workmate

Hardtop is a new boat (not just a shortened or stretched version of an existing model) which preserves the principles of the soft-riding Surtees design.

As just mentioned, the issue with smaller alloy hulls is that the hardtop structure raises the vessel's centre of gravity, with the potential to reduce its stability. Increasing the amount of superstructure also increases the windage, tending to make a hull

lean into the wind.

The Surtees design team, while preserving all the main Surtees features, has made some refinements to the hull design to counter these issues. A concept that has remained a constant through the company's history is the famous flooding-keel ballast tank, which is retained in the new model. In the case of the 540 Workmate Hardtop, this puts 190 litres (190kg) of water ballast right

on the keel line, adding greatly to stability at rest. This tank ordinarily drains when the boat climbs onto plane, but a gate on the transom can be closed to retain the water and provide extra ballast, if necessary, when under way in rougher conditions.

Surtees have widened the beam by 80mm, upped the bottom hull plate thickness from 4mm to 5mm (adding more low-down weight) and reduced



The hardtop has been kept modest in size and moved forward a little, adding to the stability and reducing windage, as well as usefully increasing fishing room in the cockpit.



The bow features split bow rails which drop down either side of the fairlead to help constrain the warp.



Surtees' new marketing executive, Isabell Zitzelsberger, with a pannie snapper taken from the 540 Workmate Hardtop.

the deadrise by a degree to 16 degrees. The hardtop has been kept modest in size and moved forward a little, adding to the stability and reducing windage, as well as usefully increasing fishing room in the cockpit.

The upshot is that Surtees has produced a 5.4m hull that retains the stability and soft ride that Surtees Boats are known for, while adding the shelter that a hardtop provides.

As we headed out on the Waitemata Harbour, the three of us (Surtees' new marketing executive Isabell Zitzelsberger, *Fishing News* advertising manager Scott Taylor and me) appreciated the shelter provided by the hardtop. Isabell had stayed down in South Auckland for the night and had to scrape the ice off her car windscreen before she could travel.

You could say conditions were

brisk (for Auckland, that is), but with the shelter of the 540's hardtop cutting the wind-rush, we were quite comfortable. It is nice to be able to keep out of any rain, too, and during the hotter months there is the offer of shade.

A cool 8-12 knot southerly was on the beam and the half-metre lift was pumped up to 1.5m at times by the wakes of launches and ferries, and in areas with stronger currents running against

the wind. Despite this, we travelled dryly and comfortably with the hull displaying the characteristic Surtees soft ride. After the photo-shoot, we ran the boat out to Rakino Channel and I was very happy with its performance.

The hull is rated for 80-100hp, with the test rig powered by an 80hp Honda. Top end 'book' revs for this outboard are listed as 5000-6000rpm and with a 15-inch



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pitch prop we achieved 5400rpm at WOT (Wide Open Throttle). This equated to a speed of 26 knots (48kph). This is pretty decent considering the engine is at the bottom end of the recommended horsepower range.

There is room in the rev range to take the propeller pitch up a couple of inches if desired, and this would also increase the top-end speed.

After the test, the Honda team did some work to optimise engine performance and kindly supplied their results. They managed a top-end WOT of 5900rpm producing 30.3 knots and using 32.7 litres per hour while running in calm freshwater, with one less adult aboard. See the performance

figures on page 105.

Stem to stern

The bow features split bow rails which drop down either side of the fairlead to help constrain the warp. Tie-off cleats are added at each side of the sizeable open-topped anchor well. Access for the bowman is through a large forward hatch with a platform to stand on in the fore-cabin.

The 'screen is toughened glass and an Exalto wiper keeps the forward visibility good. Usefully, the switch for the wiper has been placed at the bottom of the switching panel where it can be easily found by feel when underway, demonstrating Surtees'

attention to detail.

The dash is lined with grey marine carpet, which helps cut internal glare on the 'screen. The electronics, in the form of a Garmin echoMap 95sv Sounder/GPS plotter, is bracket-mounted on the dash, with a Garmin GMI 20 digital engine gauge flush-mounted in the console along with switching, USB ports and GME GX750 'Black Box' VHF.

The boat was built with display at the Auckland Boat Show in mind and the paint job and Nyalic finish, combined with full SeaDek panelling throughout, gives an impressive effect. The SeaDek theme is carried through to the gunwale tops, boarding platforms, fore-cabin and even the top of the

double-hatch 70-litre Ikey-Tek ice box that fitted neatly up forward behind a restraining ridge. Along with deck stowage space, side-shelving is fitted up forward.

Out at the helm position, seating is provided by a nicely upholstered sliding, swivelling, bucket seat with roll-back bolster and gas-shock pedestal for the helmsman, and a fold-down bench seat for the passenger. Side shelving runs the full length of the cockpit.

The transom wall features more stowage space, a protected locker for the battery and isolation switch, and a transom step-through.

Surtees boats have a background of clever engineering

Helm seating is provided by a nicely upholstered sliding, swivelling, bucket seat with roll-back bolster and gas-shock pedestal.



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Behind the transom are boarding platforms with a 'T' fold-down boarding ladder adjacent.

Performance

Honda 80hp outboard, prop 15-inch pitch, Load: three adults, 75% fuel, saltwater, light chop.

Revs (RPM)	Speed (knots)	Fuel (l/hr total)
1000	3.0	1.5
2000	5.7	5.1
3000	6.9	9.0
4000	17.0	14.0
5000	23.5	27.3
5400 (WOT)	26.0	31.5

Max performance with same outboard/prop, load two adults, 75% fuel, freshwater, flat-calm (figure supplied by Honda/Surtees)

Revs (RPM)	Speed (knots)	Fuel (l/hr total)
5900 (WOT)	30.3	32.7

ideas, such as their fold-down passenger seats, the Quik-Hitch automatic trailer catch, and their self-flooding ballast tank. A new trick in this boat is a clever drop-door that retracts into the

transom step-through. Behind the transom are boarding platforms with a 'T' fold-down boarding ladder adjacent. Grab-rails are in the right places throughout the boat.

Fishing fit-out

Surtees boats, first and foremost, are 'built to fish'. The basics of stability (aided by the ballast tank), and good footing (SeaDek panels) are supplemented by toe-

room and flat gunwale faces that offer good mid-thigh support to anglers.

For its length, this boat has a lot of cockpit space, as Isabell, Scott and I found when we stopped

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For its length, this boat has a lot of fishing room.



A new trick is a clever drop-door that retracts into the transom step-through.

for a couple of drifts with lures, knocking over a few pannie snapper for dinner. This boat would fish four anglers comfortably. Fishing fittings include: six alloy

through-gunwale rod-holders (with adjacent cup/sinker-holders); a transom-mounted bait station featuring three more rod holders, knife slots, overboard drains and

a removable cutting board which can fit inside the under-deck hold; and a live-bait tank mounted in the transom step-through. Catch stowage can be in the under-deck

hold just mentioned, or in an after-market ice box.

Additional fishing features are a seven-position rocket launcher on the hard-top, and a wash-down hose.

Hitting the trail

Allied company, Surtees Trailers, supplies the trailers for these boats – robust, galvanised, cradle A-frame designs. The 540 was carried on a single-axle model with leaf-spring suspension, galvanised steel guards and rims, entry bay,

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A comfortable boat to fish from. Isabell Zitzelsberger and Scott Taylor with a couple of dinner guests.



The cockpit has adequate toe-room and flat gunwale faces that offer good mid-thigh support to anglers.

four pairs of wobble rollers per side, manual winch, wind-down jockey wheel and dual coupling. Tow weight is about 925kg.

Final thoughts

Surtees have produced a great little fishing boat in the 540 Workmate. Robustly built, with the 'have your cake and eat it' advantages of the fine entry and flooding ballast tank, this boat will comfortably day-fish four anglers.

It has the excellent sea-keeping the Surtees boats are known for and manages to incorporate the shelter of a hard-top with a modest hull that is relatively easy to tow and cheap to run. You can bet that this is going to be a very popular new model for the innovative Bay of Plenty company.



SURTEES 540 WORKMATE HARDTOP

Specifications

Material:	Aluminium
Configuration:	Open hardtop
LOA:	5.40m
Beam:	2.19m
Deadrise:	16 degrees
Bottom:	5mm
Sides:	4mm
Superstructure:	3mm
Fuel capacity:	100 litres underfloor
Recommended HP:	80-100hp
Test engine:	Honda 80hp four-stroke
Prop:	15-inch pitch
Trailer:	Surtees Trailers single axle
Tow weight:	925kg
Base price:	\$46,000 (Honda 80hp)
As tested:	\$63,000
Test boat courtesy of:	Surtees Boats and NZ Fishing Boats, Auckland.

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