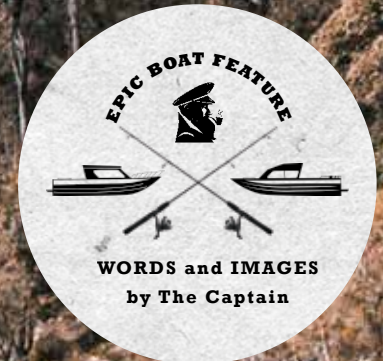


RADIO CONTROLLED RAMPAGE



IN A CAPTAIN-FIRST — ACTUALLY, IT'S PROBABLY A WORLD-FIRST, AS NOBODY ELSE WOULD BE SO DAFT — WE PIT A BRAND SPANKIN' NEW SURTEES 540 WORKMATE WORTH \$65K AGAINST A 93CM REMOTE-CONTROLLED SPEEDBOAT WORTH \$900. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, START YOUR FITBIT.



"AHOY DENIS, WE'D LOVE TO SPECTATE AT YOUR MINI SHOOTOUT, BUT ISN'T YOUR METRE-LONG MIDGET GOING TO BE SLAUGHTERED?"



RC (remote/radio-controlled) anything used to be the domain of the nerds. But hell, these days anyone can deliver a pizza to their best mate's place via a drone. RC boats, however, are still well entrenched in Nerdville. They haven't really hit the mainstream, but one bloke is trying his best to change all that. Denis Johnson is the general manager of a company that imports all sorts of RC awesomeness. He's also been pretty keen on fishing his whole life and recently purchased a new Surtees 540 Workmate Hardtop. When we heard he was pitting his Surtees against his RC boat... well, who wouldn't want to see that?

sunrise. He's cautiously backing his Surtees into the inky black water and we exchange pleasantries before climbing aboard over the XL gunwales. In no time, we're scooting up the guts of Pittwater, chatting excitedly about the big race. The 100HP Mercury is dialled in at 5000RPM with Denis keen to show us he's a high-speed hero.

We ask him how he got into fishing. "I don't care what I catch, as long as I'm catching something," he shouts over the thrum of the motor. "I've been fishing my whole life. Every family holiday I went on, I'd sneak out of the tent at sunrise and chase sand whiting, bream and flatties. My old man built a Canadian-style canoe, which we used to fish from all the time. From there we went to a Quintrex tinie, then a glass Savage."

First light pokes its nose over the eastern shoreline as we round Barrenjoey Headland into a sloppy head sea. Denis slams the Surtees into idle and opens the ballast flap, flooding her keel with 190L of saltwater before locking it back off and dropping the hammers again.

"This extra weight will help us punch into the swell and chop," Denis explains. "It'll also give us better stability at rest when we pull up to chase kings." True to his word, the ride stiffens up markedly as we slice our way south to the large sandstone cliff faces of Bangalley Headland.

Denis is well prepared with big, fresh, juicy squid secured from his local tackle store. We cut them into strips, deploy them on a poor man's downrigger and begin trolling for kings.

"I've still got plans to mount a



"Ahoy Denis, we'd love to spectate at your mini shootout, but isn't your metre-long midget going to be slaughtered?" The Captain hollers down the phone.

"Don't be so sure," Denis fires back. It's capable of unloading 34,860RPM and hitting speeds above 40 knots."

"Sounds like we've got a shootout, then," The Captain replies.

However, we quietly pack the squid rod and kingie gear, just in case it turns into a mega bust.

CLIFFHANGER

Race day is upon us. The plan is to head offshore from Broken Bay, north of Sydney, and chase kingies along the cliff faces before coming back into the relatively protected waters of Pittwater. Then it will be time for Surtees v 40-knot RC midget.

We meet Denis down at the ramp before



1, 2 STEP:
The flip-down boarding ladder is simple and functional.



WATERGATE:
The black cord underneath the bait station is used to open/close the shut-off gate for the water ballast.



FEATHERWEIGHT:
With a measly BMT dry weight of 1,100kg the 540 Workmate Hardtop is a cinch to tow.



SOUND SELECTION:
The 540 Workmate Hardtop is fitted with a Simrad NSS9 Evo3.



CHICKEN DINNER:
Wide gunwales, big cockpit and great bait station configuration – winner, winner.



DOUBLE TROUBLE:
The dual-battery system is tucked away in a sealed compartment above the deck.



"THE CAPTAIN'S CREW CAN ONLY NOD IN AGREEMENT WHILE TRIMMING HER OUT FOR THE SPEEDY DOWN-SEA RUN."



downrigger and electric motor," Denis remarks while lowering another bait. "I want to fish out of the boat for a few months first, though, so I can get a feel for where I want everything."

It doesn't take long to mark up some awesome arches on the Simrad NSS9 Evo3. Denis doesn't do much deep fishing, so he opted for the TotalScan transducer, which is super-versatile and marks fish beautifully in shallow water. You also get Broadband, CHIRP, StructureScan HD and DownScan all in the one unit — handy.

Speaking of fishing features, the cockpit space on the 540 is best in class. There's so much fishing room, you actually feel like you're aboard a much bigger boat. "They've gone to a slightly shallower vee compared to the 575, but in doing so have made the cockpit space much wider," Denis says. "They've also pushed the cabin all the way to the front. The fishing space in the back is equivalent to a 610, if you measure from the seat to the transom. So it's a small boat with big-boat fishability."

The other change on the 540 is down back at the transom. The batteries and other electrical gear sit in a sealed compartment raised above the floor and the transom door slides neatly in and out of the port side. It's practical for pulling a big fish through, but more than anything, you'd keep it fitted during big seas or while fighting a fish down back. The deck, which is also sealed, flows directly to the wet bilge at the rear, making clean-up a cinch.

ALLOY AFFAIR

After a couple of hours' trolling, it's clear the sashimi squad isn't hungry. We don't care because we've got bigger fish to fry. It's time to head back into Pittwater and get the RC shootout underway. The Captain jumps behind the wheel

of the Surtees to get a feel of the trim attitude for optimum take-off. We send it hard, throwing her around in some aggressive turns. The Surtees rides softly and predictably, even with air under her wings. No surprises there — in The Captain's alloy shootout, the Surtees rated equal-top ride, well above the Bar Crusher.

Hanging on for dear life, Denis yells, "I wanted something I could take the grandkids and missus out on. It had to be safe, reliable and strong. I decided aluminium was a better option for the sort of boating I like. It's light, you can run it up the beach and it's much more ding-resistant. I looked at the Bar Crusher 535C, but the Surtees had a thicker hull — 5mm with 4mm sides, it's built like a tank. Even the welds are beautiful."

The Captain's crew can only nod in agreement while trimming her out for the speedy down-sea run.

RACE DAY

Back in Pittwater and it's time to race. The Captain's crew are at the helm of the Surtees; Denis at the, er, toggle switch of the RC. The competitive juices have been building all day and now it's finally time to go for the money shot. We pull the Surtees up onto a protected beach while Denis gets the RC ready to race.

Dubbed the Ariane Deep Vee Racing Boat, she certainly takes The Captain by surprise. Almost 1m long with the lines of an American offshore racing boat, with a 26-degree deadrise and a complicated battery system — this thing is the real deal. But there's one thing in the Surtees' favour — the nor'easter has now pumped up the volume to a hairstyle-destroying 15 knots.

"On your marks, get set, go!" yells the race official — actually, The Captain's drone pilot, sitting on the beach.



Surprisingly, the Surtees gets the jump at the start, as it takes a moment for the Ariane's crazy spinning props to bite with its instant 30,000RPM injection. However, while the Surtees is getting onto the plane, the Ariane streaks into the lead with awesome acceleration (damn, should've dropped the ballast). Once on the plane, however, the Surtees turns the tables, not as hampered by the wind and swell conditions. The Ariane might look like a chop killer, but weighing in at only 2.6kg, she struggles to keep her props in the water. With her throttles now wide-open, the Surtees pulls away for an easy win. The Ariane is last seen launching off a wave before nosediving into a trough and starting a new life as a submarine.

THE WASH-UP

The shootout reminds us you don't need a lot of money to have fun on the water. If you don't have a 23ft wave slicer, get yourself a remote-controlled boat for \$1000. On the subject of bang for buck, at just \$65k, the Surtees is exceptional value. We've been critical of the price of modern tinnies in the past, but these Kiwi builders from Whakatane in New Zealand have certainly delivered a boat with the upside of alloy (lightweight and durable) with plenty of features, as well as a great ride, at a great price.

FINE-TUNED: Denis gives the Ariane a few last minute tweaks before the big shootout.



Boat specs



SURTEES	
Model	540 Workmate Hardtop
Length	5.4m
Beam	2.19m
Deadrise	16 degrees
Weight	1100kg
Material	Aluminium
Power	Petrol
Fuel capacity	100L
Water ballast	190L
Electronics	Simrad NSS9 Evo3 with TotalScan transducer
ENGINE SPECS	
Engine	Mercury 100HP
Model	2.1L 8-valve SOHC inline 4
Propeller	Enertia (14.7 x 16")
PRICE AS TESTED	
	\$65,000
MORE INFORMATION	

Surtees
2909 State Highway 30,
RD2 Whakatane, Bay of Plenty, New Zealand
+64 7 322 8461
www.surteesboats.com



ARIANE	
Model	Deep Vee Racing Boat
Length	0.93m
Beam	0.27m
Deadrise	26 degrees
Weight	2.6kg
Material	Fibreglass
Power	Electric
Fuel capacity	N/A
Water ballast	N/A
Electronics	11.1v 2100-4500mAh lipo battery
ENGINE SPECS	
Engine	SSS
Model	2075kv (2075RPM per volt) water-cooled brushless with 125A-ESC
Propeller	Two-blade metal
PRICE AS TESTED	
	\$895
MORE INFORMATION	

Ace Hobby Distributors
Unit 1, 32 Bluett Drive,
Smeaton Grange, NSW
(02) 4647 0184
www.acehobbyaustralia.com.au

THUMBS UP

- Massive gunwales, awesome for loading gear and fishing off
- Great fishie features — our favourite was the leader dispensers
- Loved the ability to lock the water in the flooding keel when punching into a head sea
- Sexy colour scheme
- Clean and comfortable cockpit layout with batteries off the deck, plenty of storage for rods and big side pockets for gear
- Awesome value for money at \$65k

THUMBS DOWN

- Bracket-mounted sounder impedes vision through the windscreen, especially if you're short
- Trim tabs would've been a nice touch
- 100L fuel tank on the small side

www.thecaptain.tv

5 THINGS WE LEARNED

- 01 There's no replacement for displacement — no matter how much RPM you have up your sleeve.
- 02 That displacement can be enhanced with a ballast keel.
- 03 If you're too scared to jump your actual boat, an RC boat will definitely fill that void — the Ariane flew!
- 04 Petrol beats electric — until Elon Musk starts building RC boats, anyway.
- 05 Denis is the most badass grandpa we've ever met.



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