

Savage Sabre 640

July, 2011: Sometimes it is hard to keep in mind that some of these boats - and the 'retro' tests we're re-publishing - are as much as forty (!) years old. This 1982 test of the Savage Sabre is a good example, as the Savage 640 Sabre could be put back into production today - and be just as innovative and contemporary as it was back then, and significantly better finished than most current platties

Over the last few years, the Australian sportfishing movement has not only gathered momentum, but has started to consolidate its position as one of the most vital aspects of the many branches of water sports open to the boating fraternity in this country.

There are many definitions of 'sportfishing', but to this writer, the essential difference between a sportfisherman and the more accepted definition of a pleasure boat fisherman, is primarily that one fishes for the sheer fun of pitting his skills against the fish with an ever-reducing scale of chance, where the more conventional fisherman is mainly directing his skill at taking home a good feed of fish. And good luck to him too!

There is a not inconsiderable grey period between this time when a fisherman ceases to fish just for the catch, and becomes primarily interested in the art of fishing. Nevertheless, the two extremes do exist, and in recent years, the sportfishing movement has become a strong, well organised national movement.

Not surprisingly, a number of boat manufacturers have been very successful developing boats specifically for the sportfisherman.

J.J. Savage and Sons Pty Ltd are no strangers to the world of fishermen. As they say in their literature, they have been practising boat building for more than 80 years now, and although they haven't been building in either aluminium or fibreglass for quite that long, there are very few organisations in Australia with the sort of experience J.J. Savage and Sons enjoy today.

Eighteen months ago, Savage released the first of their 'new look' Alumacraft - the 5.30 m Lancer. This outstanding model (tested AB August, 1981) was an immediate success, as fishermen and boating families recognised its potential.

Now, the Savage organisation has developed a bigger, heavier and more expensive version of the Lancer and released it at capital city Boat Shows. As it is easily one of

the most interesting new products for 1982, we made arrangements to test one.

Sydney retailer, John Smales, from the Seven Hills Family Boats organisation kindly agreed to squeeze an all day session in between demonstrations arising from the public's interest in the Sabre at the Sydney Boat Show.

With a rather blustery, odd sort of day blowing across Broken Bay, with wind strength gusting to 20 knots, wind waves to two metres over a low ground swell and a harsh, bumpy chop in Pittwater, we headed out for a most revealing test.

Design: The Savage Sabre is a 6.4 m (21' long aluminium runabout with a massive 2.48 m (8'2") maximum beam, a hull depth of 1.3 metres (4'3") and a minimum cockpit freeboard of 630 mm (25"). The maximum beam at the hull shoulders is unusually carried right through to the waterline at the transom, and this, combined with a 15 degree deadrise (the angle of the vee at the back) has given the Sabre a very high level of dynamic (moving) and static (at rest) stability.

Up forward, just about under the helmsman's seat, the hull is very heavily veed, with some sections approaching 30 degrees, to slice through choppy water (before warping out towards the transom) giving the Savage the same uncannily soft ride its predecessor, the Lancer, enjoys. It is an excellent design technique, and one that seems to work singularly well in aluminium hulls. In alloy boats, manufacturers are able to produce an extremely sharp entry without either a loss of strength (as there could be with GRP construction) or the unnecessary build up of excessive displacement as there might be with heavier boat building material.

Perhaps the only design criticism we could make concerned the lack of flare engineered into this hull.

This is still the Achilles' heel of aluminium. It is still difficult for a manufacturer to build much flare or overhang into the bow or shoulder sections of an aluminium craft - despite computerised multi-conic development - and that means the designer has to pay a great deal of attention to his hull shape in the region of the forefoot and bow, together with a careful assessment of the likely weights on the

cockpit sole above, if he is going to ensure the craft will run dry, turning the waves and spray back properly.

It is essential that aluminium hulls run at a slightly higher running angle than a fibreglass boat of the same length. Ideally, the water should start breaking away from the heel of the forefoot but should not emerge under the hull until approximately half way back along the waterline length of the craft.

In this case, to make sure the Sabre has plenty of lift, Savage has installed three big all-welded planing strakes on each side of the keel, two commencing from the curved chine, and the other from the stem itself. As we discovered later in the test program, keeping the boat moving, making these strakes earn their keep, is an integral part of the Sabre's success offshore.

But there are other interesting design innovations.

Consider the outboard well/transom arrangement. This is the first mono-hull built in Australia to take full advantage of the ready availability of 635 mm (25") outboard legs - so much so, Savage has even had the courage to go a step further; they have designed the best outboard well arrangement this writer has seen on an Australian built outboard powered craft.

When Savage drew the lines of the Sabre Sportfisherman, they not only recognised the sportfisherman's need for a self draining cockpit sole (floor) they also realised that in many cases, an outboard well (as such) is not only a dreadful waste of space, but it can be positively dangerous to sportfishermen working in white water areas offshore, or running through narrow inlets which are possibly barred to the ocean - Narooma, Port Macquarie, Mallacoota Inlets spring to mind.

So, with not inconsiderable courage, they have taken the initiative and designed a lift-out splash board that slots down in front of the outboard motor. If you want an outboard 'well', there it is - but on the other hand, if you have to punch your way through the bar, the splash board lifts out completely, leaving the floor flat through to the transom. In turn, there is a 4" lip on the transom itself (mainly for the motor to be bolted against) so that if the worst does happen, and you take a green wave aboard, the water will simply run straight back out through the transom, past the outboard motor. There is nothing to stop it - and the very action of the wave dumping itself in the cockpit will virtually guarantee the momentum of the wave will be carried aft and by the weight of the water moving aft, tilting the boat back on its

F&B RETRO BOAT TEST: Unchanged, as first published, written and photographed by Peter Webster in 1982

