

Markham 16' Whaler

Since we published the first Whaler test 18 months ago, the Whaler has gone from strength to strength. The original features are still there — only now there is more space to enjoy this unusual craft.

Report by Peter Webster.

Fishing is a peculiar hobby, and especially from a boat.

It is expensive, time consuming, often fruitless, usually dampening and at best, subject to the development of skills and knowledge of a very high order.

I was giving the matter some thought just recently.

Anchored, sitting over a spot at Palm Beach, (N.S.W.)

fishermen know as Birchfield Park (or Wreck) about three miles offshore. Below me, 23 fathoms down in fact, my hapless

yellowtail swam in nervous circles, keeping a very wary eye out for the mulloway I was hoping would happen along to snaffle said yellowtail.

Looking back over to the west, I wondered what the city folk were doing.

Apartments glistened in the fast

fading glow of sunset, windows flashed light beams back across the sea, and a veil of blue bushfire smoke settled down across the headlands.

The sky, deep blue above me, changed colours with breathtaking radiance as it moved through the magenta yellow spectrum and changed from pink through orange, to red, leaving the sun a fiery orb etched deep in the aftermath of one of our first truly warm summer days.

The water lapped gently around the boat. Sounds drifted vaguely across the water from the other boats nearby. A quick cry was heard from one boat, then a laugh. "You silly b....."

Enveloped in the silence, my son and I sat quietly, listening. The sounds of three million people could have been as many miles away.

Then imperceptibly, the rod tip moved, line peeled through my fingers, slowly, then steadily, slipping away through the runners ... sitting up slowly, I checked the tension on the drag for the twentieth time.

My son, noticing I had changed from semi-reclining to switched-on, wordlessly indicated the gaff. "Not yet,

not just yet" my eyes reply, as I concentrated on the line still slipping through my rod, but it sure feels like our quarry, I thought, not wanting to break the expectant silence with the sound of breathing, leave alone words. Then it was time. Clamping down on the reel with palmed hand, I brought the rod tip swiftly erect, driving the hook deeply into the side of the big mulloway's cavernous mouth. He didn't like it either, and suddenly the reel drag shrieked in protest as the mulloway's powerful shoulders flexed and drove through the water in his desperate struggles to breakaway from the restraining force 23 fathoms above ... but the hook was set well, and the line unforgiving.

Darkness had fallen like a blanket over the water when we decided to leave the fishing grounds. It had been a good night. Three jewfish, (mulloway), several trags, and one nice snapper, that just couldn't pass up one of our plump live baits, half filled the fishbox.

The motors purred contentedly as we rounded the lighthouse point. The air was warm on our faces, tinged with the eucalypt scented traces of smoke.



Yes, fishing is a peculiar business. Some people look at you blankly when you list fishing as your favourite pastime/sport/hobby/leisure activity.

People like that would never understand why anyone would want to spend \$10,000 on a 16 foot boat, much less appreciate why the Markham Whaler is arguably the best 16 footer on the market.

Design

It measures 4.9 metres overall with a maximum beam of 1.98 metres and an average freeboard of 2ft. 9ins.

The cockpit area is extremely large for a 16 foot boat. It measures 8ft. 6ins. x 6ft. with a cockpit railing height of 2ft. 6 ins. near the stern. It weighs approximately 1100lbs ready for motors, with maximum recommended horsepower totalling 2 x 60hp outboard motors.

Two 15 gallon alloy under floor fuel tanks are fitted with breathers to the port and starboard stern quarters.

These are just the bald statistics.

In a more esoteric sense, the Whaler must surely be one of the most unusual looking boats on the market today.

When it is in the water or on its trailer, the Whaler is a very "stumpy" looking boat and it is highly unlikely that it will win any styling awards for its good looks and flowing lines.

The problem — if indeed it is a problem — stems from designer Mark Hookham's preoccupation with achieving the largest possible cockpit area in a 16-foot boat. There is no doubt that he has succeeded. The Whaler has easily the largest working area of any boat in the 16-17 foot class.

To do it, Hookham had to compromise somewhere, and the compromise involved the traditional idea of boat styling. The helmsman and passenger seats are located right forward, so far forward in fact, the helmsman can lean through the centre-opening windscreen section and raise and lower the anchor with his left hand at the helm! It is another case where the practical application of the design over-rides the styling considerations.

Needless to say, this approach isn't going to suit everyone, but then

Hookham didn't design the Whaler for everyone. As the test lengthened, and we became more and more familiar with the product, it was increasingly apparent that the Whaler was not a boat for the beginner, as there were simply too many design features he wouldn't understand or fully appreciate.

Take the cockpit area, for example. Consider it as a rectangular shape. In the starboard (forward) quarter you have the helmsman's controls falling nicely to hand with grab rail support over the windscreen facing the skipper.

In the port quarter, the passenger is similarly provided with a solid grab rail over the windscreen, comfortable adjustable height seating and the ability to swivel round and face the action in the cockpit.

In the centre sections of the cockpit, rod racks and gaff racks are provided along the port and starboard topsides. Grab rails are located at hip height for added security. In the starboard arid port aft sections, built-in rod holders, a two cubic foot live bait well complete with teak chopping board plus two moulded quarter seats complete a very