

F&B's
QUICK TEST

Sensational **SEA SPIRIT 730** *Sports Cruiser*

Every so often we come across a real "gem" of a boat that takes us by surprise because of the sheer excellence of its design and performance. That's how it was with our exploratory test run in the latest version of the Sea Spirit 730.

Built on the Gold Coast by a very well known GRP trade building centre headed by Rob Cross and his partner Jim Hoad, the Sea Spirit has been around the Coast now for several years.

The moulds were originally made for a Sydney business man but things didn't work out as planned, and for a long time, the moulds languished in the back of a shed.

Around about this period, Rob Cross, Jim Hoad and their team established a successful GRP business specialising in contract work for other fibreglass product manufacturers. Anytime an overload situation calls for additional fibreglass boat building capacity, the team put up their hand and say "We can help!"

Having such an operation on the Gold Coast is clever, because the boat industry is invariably going through a "flood or a famine" situation. In fact, Southern Queensland boat building is possibly the most cyclic business in Australia today.

The Sea Spirit 730 sports cruiser was one of their production contracts, so when that business was put up for sale, Rob and Jim didn't need to be convinced about the potential of this stunning cruiser. They decided to step forward and buy the whole show (the moulds, basically) outright.

Because they are

until a few months ago that they contacted F&B's office for the first time, to explore the possibility of cranking up the publicity and marketing for the Sea Spirit.

In fact several have already been built and sold by the team, but the boat you can see on these pages is their first true "demo" model.

This is quite a major step forward for the team, as it gives them the opportunity of letting the public experience the Sea Spirit on the water for themselves – and believe me, this is the only way to experience this boat properly.

and an amazingly deeply veed forefoot. In this case, the vee is carried right through to the transom, where the deadrise is no less than 23 degrees.

The hull at the waterline is 2.05 m wide, a little bit narrower than (say) many of today's big plate alloy boats, but it has been kept at this width to retain the classic 3:1 length to beam formula.

Apart from looking good though, this is also one of the most practical family boats I've clapped eyes on in recent times. I can't think of a better production boat in Australia for a family to go out on the water on a Saturday or Sunday for a truly fabulous day's outing in great comfort, convenience and style.

Check the photographs carefully – they'll tell their own story.

Here we have a two berth cruiser with a private, electric toilet (below, in the cabin), two very long single berths, or a superb seven foot long double berth. The cabin area then leads out to a cockpit I believe, is the best of its kind in this class in Australia.

The helmsman and passenger seats are of good design, beautifully made, comfortable and body hugging.

Abaft (behind) both seats the mouldings continue to offer many pleasant surprises.

On the portside, behind the passenger, the mouldings open out to



professional GRP builders, the team immediately stripped the moulds down, and started the hard work of re-polishing and perfecting the original tooling.

But it all takes time – and the months ticked past whilst the guys balanced their trade work against their investment in the Sea Spirit moulds. So it wasn't

Design: The Sea Spirit has to be one of the best looking GRP boats on the market today. The styling is sleek, rakish, beautifully proportioned with that "Englishy" or Don Shead "look" I find quite appealing.

Like most of the true deep vees of this ilk, it has the long, finely drawn 'snout'

reveal a proper little galley unit with a 12 volt fridge underneath, and one of those 'orrible little "hand grenade" butane cookers this industry is beset with at the moment.

We'd chuck that out real quick, and install a proper LP gas stove, complete with flame failure and the ability to actually cook something! Together with the moulded sink unit, this would convert the Sea Spirit into a true weekend cruiser for two people.

Time Out: In fairness to the blokes, they were mortified about our comments on the butane "stove" and quickly moved to locate a better quality stainless steel, LP gas stove. "It is just not an issue" Rob told F&B, "we're just glad you've pointed it out. We've already contact the Maxi stove people about getting a real one - and we'll make that the standard fitting."

Obviously you could cruise with more than two if

you wished – but it is such a wonderful cruising boat for two, it would be very easy to just take off for some quality time together. However, if the ankle biters insist on coming too (*grrrr!*) you can easily put a couple of kids on the aft lounges without any trouble at all.

These lounges quickly convert into a big queen size double, so upon reflection – maybe you stick the kids or rellos in the cabin, and enjoy the playroom in the cockpit. You'd need to think about enclosing the rear cockpit with midge screens and covers (a common option) but hell, it would be hard to find a nicer place to settle back and watch the stars, while she cracks the Moet, and you slide in the Julio Iglesias CD she likes so much . . .

Back On The Job! On the starboard side, there's all sorts of storage space in the curvaceous mouldings for nick knacks and more

personal belongings, leading back to the rear lounge and centre table.

This swings away to reveal the transom door which steps out onto a true aft deck ahead of the outboard well.

This is the best portofino transom I've seen on a trailerboat – and I say that having full regard for the transoms on boats such as the Smugglers, Signatures, Whittleys and the like.

This is a perfect set-up for social boating where you take a mob of friends or family over to your favourite anchorage, put the pick down - and relax. Everybody can just laze around in the lounges and the seats, with the kids rushing backwards and forwards from the food and drinks to the water (usually!) through the wide transom door.

This is one of the very rare boats made in Australia which has really good access to the water and back

up onto the boat, for everybody who isn't an olympic athlete. Many women and kids – *and a lot of very proud men* – find it extremely difficult to get on and off a boat just to go for a swim; clambering over the transom and back into the cockpit is often very hard for the young and older people.

Here, there's nothing to climb over or leap frog across. The kids (and mum) just walk through the transom gate, dive off the platform, and climb back up the ladder onto the landing platform, as easily as the pool at home.

So in the total sense, this is a 7.3 m sports cruiser with genuine cruising capability over a weekend for two plus two. Or a fabulous day boat for up to 8 people. And a boat that still retains the potential to be a good fishing or diving platform should your mood incline in either direction.

The Sea Spirit is also





available as a serious sportsfishing model for the dedicated fisho.

Construction And Finish: Cedra Marine, that's Rob and Jim's actual trading company, have really "done a job" on this boat.

I don't know whether this boat was given the red carpet treatment because it was being prepared for media trials, but whatever, it certainly demonstrates this team has the capability to finish their mouldings, carpeting, linings in the cockpit and cabin as good as any, and considerably better than most boat builders in Australia.

The forward cabin is beautifully fitted out and lined, with high quality finishing materials, and a really high standard of workmanship in the actual fitting out process, ie gluing the linings to the walls, merging the seams with the moulded edges, etc.

Both Ruth Cunningham and the

writer are very conscious of the "industry standard" of quality at the moment, having fitted out a number of craft ourselves recently.

We've also employed 'top flight' professionals to do the work for us in several craft, and are currently fitting out our new 8.0 m diesel sports fisherman as this test was conducted. So we are very *au fait* with current industry standards. Both came away from this test report wishing we could highjack the Sea Spirit team to finish our own boat.

Performance: Well, if this boat doesn't knock your socks off, it's time to book a box in that big garden up on the hill!

Jeez, this is one horny piece of equipment, and it flies! The hull is a classic English style deep-vee, with absolutely bugga-all lateral trim on the water at high speed. This is not a boat

for mugs, let me tell you.

This is like driving a turbo Porsche Carrera in the rain on a twisting greasy mountain road – fantastic fun if you have the talent and the skill to wring its neck, but if you're lead footed or ham fisted, you'll end up in the bushes, quick smart. Well, this is not quite as bad as that, but it is certainly the most trim sensitive boat I've driven for several years.

It just blew me away. If you know what you're doing, a good skipper can get an absolutely sensational ride out of this boat, even at very high speeds.

The ride and performance will blow every plate boat under 7.5 metres clean out of the water. On a rough day, the Sea Spirit will just disappear over the horizon at almost twice their speed – believe me, this is seriously quick.

Even working in fairly heavy bay chop, this magnificent deep vee just cleaves its way through the water, while the skipper sits there with a stupid look on his face . . . two fingers on the trim switches, and a hand on the Hydrive hydraulic helm. All I wanted to do was put an even bigger engine on it, so we could go even quicker!

How fast does it go? Well with the 225 Yammy EFI Saltwater V-6 on the test boat, spinning a big 18" wheel, we were screaming back through the traps at around 55 mph and pulling up a rooster tail the Riviera Class One race boat would have envied!

I can't remember when I've enjoyed driving a boat as much as this – it's that good. Although I say again, it's not a boat for mugs – if you don't know how to drive trim tabs and/or you don't like trimming the boat out to the absolute nth degree of perfection, then make sure you order the Sea Spirit with Bennett *Auto* trim tabs – one of the boat's very rare options.

This is a boat that's set-up for guys who truly love their boating; blokes who get right off in trimming a boat to the sea state of the moment at the maximum and highest level of the boat's performance.

I might add, if you pull back to the 4,000 r/min range, the boat just lopes along like it's in overdrive fifth – there's no noise, there's no slap, there's no bang. It really is a boat to impress the rellos - just don't give them the helm if you've only got manual tabs and the driver is not used to them.

If you do, nothing too untoward will happen, but the boat will probably "fall

over” on one side of the deep vee or the other – and the faster you go the more spectacular the heel angle will become unless you’re in control. Or you fit the auto tabs.

And if you are prepared to drive it slowly, and slide back down the performance ladder quite a bit, then you can tootle round the bay all day on the same trim setting, whilst you talk to Aunty Thel about her dot com shares, and the grandchildren run around the back of the boat.

Application: One of the best family or social boats I’ve seen for yonks. It fulfills so many “mission statements” it is uncanny.

It’s a boat that would be an absolute delight to have launched at Akuna Bay (up the Hawkesbury River, NSW) to take the family and a couple of friends down the river to your favourite restaurant, before going back to Jerusalem Bay to spend the afternoon swimming, frolicking and relaxing around the boat. Read the weekend

papers; crack a cool Chardonnay, laugh at the kid’s antics - and all the time enjoy an environment that is safe, practical and very, very comfortable.

Amazingly, this is one of the very few boats that actually encourages half a dozen adults to sit around a central table, and share a few drinks, some tall tales and a lot of laughs. Very few boats of this size and length can do this.

Of course, there are the flocks of Bayliners, SeaRays and a myriad of imported US boats available, but very few of them can be packaged for \$74,000 on a proper Aussie tandem trailer. Even fewer can be trailered with such ease and comfort to places as far afield as the Whitsundays or the beautiful Port Stephens region.

Whatever – this is an easily trailered, 2.5 tonne family cruising boat that is going to be just at home in the Whitsundays as it is cruising up the Hawkesbury.

Rob Cross told us the BMT package price of this boat was just \$74,000

including GST, and given the exceptional build quality and long list of standard features, this is excellent value. Keep in mind the package includes everything you can see on these pages, the Yamaha 200 EFI Saltwater outboard, the canopy and covers, and a dedicated tandem axle trailer.

If they can hold this price it represents astonishing value for money – and a very, very welcome break in the scheme of things for boatowners across Australia.

Summary: Well, I did say in the beginning that we had discovered a real “gem”. And I must also observe we were truly taken aback by the value for the money it offers against the quality of workmanship and finish we’ve found on this craft.

I love the boat’s design and liveability – especially for a mob of people and a bunch of kids. This really is going to be a fun family holiday machine. Remember the name, the **Sea**

Spirit 730 Sports cruiser

because we’re going to hear a lot more about this fine craft in the future.

For further information about the Sea Spirit 730, call Rob Cross at Cedra Marine Industries, phone:

(07) 5529 9822,

fax: (07) 5529 8086 or visit their web page:

www.cedra.swsites.net or write to them on their e-mail

< mcsq@ozwide.net >

