



Seafarer's Sensssational 5.0 m Viva!

Sleek, smooth and pretty styling sets the Seafarer Viva aside from many competitive brands. One of the first of a whole series of new boats from Seafarer, the Viva sets a cracking pace.

Story and pictures by Peter Webster.

The Viva is one of the key Seafarer models we've been chasing for some time, but often we could only watch in despair as the semi-trailers rolled out of the Seafarer factory in Mermaid Beach with another load of Vivas, Voyagers, Vikings and Victorys heading north, south, east or west.

Seafarers have sustained their

reputation through many years of boat building as one of the best brands of fibreglass boats in Australia, and the retooling program Seafarer owner Lindsay Fry has undertaken this past 12 months is a sure fire thing to keep Seafarer up on top of the heap.

Case in point – the very attractive 5.0 m Seafarer Viva. As you can see from the tower shot on the facing page, words are not really needed to describe this pretty little craft.

Observe the beautiful curving mouldings around the transom – this is a work of art and a real tribute to the Seafarer R&D team. There's scarcely a straight line on the boat in the transom area and they've made fabulous use of GRP (fibreglass) at its best – with sleek, curving, almost sensuous mouldings wrapping around a package that can be towed behind many of today's four cylinder vehicles, let alone the larger sixes.

When we first spotted the new Viva coming out of the factory, we were very keen to get one, but it proved to be a lot harder than we thought, as demand from dealers is keeping this boat's moulds in production around the clock. In the end, it was an early order

for OMC and their media and dealer day that led to the opportunity to conduct this test.

The Evinrude FICHT outboard you can see on the back of this Viva is in fact next year's Evinrude 115 FICHT engine. This very same package was one of the star attractions of the recent OMC press and dealer day's held to launch the new 2001 Series FICHT engines.

Now, as anyone who's read F&B fairly regularly this past couple of years will be aware, OMC suffered an international horror period following the release of their Stage One and Stage Two FICHT engines. Over the last couple of years this poorly conceived program has cost the OMC Corporation hundreds of millions of dollars.

The FICHT development program will probably go down in history as one of the most expensive ever undertaken by any marine engine company, but the OMC Corporation and their world wide dealer network has just soldiered on. They've ridden out a very rough storm. They've built new engines, better engines. They've refined them, created oils for them, and

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tested them over and over again.

Despite their more recent problems out-sourcing parts for the engines, and struggling to keep the financial backers happy, they have now released these 2001 FICHT engines – and put a smile back on the faces of their dealer network across the world.

And it’s pretty easy to see why, too.

This 115 FICHT V-4 is an impressive engine. It ran with turbine-like smoothness, it was remarkably quiet, and offered the classic 2-stroke power to weight advantage over competitive 4-stroke technology.

Not only was the delivery of the torque and power virtually seamless, but weighing in at 164 kg, the package is some 13% lighter than the 189 kg Yamaha 115 4-stroke, and a huge 27% lighter than the Honda 115 4-stroke.

Standing back from this package and looking at the Evinrude 115 FICHT objectively, one must observe that this engine is certainly taking the fight right back up to the Yamaha 115 4-stroke with which it directly competes. And it has a number of very significant advantages over the heavier, bulkier and slower performing Honda 115 hp 4-stroke.

This engine reminds us that 2-stroke outboards were invented in the first place for marine use, and marine use only – and this application or leaning towards marine use is very evident in the Evinrude’s instantaneous and flowing response when the throttle is opened.

There is no doubt that this high pressure FICHT fuel injection system provides a significantly faster turn of acceleration and a much faster response and delivery of power right across the rev range than any comparable 4-stroke or an old style carby driven 2-stroke.

(Time Out: Okay, many readers out there are thinking “Hell, Webster’s done a 360 degree turn here – he must have got their advertising back again!” because F&B has been seen to be so critical of the early OMC FICHT debacle. Be that as it may, we still have to retain sufficient objectivity to give credit where credit is due – and we were singularly impressed by this smooth, quiet 2-stroke 115 hp engine.

Obviously we won’t know for months how it’s going to perform in the long haul, but one has to observe that some of the OMC Corporation’s old

confidence is coming back. Along with the relative calm and growing satisfaction with this latest generation FICHT evidenced by the Internet’s international Bulletin Board pages, it does suggest the very fervent prayer of just everybody in the trade has been heard: It looks like OMC has finally turned the corner.)

We are often asked at F&B to help people choose their first boat, and without being in anyway patronising, we would like to observe that this is getting very close to the ideal “first time” boat for families – particularly those with active youngsters who love being pulled around on tubes, wakeboards and skis, with a dash of fishing and picnicking on the side - this would be a perfect craft to purchase for that role.

Handling & Ride This is a classic little Seafarer. I keep writing “little” when it fact it’s not. It’s more the sort of feeling you get when you drive a small high performance motor vehicle (such as a BMW 3 Series, perhaps a Saab or an Audi Quattro) where the body structure is not big, but the performance of the vehicle is more



than enough to blow the doors off vehicles that are bigger, heavier, bulkier, etc.

And so it is with this Seafarer Viva. The driver snuggles down behind the helm, under the ridge of the windscreen, with all of the controls falling beautifully to hand, and then opens up the throttle – *whammo!*

Phew – *does this thing lift out of the water and go!* It's at near full speed in about 3 boat lengths, and once you learn to trim the motor up, up, up (*ye gods!*) and the rooster tail is lifting up about 10' in the air as the boat hurtles down through the traps, the penny drops.

This is one hellava fun boat to drive!

The 115hp Evinrude FICHT is an absolute hoot on the back of this boat. It's got miles more horsepower than families will ever need, but who cares? It's fantastic fun, and the boat handles the power with ease and safety. So forget about the fuel consumption and the range figures – put all that in another box, and just for once let's get out on the water and blow the cobwebs clean out of that space between your ears.

It's pretty much a fail-safe, or to be blunt, an idiot proof boat. The handling is absolutely a treat – and after just a few minutes at the helm it's all you can do to stop playing Stefan and doing the “flat stick around the buoys” number and then hurtling back down through the simulated chicane you've created in your mind's eye.

Lindsay's done a beautiful job on this hull. It hangs on like a limpet and will be just excellent for families into wakeboarding, tubing and the like.

On the other side of the coin, it's also a very useful configuration. The two forward seats are quite comfortable and the rear lounge is actually a great spot for youngsters to sit and enjoy the experience. For once, they're not drowned out by the noise of the outboard, or blown out of the chair by the wind.

The Evinrude was remarkably quiet – I couldn't get over that, so we went to the trouble of measuring the sound in this boat.

We logged a stunning 82.7 dB(A) at 4,000 revs (the normal cruising speed) which increased to 97.8 dB(A) at 6,000 rpm. This is drop of at least 15%

across the board in the level of sound we've become used to from 2-stroke engines. It's even more dramatic at the other end of the scale, with an almost unbelievable 70.5 dB(A) being recorded at 1,800 rpm (trolling revs).

This is a reduction from what we've been used to (over the years) of around 20%. Considering that all this has come about because of the development of the FICHT system, is a real feather in OMC's cap, and an advantage they should be marketing more strongly.

In a practical, day to day sense, this manifests itself in the point I was just making. In this boat, two or three youngster can sit on the back lounge and actually talk amongst themselves as the boat cruises along, because 80-82 dB(A) is not that far off normal conversation levels in a motor vehicle.

Fishing Thoughts The Viva will make a neat little fishing boat too, especially if you leave the rear lounge at home. This opens up the cockpit considerably, with the boat then having quite a useful fishing cockpit.

At rest, stability is excellent, and it

will be a very pleasant to sit 'on the pick' for luderick or whiting with the forward anchor down and the two main seats swung around to face aft so the berley and baits are let down into the current flowing away from the stern. With a nice little bimini over you, this would be a very comfortable fishing set-up.

On the subject of anchoring, note too that it has one of those wonderful runabout walk-through windscreens and foredeck arrangements. The crew can walk right up to the anchor locker from inside the boat. There is no safer set-up, nor is there a better way of doing it.

Summary If this is an example of the package we can expect from the combination of Seafarer and OMC in their other new models, then we're in for some wonderful boat/motor combinations, aren't we?

This boat was packaged with the now standard Tinka Classic trailer, with which the buyer gets a full three year warranty. It can be packaged with other trailers, but in that case, the hull warranty is reduced to 12 months. Whilst this might be about as subtle as a train crash, the reality is that Seafarer's hull warranty claims have dropped by nearly 80% since the introduction of a policy that states you must fit the correct, quality Tinka Classic trailer to a Seafarer in order to get the full three year hull warranty.

Criticisms It's very hard to criticise a boat as good as this, and the points we've raised would both be covered in the "optional extra" category if you spoke to the dealer or the factory about them.

But for the record, I think that the time has come now for boats as well built and appointed as this one, to feature fully lined and properly insulated ice boxes somewhere in the structure to keep peoples' drinks cold on hot summer days.

It's not a big ask, and when manufacturers such as Seafarer have stayed so rigidly to the centre trench philosophy, for the life of me I can't see why it's not possible to create a centre trench moulded, green foam insulated ice chest ("One size fits all") that could be used from the Seafarer Voyagers right down to the Vivas.

Similarly, I know it's being picky, but again I can't really understand why



this industry has so much trouble with the concept of helping people get in and out of the water.

I would suggest that most women over the age of 30 and most guys over the age of 40 couldn't get back into this boat if they went swimming from it – and that includes standing on the outboard to clamber onto the swimming platform.

Why do we make it so hard? How

expensive would a single pole stainless steel or moulded GRP ladder be for Lindsay and all the other manufacturers to install on their boats as standard equipment. Surely it would be possible for manufacturers of the calibre of Seafarer, Cruise Craft, Haines Hunter etc to mould a "one size fits all GRP ladder" that would cost two fifths of bugger all to install on every boat? Especially boats like this, which are clearly targeting boating families and cannot get away with the claim that they are, strictly speaking, "fishing boats."

There, I've said it – now I'll get off my soap box!

Conclusion A beautifully built, superbly appointed and wonderfully complete package that we heartily recommend to people coming into the boating world for the first time.

Especially families who've maybe had an older centre-mount speedboat in their younger days, and have got a hankering for some performance boating with their (now) young families.

Definite performance leaning, a huge amount of fun for all involved and a very simple and safe boat to use.

A good size too, because it will just about fit most garages, and at 1.2-1.4 tonnes (depending on fit-out) all up, is very easily towed by any of the modern 4 or 6 cylinder family cars.

Packaged with the Evinrude FICHT 115 hp engine, the Tinka Classic trailer and a heap of options (including a bimini we took off for the pics), this test boat costs \$33,000, but can be acquired with the less spectacular but nevertheless effective standard 115 carby engine for \$30,500

Quite frankly it would go wonderfully well with a 90 hp on it too, so that's also worth exploring – especially for (say) an older couple who just want to use the boat themselves without ever bothering with the 'towing the grandchildren' syndrome.

If it was never going to be used for towing skis or tubes, then 90 hp would be heaps – and the 90 FICHT OMC would be an obvious choice. Packaged that way, the rig comes down to around \$29,950 (FICHT) or \$26,500 (carby).

For further information please call Seafarer Fibreglass Boats on the Gold Coast on (07) 5531 6939

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