



Haines Signature 542 Centre Console

After months of planning and tooling, the Haines Signature 542 Centre Console was finally ready to launch, and we wasted no time climbing onboard this newcomer from the big Haines Signature family of boats. The 540/542 Signatures are the biggest selling boats of their type in Australia, so the arrival of this new centre console model was awaited with great interest.

Design Based on the now well proven 542 hull (the same hull that adventurer Hans Tholstrup steamed all the way to Japan!) its credential have long since been proven in hundreds of applications here in Australia and New Zealand.

As we've noted on these pages before (540 F in F&B #24, and 542 F in F&B #54) this 540/542 series is one of the best deep vee fibreglass hulls in this class of boat. It's soft, dry under normal circumstances, very stable at rest and an absolute delight to handle in rough and tumble offshore conditions.

It's not a boat that you can set the trim and forget about it – it deserves better than that.

A good skipper who understands how to wring the most out of the boat by changing the running angle according to the speed he or she is using, will absolutely adore this 542 hull. It is so beautifully sensitive to fine trim adjustments, I was frequently changing the trim settings to get the most out of this classy hull.

There are very few other boats as good as this on the market in this class, and very few in the sizes up or down, for that matter.

The centre console is very well done, although I think its positioning in the boat needs to be reconsidered.

Set-up as we had it on the test boat, the centre console is quite well aft, leaving a huge foredeck casting platform which actually has provision for a fishing chair.

This is no doubt a deliberate strategy from the Signature family, but it's questionable whether the centre console should be so biased towards the stern, as distinct from the more conventional placement - biased towards the bow.

When you add in the very practical (if bulky) "bum rest" amidships across the cockpit, what you end up with is a driving and helm position which is unusually comfortable for a centre console – at the expense of a lot of vital cockpit space and convenience.

Big Picture In the broader sense, this is a

5.4 m GRP centre console with an excellent inner liner moulding. This runs right through from the stem to the stern in one seamless piece of fibreglass, just like the beautiful little 460SF Haines Signature's tooling.

It is wonderful to look at, work with - and it's very practical. To wash it out, all you do is grab the garden hose and turn up the pressure.

It also has the other very marked advantage that the whole cockpit is truly self bailing so that any heavy duty water that does come onboard, goes out one of the various scuppers placed around the hull.

So in a broad sense, it's a terrific set-up and if you love centre consoles this is definitely a boat to get excited about.

Having said that, I must note that the positioning of the helm and bum rest spoilt the boat a lot for this writer. As I see it, you buy a centre console for just one thing – to go fishing.

It then follows that if you are going to go fishing and spend \$30,000-\$40,000 getting a boat to do just that, then you won't want it all cluttered up with things like the bum rest.

Frankly, I'd take it out and leave it back at home. Yes, it works, and yes, it's a lot better than just standing at the helm – but the loss of space and convenience in the back cockpit (THE critical fishing area) is too big a price to pay for the sake of having something to lean yer bum against!

If you needed a seat to rest your weary body from pulling in all those big reds, I'd chuck the bum rest out and go back to the more traditional system of putting in a big freezer box (across the boat) to sit on instead.

The positioning of this bum rest aside, the design of the 542CC is right up there with some of the best in the world.

This boat has wonderful storage space(s), and self draining kill tanks set ahead of the console, plus an excellent live bait tank set-up, so everything is ready to rock'n roll !

We won't dwell on the construction or the shape of the transom, because we've covered

that extensively already in the previously listed issues. However for readers who haven't read the earlier reports, suffice to say here this is one of the best transom set-ups in the business, with a minimal loss of effective space – and importantly, it is a transom you can easily fish around and over the outboard.

Handing And Ride As noted before, the 542 is one of the best hulls in the business, and the centre console shares that heritage.

But it is a centre console – and that's both good and bad news.

The good news concerns the fabulous amount of fishing space – truly, as a fishing platform, this boat is amazing, simply amazing. It's so stable at rest and there's so much space to fish around the boat, especially forward, that fishos looking for plenty of room to move (especially for fly fishing) will fall in love with this boat at first sight. Everything about the centre console philosophy is carried through beautifully in this boat – but so are the bad things.

Notably, the centre console offers very little protection against the elements. Flying spray, rain, wind or sun . . . when you fish a centre console, you face off with the elements. A good "tee-top" would help, but hey, it's a completely open boat, and no matter who





The standard of tooling on the HS 542 CC is extremely high, with lockers, mouldings and recesses utilising just about every nook and cranny. This is a boat you need to get into, and just sit there for a few minutes to take it all in. Like the smaller HS 460 SF, this is close to the benchmark in GRP fishing boats.

makes it, offshore with a stiff nor'easter, the crew is going to be as wet as a couple of shags on a rock.

We didn't have a bad sort of a day to go outside. It was blowing about 10-15 knots and a little bit choppy – enough to pull you back to about 18-19 knots head-on, and maybe 23-24 running beam-to, which this boat just loves to do. Heading into the wind, the boat is a dinky dye Aussie and “drizabone” to borrow from that very famous range of waterproof bush coats.

Bear away from head-on by 10 or 15 degrees and put the boat on the quarter too fast, in choppy seas, and you'll pull up pretty quickly. The 542 CC is actually a very dry hull, but that doesn't matter a damn if the wind is blowing - and it picks up the spray from the boat working through the seas.

Nevertheless we did venture 'outside' and despite the occasional spray flying into the boat, we still enjoyed the experience.

Criticisms I really question whether a centre console is a better fishing boat in the ocean environment, than a good cuddy. How often do you fish out of the front of a boat when there's only two or three of you onboard?

In *Take Two*, F&B's 1996-97 Project Boat, we discovered that one of the fallacies concerning the centre cab or walkaround arrangement was the amount of times we actually used the foredeck fishing cockpit for fishing. For anchoring, yes, it was fantastic. To come alongside and fend off, yes, fantastic, but fishing? We hardly ever used it with just two of us aboard.

And I suspect it is the same here with the 542 centre console.

Modern cuddies are so well planned, with minimal loss of space around the transom, commonly, full width beams - there's not really the need to fish forward anymore like there used to be.

So for all these reasons, I reckon the disadvantages of the centre console in this case seemed to outweigh the advantages.

Or to put it another way - would the extra fishing space this boat has, offset the increased exposure it suffers for the crew?

This is one of those very personal issues you've just got to sit down and contemplate, before making THE decision.

Luckily, Haines Signature have a choice of models here – with a runabout, the centre console and the hugely popular cuddy configuration all utilising this fabulous 542 variable deadrise deep vee Haines Signature hull.

My vote, still, would be for the cuddy.

What do you think?

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