

Haines Signature Release 'No Frills' 542 Centre Console



As regular readers will acknowledge, the 540/542 Haines Signature series of boats have been well covered through the pages of F&B.

Over the last couple of years we've chronicled the slow and steady change from the original 530 Haines Signature, through to the later 540 models. More recently, the 542 F was our cover feature in issue #54. A month or so ago, we tested the deluxe version of the 542 Centre Console, a model which by virtue of its very sophisticated fibreglass tooling, is probably a boat a couple of years ahead of its time.

Like the award winning 460 SF, the bigger 542 fully moulded centre console is an extraordinary craft, with a standard of tooling unprecedented in Australia.

That said, it's also fairly expensive, and Haines

Signature dealers across Australia said as one, "Well, it's a beautiful boat, that's for sure – but aren't we missing a big opportunity here to develop a 'no-frills' package without the mouldings – just with traditional fibreglass and flowcoat finishes?"

The difference between the deluxe model and this basic model is considerable.

This 542 CC is a much more traditional type of fibreglass boat – strong, plain construction, retaining the first class Signature hull mouldings of course, but with a traditional flowcoat finish on the inside.

Obviously, there is less handwork and laminating involved, the boat is faster to produce, and it is actually lighter (by 103kg) than the fully moulded deluxe model.

From a philosophic point of view it's a fascinating debate, although I suspect

the outcome is almost pre-ordained.

Faced with a choice of identical craft (in their broad dimensions), will fishermen pay \$40,000 for the deluxe model with its sophisticated, easy-care and very practical moulded lining, or would they prefer to pay \$28,000 for the Plain-Jane model?

The hull is identical – and ironically, the Plain-Jane is probably faster and more economical to run, thanks to the hull weight saving.

I don't think there are any prizes for guessing the answer to this question.

From the writer's viewpoint, I've always believed centre consoles are just about the definitive fishing platform. You buy them for one purpose, and one purpose only. That is, to go out and catch fish, seven days a week, rain, hail or shine.

There's a breed of guys

who just love being out on the open sea, in a boat that is open to the elements, with its very low windage, 95% fishing space and the freedom to fish any which way you choose, from any "corner" of the boat.

Centre consoles today are usually aluminium. There are very few fibreglass centre consoles left on the market, and that's a real shame. As the 542 CC confirms, a really good 'glass centre console is a helluva good fishing machine, and when it's in this class of design and construction, it's almost embarrassingly better than an aluminium boat of the same size.

Tragically, not nearly enough people have the opportunity of jumping from a Haines Signature 542 CC into a 5.4 m pressed aluminium centre console on the same day, on the same waterway. But take my

word for it, it's a 'No Contest' situation.

This 542 CC is infinitely softer riding than anybody's pressed aluminium hull and only the very latest, larger and most sophisticated plate aluminium boats from some of the top naval architects are approaching this level of performance, handling and ride. But they're also much more expensive.

Packaged up at around \$28,000 including the 115hp Yamaha 2-stroke, on a sensible Mackay single axle, multi-roller trailer, this rig is exceptional value at around \$27,000-\$29,000 depending on the dealer and the outboard involved.

Across the traps, the 115 Yammy pushed the rig up to an easy 38 knots, and it cruised very comfortably at around 23-24 knots.

Offshore, the 542 has long been one of our favourites. I remind readers this is the same hull that Hans Tholstrup took from Darwin

right through to Osaka in Japan – a journey of some 7,500 kms across the ocean. So I don't think there is going to be much argument about its seaworthiness or capabilities as a coastal fisherman!

Summary: The centre console concept has, for this writer, become a little dated.

I don't think I can ever go back to such an exposed helm position, and I must confess that the totally open configuration of the modern centre console at this size (where you don't have a self draining cockpit or covered deck), does create some concern in areas where bars have to be crossed.

If I lived at Narooma or Ballina, for example, I'd really prefer to run the 542 Cuddy out through the entrance, rather than tackle it in this 'sister' open centre console.

This is not a criticism unique to the Haines

Signature – it applies to just about every mono centre console (in fibreglass or aluminium) I've ever tested under about 6.0 m LOA. Why? Because you have to have a pretty big boat to get the form stability and hull dynamics that allow you to run a legitimate self draining cockpit capable of shedding the sort of water you can cop if you get the timing wrong in the run out through the entrance on a white water bar.

Okay, I'll concede that I'm a bit paranoid about this issue of seaworthiness in small craft, and feel very strongly about the sort of boats you need to cross ocean bars and river entrances.

I also respect the fact that there are some bloody good seamen out there in the recreational fishing world who know exactly what they're doing, and given a boat as good as this, are more than capable of

handling anything that comes their way in the ocean.

But for the average family man, I'm not comfortable with centre consoles of this size in open bar situations – and let's face it, there's plenty of poor entrances, along the eastern seaboard and a couple of beauties over in the west.

So for those waterways, I'd still advocate the 542 Cuddy model over this Centre Console, but for all the other areas where there's a good safe entrance then this is without doubt, one of the best centre consoles in this class built in Australia.

For further inquiries, or the name of your nearest Haines Signature dealer, brochures, etc, please call Greg Haines on (07) 3271 4400 or fax (07) 3271 4054

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