



Haines Signature 650F & Mercury's Optimax 225 hp

Introducing what is quite possibly the most fuel efficient maxi outboard in the world. It features the Optimax DFI fuel injection system originally developed and patented in Australia by WA based Orbital Engineering. After years of research, design, development and testing, the big Optimax is now available at a Mercury/Mariner dealer near you. We tested one of the first Optimax 225's on television personality Andy "Phippsy" Phipps' Haines Signature 650 F, a combination of boat and motor that produced a stunning result.

The Haines Signature 650 F is a curious model. In the ever growing Haines Signature range, it has always been something "of a bridesmaid, but never the bride".

It is one of the first of the genuine variable deadrise hulls the Haines Signature R&D team developed, and it's been in production now for nearly six years. During that time, it has attracted a core of devotees that

wouldn't swap it for quids, because it's still one of the rare 21 footers in Australia with a true self draining cockpit, a fully moulded inner liner and an application to sportfishing like very few other boats on the market today.

It hasn't achieved the publicity or, if the truth be known, quite the sales the factory wanted, but that is largely because of technological

problems stemming from the way the 650 F was made.

This is one of the first boats in Australia ever produced with a completely moulded inner liner - an amazingly intricate, complicated fibreglass liner that runs from the transom right through to the stem (bow). It incorporates a whole host of boxes, lockers, seat bases, berths, bulkheads and side pocket

mouldings - it really is a tribute to the skill and craftsmanship of the Haines Signature R&D shop.

As noted, the 650 F scored one of the first of the true Signature "variable deadrise" hulls ("VDH") and with the wisdom of hindsight, perhaps a little too much attention was paid to getting the hull design (6.5 m LOA x 2.5 m) right, and not enough to how it was going to be powered, trailered or fuelled.

It has catamaran-like levels of stability at rest and underway; it is remarkably soft riding, and very dry, even in heavily chopped up bay and estuary waters. Then, you just put the hammers down, lift this big rig up on top of the water - and go!

Just about the only downside of this whole combination was the fact that it's a fairly heavy boat, with a bare hull weight in excess of 1,000 kgs plus toys. This means it must have fairly big horsepower to realise its potential. . . . thus began a Catch 22 situation that has kept this superb sportfishing boat on the back burner for several years.

Because it needed pretty big horsepower to work properly, the 650 F has to carry a fairly substantial fuel load - or, alternatively, be fitted with a 4-stroke sterndrive . . . or, perhaps twin engines, so the skipper could use just one (smaller) engine for all the trolling this sportsfisherman was designed to do.

Well, that's how, *in theory*, it should have been.

But in a cruel irony, such is the complexity of the 6.3 m long, fibreglass inner liner and its crucial role as an integral part of the 650 F's "chassis", to change the 650 F transom over to allow a sterndrive to be installed, means the factory has to virtually retool *the whole boat*. You guessed it - the deck moulding, the inner liner *and* the hull mouldings all have to be extensively modified to allow a sterndrive to be installed.

A similar problem affected the many requests for twin engines from dealers in the more remote areas of Australia. But once again, the inner liner interfered, and again, developing a twin outboard transom involved a massive retooling project for a relatively small number of boats.

Thus the Catch 22 situation emerged. Here was an extremely sophisticated sportfishing boat that

