

Trailblazing Trailcraft 475

(Are side consoles suited to offshore work?)

Forty nautical mile offshore in a 4.75m tinnie is not everyone's cuppa tea. But for a select few, it's a journey worth undertaking. With some sensational weather, great fishing and sights rarely seen, this was one trip and adventure I wasn't going to miss.

Story and photos by Scott Shepherd

Mission 1 – Take F&B's Trailcraft project boat offshore to test its capabilities.

Mission 2 – Collect data on the new Yamaha F60 to see if it does actually use fuel.

Mission 3 – Get feedback on the onboard electronics and custom fit out.

The Beginning

It was dark and cold, and I was amusing myself watching Peter and Ruth, F&B's intrepid editor and publisher working out how to secure the brand new Craft Cover to their project boat, the mighty Trailcraft Profish 475. We were outside Ruth's Gold Coast house and were finalizing my mission to take this craft up to Gladstone for a number of trips over 2 weeks. There was a final briefing from Peter as I was on my way up to Brisbane. His final words to me were "make sure you take the kids out to the reef".

I was lucky to be given this opportunity to take this very well fitted out tinnie so far away from its home, given that I am not a boat tester, but just a devoted boat owner and responsible skipper (That's what I paid my friends to say to Peter and Ruth - hey, it worked!)



As a family rig, the Trailcraft got the thumbs up from Scott's kids, Kaila (above) and Josh - a young bloke following in his Dad's footsteps as a very keen fisherman.



So with bags packed and a 550k trip ahead, we were looking for a trouble free run to start our adventure. On Thursday night heading north on the Bruce Highway, I checked the boat many times to make sure everything was ok. As the boat was completely covered with one of Phil Baker's Craft Covers, we were confident nothing would be lost out

of the boat. We did not count on the bimini "turtle" unzipping itself on the targa though. So if you find a black, 8-foot long cover north of Gin Gin, please give Pete a ring.

Basing ourselves at Tannum Sands (just south of Gladstone in central Queensland) at my mate Paul Jacklin's place, we were eager to get the boat wet for the first time. We

were there for the Boyne Tannum HookUp, one of Australia's premier fishing events.

My wife Janene and my kids Josh and Kaila were to be my crew for the next few days.

Maiden launch

We launched in Wild Cattle Creek on Friday morning to get the Trailcraft 475 Pro Fish sorted out. My sister Deb and partner John followed in their Horizon 420 as we took off up the creek to find bait. It took a bit of getting used to having a 4.75m tinnie with an attitude of a 6m rig, but a few miles up the creek, and approaching the Colosseum Inlet (a large, wide, deep opening) it all felt just right. We targeted whiting, as their size is better this far north than in the Brisbane area. Josh (8) and Kaila (4) caught their fair share of fish and were happy to release most of them.

For two days I was learning how to use the various electronics, trim tabs, live bait tank, wet kill tank, and all the other tricks this boat was fitted with. The briefing I had from Ruth Cunningham was, "You'll find out soon enough how it all works!"

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The Observer 10th Anniversary Boyne Tannum Hook Up 2005

The crowd were hushed and the mood in the park was of expectation as the 3,000 entrants and their families listened to big Darryl Branthwaite (the voice of the HookUp), Grant Cooper (breakfast DJ at radio 4CC) and Steve Starling (TV personality) call on the major sponsors for the draw of the biggest prize in HookUp history. I was one of the many in with a chance to tow away the new Cruise Craft Outsider 575 valued at close to \$60k. It was Sunday night the 12th of June on the Queens birthday long weekend and it was the culmination of a fun filled, full on, mind blowin' 3 days in tropical paradise at Bray Park, on Boyne Island.

Thinking back 10 years when we all had a bit more hair and a bit less girth, the thought of running a small local fishing competition in arguably Australia's highest boat ownership per house town, was always going to be moderately successful. The fact is, not only is it now a well run and very successful event, it is the largest event of its kind in our fair land.

This year a sustainable level of entries had to be agreed upon to keep the park boundaries from bulging, so 3000 was the final figure. That was reached two and a half weeks before the advertised closing date, and many, many more entries were rejected. So 12 months of planning had come to this - the 3 days of festive frenzy.

Boyne Island and Tannum Sands are laid back coastal townships lying about 10k southeast of Gladstone and about 550k north of Brisbane. The population of 8,000 is largely employed either directly, or indirectly by BSL (the Boyne Smelter), which employs just on 1,200 of them. This is the reason that the HookUp had to be successful, as all those workers had to support such a worthwhile cause.

Every year, the HookUp committee has a beneficiary that they raise money for and during the year, it didn't stop its momentum. Many people and organizations have benefited over the 10 years and this year, they are raising money to upgrade the Bray Park boat ramp with a floating jetty. That is a much-needed investment as anyone who has launched there will attest. A healthy sum of over \$11,000 was raised at auction for two State of Origin jerseys to aid charity as well. This year Bring Dan Home, Chris Trevor Walk of Hope and Relay for Life were 3 local charities to benefit.

All good events have many stories to be told and this event, being associated with fishermen and "fisher-sheilas" had its fair share of "tails" to tell. One of the best was the tale of John Platten and his son Ben, who went fishing in Awoonga Dam, just west of Boyne Island. It goes that young Ben had the runs on the board on Friday (much to the ol' man's disgust), so dad did what dads should do and nicked young Ben's lures. He proceeded to fish that night and caught a Barra at 19.2kg. They both fished on the next two days (after they sorted out their differences) and caught over 20 more Barra, releasing all but "Yo Monster" and duly won the category.

Other fish of interest that were weighed in this year were a 32.8 kg spanish mackerel by Jason Mitchell, a 29.4kg cobia by Ray Wallace and the one that caught my eye was the 540g whiting weighed in by Barry

Counter. That is a huge horse of a summer whiting in anyone's book.

Some of the biggest winners of the weekend were the kids. Lots of rides kept them amused during the day and Greg Klease lit up the sky on the final night with a fire works display that left the 8,000 or so spectators speechless. The HookUp committee is committed to looking after the kids, as that is where the future of these events lie. That is why sponsors like myself, donate prizes to the kids to keep that spark ignited in their minds.

The Gladstone Sport Fishing Club were on hand to conduct the live weigh ins and let me tell you, this is an eye opener. The fish go on display until deemed fit to swim away, so after measuring, weighing, tagging and photographing each fish, every one can watch them swim around until their release. The live grunter caught by Michael Tysoc, which weighed in at 3.9 kg was most impressive.

Congratulations must go to the Gladstone VMR for again providing a service from its volunteers over the whole weekend and assisting those who needed help. Tannum High School Marine Studies class gathered some interesting data, which will be good for the future, as well as keeping the kids involved at school level. Marine Safety, Water Police, DPI, Cap Reef Rescue, Lions and Scouts are also on hand to help out and benefit from the weekend.

Hundreds of boats were launched from far and wide over the many boat ramps from the Narrows in the north to the Town of 1770 in the south in near perfect weather. The expectation of many was to land that elusive prizewinner, whether it be from the beach, boat, jetty or dam.

I had the F&B Trailcraft project boat there as well and talked to many people from all walks of life. I also fished many of the waterways around the Colosseum Inlet with my family. It surprised me how many families were actually out on the water. It shows the "Misses" and "Billy lids" enjoy the day out as much as us blokes.

Everyone who enters the event has a chance of winning, whether you catch a fish or not. All in all, 10 boats were given away over the weekend, the Cruise Craft Outsider 575 and 9 Stacer tinnies with Mercury outboards, 3 Redline BMX bikes, Engel fridges and of course some F&B subscriptions along with many other prizes all with a total value of \$150,000.

Congratulations go to Zac Simmons, Darryl Branthwaite and all the members of the HookUp committee (past and present) for sticking it out over the last 10 years and giving their own personal time to help thousands of other people enjoy themselves. From the many under privileged recipients you guys help out all year and the many thousands of attendees and businesses that have enjoyed the Queens Birthday weekend over the last 10 years, we all thank you for what you have done.

For me, well there is always next year to dream about. Oh, by the way, Peter White (manager of the Gladstone Observer-the major sponsor) along with Danny Nichols (Cruise Craft) and Joe Jacklin (Queensland Coast Boating) who supplied the Outsider 575, picked out Bruce Baker's name to be the luckiest winner in the 10 year history of this, the Observer Boyne Tannum HookUp.

- Scott Shepherd