

Fisherman & Boatowner FIELD TEST

Cruise Craft has unleashed a new challenger for the top spot in the competitive 6.0 m offshore sport fishing class. The new Explorer 600 is a beautifully finished, wonderfully practical fishing boat - and good lookin' to boot. Words & photos by Jeff Webster.



In the 6.0 m fibreglass sport fishing boat market, there are some truly magnificent craft to choose from. In fact, the choice of quality monohull craft has never been larger.

Companies like Signature, Haines Hunter, Seafarer, Streaker, Southwind, and of course Cruise Craft, continue to try and outdo each other with new and exciting fishing models. As a result we have seen some great boats released during the past two or three years. It's an exciting time for big fishing trailerboat buyers - if you've saved the money for one of these gun trailerboats, there's never been a better choice available, or a better time to buy.

At the commencement of this year's boat show circuit at Sanctuary Cove (in May), we can expect to see several more exciting new models - including the first of the big new fishing rigs released, the gorgeous new Explorer 600 from Cruise Craft.

Design: The Explorer 600 has been released to compliment Cruise Craft's Outsider 650. It shares the same hull, but is less glitzy, and marginally cheaper. Where the Outsider is aimed at the family fisherman (who might be just as likely to take the family out cruising as fish the 'Shelf) the Explorer is targeted at the hard core fisho -

someone who wants a big, seaworthy boat with a big cockpit and few frills.

Of course that's not to suggest that the new Explorer is a bare or basic boat. Cruise Craft simply don't make boats that way. By Cruise Craft standards however, the Explorer has relatively few glossy appointments - at least by comparison with the Outsider series.

Instead of cloth fabric covered berths for example, the Explorer uses a patterned vinyl - not that you'd notice upon first glance. The vinyl looks like cloth, but is much tougher, easier to clean and more durable. It's ideal for a sport fishing application.

If you're wondering about the discrepancy regarding the length of the Explorer - as compared with the Outsider - I should note that the hulls are identical. The Explorer has been named for its centreline hull length, rather than the overall length - which is much more accurate to my way of thinking.

As most readers would know, the new Explorer 600 is the largest in a series of cuddy cabin boats which commenced with the 500 model, and later, the 550. The three boats share a similar, contemporary styling, notable for their high, roomy cabin shapes. The design is very practical, and good looking by any measure.

That Cockpit! Upon climbing aboard the new Explorer 600, the most obvious feature is the sheer size of the cockpit. It's huge! I suspect this boat has the largest cockpit in its class. From the transom to the cabin bulkhead, the cockpit is 3.08 m long. The fair dinkum measurement - the length behind the helm chairs to the transom - is 2.1 m by 2.17 m in width.

The significance of the big cockpit is that there is enough length and width to easily mount a central fish box/seat or perhaps a small fishing chair. The ultimate would probably be to have a small chair mounted over a longish fish/storage box.

A glance at the accompanying cockpit photo shows clearly how well the Explorer is designed for fishing. Check the full length, above floor side pockets, the high freeboard (715 mm minimum) all the way around the cockpit, the compact engine well, the wonderfully wide side coamings (185 mm minimum), recessed grab rails and stern cleats, and the "must have" optional padded side and rear bolsters.

What you can't see from the main cockpit shot is the "40 kg tuna sized" underfloor fish box, or the live bait tanks recessed into each of the transom corners (yes, there's two of them). Nor, for that matter, can you see the scuppers for the self cockpit, the standard bilge under the transom, or the above floor battery and oil tank platforms.

Fair dinkum, the Explorer is wonderfully set up for sport fishing - even in standard form.

A few features on the option box you will want to tick, however, includes the big cutting board over the well, the live bait tank pump and plumbing, the rocket launcher rack with bimini top, front and side clears, and maybe the deck wash.

Other optional features on the test boat include the rear split, fold down (and removable) bench seat (a must for families), electronics, and the cockpit carpet. Just about everything else is standard - like the EPIRB and fire extinguisher recesses, rear boarding



Cruise Craft 600

Explorer Cuddy