



Introducing one of the most important trailer boats of the year, from one of Australia's best-known and oldest boat building families. For Nichols Bros, the boating public's reaction to their new Outsider 685 will largely determine the direction they take in the future. The 6.0-7.0 m market is intensely competitive, but with this very special craft, Nichols Bros believe they can beat back all comers - especially those in plate aluminium.

Cruise Craft Outsider 685

It's ironic really, that Nichols Bros no longer see the boats produced by Haines Signature, Seafarer, Allison (etc) let alone the cats from the likes of Noosacat, Kevlacat and Dominator, as their competition.

Indeed, the fibreglass manufacturers are starting to learn that they have in each other, allies they'll need if they're all going to ward off competition from the aluminium sector in the future.

Fibreglass boat builders have done themselves no favour by assuming the boating public share their deeply held conviction that fibreglass is a markedly superior boat building material than aluminium, be it pressed or plate.

Be that as it may, for thousands of Australian families, the choice is not necessarily between fibreglass or aluminium; more often than not, it is determined by what is standing on the dealer's show room floor when they walk into the showroom to buy a boat. If there are no fibreglass boats on the floor when the first time buyers walk in, and

there are half a dozen shiny new aluminium boats, they can hardly be blamed for dropping fibreglass off their shopping list.

For manufacturers such as Cruise Craft, this situation is becoming a matter of no small concern. Year by year, the smaller models are dropped from GRP boat builders ranges, and the "most popular model" median moves up the rung one more notch.

Today, Cruise Craft's most popular models are in the 5.0-5.5 m range, and usually start around \$30,000 - and so it is with Haines Signature (their 520-540 series) Seafarer (5.5 m Viking and 5.0 m V-Sea). All of these top fibreglass boat builders are being forced to quit the entry-level section of the market as aluminium wins the day.

I was giving this a great deal of thought as we drove up to Hemmant to see the Nichols Bros recently, pondering how we can best explain what makes this big Cruise Craft so special, and why it is such a world class

piece of equipment.

The writer has always had a soft spot for Cruise Craft. One of the first boats I ever tested professionally (back in the early 1970's), was a Cruise Craft Reef Ranger, a boat which continued in production for many, many years as a benchmark 18 footer for a whole range of Australian boats from dozens of different manufacturers.

For more than 50 years, Cruise Craft has enjoyed a reputation as a quality boat builder. Their boats are invariably conservative, with an emphasis on good construction, a beautiful finish - and the continuation of many traditional boat building standards.

It's a tradition that continues today. To really appreciate this Outsider 685, I urge readers to do much more than take a cursory look at the photographs or walk past it at the Boat Shows. To really appreciate this boat, get down on your knees and look up under the gunwales, down into the underfloor hatches, and stick your head into the cupboards and

