

# F&B's Small Craft Section



*We test the seriously impressive polyethylene*

## PolyCraft 455 Centre Console

**The concept for building polyethylene (commonly known as “plastic”) is hardly new, with so-called plastic boats being manufactured all the way back into the 1970’s with some commercial success, too. Although they were finally put away by the overwhelming popularity of the ubiquitous tinnie, plastic boats nevertheless staked their claim as a proposition for some time in the future. As Editor Peter Webster rediscovered, it could well be that the time for ‘plastic’ boats has arrived.**

**A**s most people are aware, there are now several manufacturers in Australia pushing these so-called “plastic” boats, and several major overseas suppliers in the market too.

It seems that just about everybody is talking about plastic boats, and not without good reason.

Let’s face it, the cost of going boating is not getting any cheaper, and the total cost of setting up a 4.5m tinnie (for example) complete with outboard, trailer, all the fittings required, safety equipment (etc) leaves very little change from \$20K.

With pressures building on the price structure, it was probably not that surprising that the industry starting casting around for alternative sources of supply of cheaper, practical, knock-around family boats.

There’s probably no more sensitive person on earth to “coalface economics” than an Australian boat dealer, so when the first of the plastic boats started appearing on the scene, a lot of them pricked up their ears and paid very close attention to these low cost,

alternative boats.

As you can see in the accompanying photos, the boat we’ve chosen to test for this inaugural plastic boat report is the 4.55m (15’6”) centre console by Polycraft in a bright, cheerful rescue yellow. This is an admirable design for presentation to the public because it’s targeting the most vulnerable and cost sensitive audience of them all – the very young families, or alternatively, the older, retiring families who have to work out their boating in conjunction with their pension or retirement income.

As it happens, the raw cost of this 4.55m centre console, hull only, without frills, is only \$4,000 (approximately) and that’s a very inexpensive boat by today’s aluminium boat standards.

The cost of the outboard of course, is the same no matter what the hull material or for that matter, how it is fitted out. However, the fact remains, that you and I can go down to our local dealer and buy a very smart 4.55m centre console packaged up on a trailer on the water with bimini and a 2-stroke 50hp outboard, for as little as \$14K – and that’s very competitive,



isn’t it? Better still, customers can also choose from a runabout model, a baby bow rider, a cuddy, a tiller steer open boat – and a side console model!

Again, it was no surprise to have readers calling us from all over Australia seeking F&B’s appraisal and opinion on the growing range of plastic boats, but we elected to hold off a little until the market stabilised and some clear leaders in the marketplace emerged.

Polycraft, one of the pioneer builders from Bundaberg in central Qld, has now emerged as one of the leaders in the plastic boat brigade, with a range of seven models up to this 4.55m centre console and are only a few months off introducing a 5.9m x 2.5 m beam model.

It’s all part of a matrix of economics and commonsense that is surely pointing the way to a very interesting future for these plastic or polyethylene craft.

### Design

In simple terms, as you can see, it is a centre console with a nicely moulded shape built into the console itself, a curvaceous inner liner with moulded seats in a sort of casting platform position upfront, with two moulded quarter seats off the transom.

The hull itself is surprisingly conventional, and it’s not a bad shape, either. By definition,

it’s a curved chine hull with a very moderate deadrise at the transom combining a nicely shaped forefoot with a curved run aft flattening off at the transom for stability – which it has at impressive levels. It might be a smallish boat in the overall scheme of things, but it is pleasingly stable, and feels very good underfoot with just two or three people onboard or working on your own.

The roto-moulding system allows them to build in major ‘hollows’ such as the anchor locker, but one of the things you do notice is the absence of the usual side pockets common to both fibreglass and aluminium boats.

Thinking about it, there’s actually no reason I suppose why they couldn’t mould separate side shelves that were of a modular kind that could be affixed to the different models, but I suspect they’re very budget conscious at this stage, and are working very hard to keep these boats right down on the bottom of the economic scale - at the risk of losing out on a few fittings here and there.

### Construction And Finish

In looking at the design of the Polycraft, it’s impossible not to take onboard the construction and finish as well because all three are inexorably entwined. It’s different to conventional boats from the aluminium or

fibreglass builders because here, everything is moulded into the one single unit, and that spits out a product that contains the design, the construction and the finish as it emerges from the mould.

In that context, I still reckon it’s not too bad at all – surprisingly good in fact, in some ways.

It still has a plastic look about the way they’ve rolled the coamings and the gunwale sections, but apart from the inside looking a bit like a bath tub in some sections, the reality is that it works very well and is incredibly strong.

These boats are just about indestructible and always amuse if not shock the passers-by at boat shows by the sales people invariably offering the passing parade a sledge hammer with which they can attack the boat, with a view to smashing it to bits! Of course, you can’t do it and the sledgehammer literally bounces off the side of the hull – a technique that is certainly not recommended further down the aisles at the Quintrex, Ally Craft or Savage camps!

Already, the polyethylene boats have earned an extraordinary reputation for rugged durability, and there is no reason to suggest these boats won’t be around whilst all of us are pushing up daisies.

However, unlike fibreglass boats, it’s relatively easy to recycle polyethylene, so the