

# F&B's Small Craft Section



## Mark Ward's 410 PolyCraft - Charter Boat!



**Gold Coast fishing guide and tournament angler, Mark Ward, makes the transition from alloy to polyethylene hull and writes about the switch and the fit out. As he discovered, it's not easy when they're full of foam . . .**

**T**he first time that I ever saw a soft plastic lure hanging from the wall of my local tackle store, I shook my head and wondered who would ever use such a thing for catching fish.

Twenty years ago I could never imagine that I would be shopping over the internet for the latest soft plastics to come out of the United States and fishing them on thousand dollar carbon-fiber and graphite rods with fused nylon fishing line that was as thin as hair. Such is the development of these new products that it is now impossible to imagine life without these necessities.

Past experience has opened my mind to new products that come out

on the market and when faced with the possibility of buying a plastic hull, I had to take the boat on its merits. What I was looking for was a tournament style V-nose punt that could give me a platform for fishing pro bream and bass tournaments as well as a boat that I could get built to survey standards and use in my job as a fishing guide.

When Bunderberg based Polycraft Industries released a 4.1 metre tournament style V-nosed punt I was immediately interested. A good friend of mine had water tested an earlier model Polycraft and was very impressed with the ride that it gave as well as the price tag. Fishing the tournament circuit gave me the

opportunity to see that a well known angler and fishing guide was already using a 4.1 Challenger in a side console configuration and he was rapped in the boat.

After a lot of consideration, Xtream Marine in Brisbane had my deposit and I was about to take delivery of my first piece of fishing hard plastic.

The order was for an open, tiller steer version, which will maximize the available fishing area. I needed a colour that would stand out and the boys from Polycraft offered to mix the colour in the mold to give me a yellow bow that would fade to green towards the stern.

The boat had to be made to survey standards, which meant that the hull

had to be filled with foam. This meant that the fit out was going to be difficult so the boys at Polycraft had to lay some of the plumbing before the foam went into the hull. Adrian Ward oversees operations at the Bunderberg factory and the fact that he is a tournament angler himself and has fitted his own 4.1 Challenger out was reassuring considering that

Chris Metcalf. Chris is very experienced at fitting out tournament boats and the fact that he is also a builder came in very handy to say the least.

The boat is to be used in catch and release tournaments that require the boat owner to keep up to ten fish in a live well to be weighed at the end of the day before being released.

having to drop the bung at the bottom of the well. The overflow pipe runs into a neat through-hull fitting on the transom.

A four-switch panel was fitted just below the driver's seat so that all can be operated while up and running. This gives me the added benefit of separate fuses for the electrics. We did have a small incident during the



**Left:** Couran Cove Island Resort's fishing guide, Mark Ward, putting the new Polycraft to the test. **Right:** The carpeted area of the casting platform is the extension, giving the anglers a lot more room to work. The foot controlled electric motor and the sounder mounted on the bow is Mark's idea of an office. **Right Below:** Three batteries power a 24 and a 12-volt system. The batteries look like they just sit there but they are tightly wedged into a well-designed base that keeps them secure in the roughest conditions. **Left:** The four-switch panel is conveniently located but can also be easily bumped.



once it was laid and foamed, I was going to have to live with it.

### The fit out

The Challenger finally arrived and all vehicles were banned from the garage during the fit out and the boat was stripped. The false floor was removed, seats, casting deck, and anything else that was removable was taken out of the boat and the fit out began.

The boat was built with two seats at the rear for both driver and passenger so there had to be some weight towards the bow to allow for the load on the rear seats.

In the standard Challenger, there is a lot of storage room under the back seats but in my vessel, this was filled with foam, waterproofed and screwed shut. To bring some of the weight towards the bow and to add some much needed storage space, a 600mm extension of the casting platform was erected with the help of

The Challenger is fitted with two 90-litre storage areas under the casting platform and the port side was chosen to be plumbed up for the live well. This was where having Polycraft fit the pipes for the plumbing before the foam was laid proved to be a huge help.

One of the three bungholes in the stern was used to fit a bait pump that would pump water from the rear of the boat and into the live well. Another bung was fitted to the bottom of the live well and this was piped so that when the bung was opened, the water in the live well would drain and run into the false floor before finally draining into the engine well. To drain the engine well of all this water, a 360gph bilge was fitted which pumps the water straight out the side of the hull.

The final touch on the live well was an overflow pipe that was laid in the factory, which allows the live well to be filled with fresh seawater without

Gold Coast Flattie Classic, which may cause me to rethink the location of the switches next time. There was no need for the live well during this comp so we were using it to store our lunch, cameras and drinks when my brother accidentally bumped the switch and started filling the live well with fresh seawater. Fortunately, I realized what that strange buzzing sound was before too much damage occurred but it could have been ugly.

The foam in the hull created a few problems when it came to fitting lights. Being a dedicated lure angler, I don't fish at night very often but I didn't want to be restricted to daylight hours. It was decided that a battery operated port and starboard light was bought for the bow and an all round white stern light was wired up to the boat batteries and mounted to the gunwale. This allows me to be anchored up for hours under an all round white light and be under disposable battery power for the

## Mark Ward's 4.10m Polycraft Charter Boat



**Above:** The cockpit provides swivel chairs and everything well within reach of the driver. **Below:** By extending the casting platform, the batteries and fuel has somewhere to live.



short time that the boat is underway. Wiring up a port and starboard light towards the front of the boat would have been almost impossible without running external wires due to the foam in the hull. A foamless hull would have had me wiring nav lights to the boat's batteries in a flash.

To wire up the stern light, a hollow aluminum pole was used to dig a channel through the hard-set foam and the wire was passed through the channel and wired up to the switchboard.

The boat required two large, deep-cycle batteries to be wired together

for a 24-volt electric trolling motor along with a smaller battery for the 12-volt light, sounder and pumps. Holders for the batteries were made in the casting platform extension that placed the weight of the batteries mid-ship to help counter the weight of the anglers at the rear of the boat.

All wiring was passed through the false floor and into the casting platform and to the batteries. The wiring for the bow mounted electric motor was passed through some piping that was laid by Polycraft and this has managed to keep all the wiring neat and under the floor.

A 24-volt saltwater series Motor Guide was selected for the bow of the Challenger. This allows 82 pounds of thrust as well as the long life of a 24-volt system. The two large 130 amp hour batteries could have been set up to allow for a 24 volt and a 12 volt system but to avoid any disturbance to the sounder when the electric motor is in use, a completely separate battery for the 12 volt system was decided on. More weight but a clear sounder reading was of more importance.

Anderson plugs were used to connect the foot control to the electric motor as well as another set to connect the batteries to the motor. This allows me to unplug the batteries for charging and also unplug the motor and simply remove it from the bow mount for security reasons. To save me from damaging my expensive electric motor, a 50-amp circuit breaker was also fitted.

The sounder was mounted on the bow, in front of the casting platform. This allows me to silently steer the boat with my foot while watching the sounder. The sounder is also easy to read from the stern and the head of the sounder is mounted on a bracket that allows it to swivel and pivot in all directions.

The sounder decided upon was one of the new Humminbird Matrix Fishing Systems. The narrow screen, dual beam 15X Matrix was fitted allowing me to operate either a 60 degree beam or a detailed 20 degree beam. The wide 60 degree beam will give me twice the depth in bottom reading for locating reef, thermoclines and holes while the definition of the narrow beam can show me bait schools, fish schools as well as fish sitting hard on the bottom. The Matrix is also GPS ready and capable of reading barometric pressure, gives a barometer reading history and also gives an accurate reading of the water temperature. All of these functions are enormous resources for the serious angler.

On the business end of the Challenger, Gold Coast Boatarama fitted a small 30hp 3 cylinder Yamaha 2 stroke. The engine has proven to be ideal for one or two people but when an extra passenger is invited on board, the boat is very slow out of the hole and could really do with the

extra power of a 40hp. Having said that, I must say that I am very happy with the little Yamaha and the shallow water drive along with the easy starting has made getting to all those little tucked away places a breeze.

To finish the fit out, rod racks were installed, the platform extension and lower deck was carpeted, an anchor and safety gear fitted and the all-important measuring ruler was placed just below the gunwale and starting from the beginning of the casting platform. This allows me to sit a fish on the edge of the casting platform and obtain an accurate measurement.

The fuel tank had to be out of the way and space for that was built into the casting platform. The fuel line was extended and placed under the false floor and into the tank. The priming bulb sits in the engine well and keeps everything neat as well as handy.

### Time to fish

The boat hit the water just in time for the Gold Coast Flattie Classic. Three days on the water in 15-knot winds and a good 45-minute dash to the fishing grounds each morning helped to run in the new motor and put the new fishing platform to the test. A few teething problems were weeded out but the boat performed superbly.

The ride of the Polycraft is exceptional compared to aluminum boats. Stepping from a 4.2 metre open aluminum boat with a 40hp, the ride is a pleasant addition for some bones that are starting to age due to too many years in small tinnies.

The entire fit out came in at around the 16 thousand dollar mark. Included in the price was a quality custom trailer, Motor Guide bow mounted electric motor, 30hp Yamaha, hull built to survey standards with a certificate of positive floatation, electronics, plumbed live well, safety gear, seats, extended casting platform, batteries, carpet and on-water costing for 2E survey.

### Poly vs. Alloy?

To compare a Polyethylene hull to an aluminum hull is a matter of weighting up the pros and cons. Aluminum has been producing great boats for many years and in the world



**Above:** The engine well is very busy with a bilge, bait pump, fuel line primer and the transducer cable running through. The live well drains into the engine well and is pumped out the side of the hull by the bilge. **Below:** A very important devise for the modern tournament angler, the live well. The Polycraft comes with two 90 litre under floor storage bins that convert easily to a live well.



of tournament fishing in calm water, the Hornets and Edge Trackers dominate. To place a plastic hull amongst a field of tin certainly raises a few eyebrows but it also poses a question that anyone thinking about buying a poly boat must ask themselves. If tin was the new guy on the block and plastic was the norm, would the advantages of aluminum make you sell your Polycraft and race out to buy a metal boat? If you are not too sure on the answer to that question, you better have another look at some hard plastic.

**F&B**