

F&B's Small Craft Section

Here's One Sharp Fishin' Boat: Quintrex 3.75 Dart



It's been quite a while since F&B tested a small boat in the sense of an open two or three thwart tinnie, so when Quintrex suggested we look at the new 375 Dart they had just assembled for their 2003 Catalogue photo shoot, we jumped at the chance. Fitted with a 15hp Mercury outboard, the Dart represents a true, middle ground, all round 'dinghy shape' hull that you can use for just about anything.

We were particularly interested in going back to the dinghy shape

because we've spent so much time with vee-bowed punts of late. As a result, it's all too easy to lose track of how differently these various shapes perform on the water. And it took all of 10 or 15 seconds for the writer to get it all back into focus, let me tell you.

With a 15hp Merc on the back, the little Dart and I could safely fly along at around 20 knots flat out, and cruise all day for 15 knots.

Okay, plenty of boats will do that, but what makes the dinghy shape (ie, the hull shape with a 'pointy' bow, a

genuine forefoot and a hull bottom designed to part the water) so much better than a punt, became evident in the first 10 feet off the ramp.

First up, the dinghy hull shape does actually part the water as distinct from push it aside. If you look at most vee bowed punts or the classic punt shape, they're invariably pushing the water forward – partly because they are so bluff in the bow because of the buoyancy they need to allow anglers to stand right up in the bow of the boat.

That's the good news – yes, the anglers can stand up in the front of the boat, BUT the end result is that the boat has to extend under the angler, and swing upwards very sharply to keep the boat a nice tight package. Well, obviously it's hard to put a

dinghy shape into a vee bowed punt format – especially if the whole package has to be kept at around 3.75m.

Not surprisingly, the Dart has a much softer, and considerably drier ride than any vee bowed punt of this length.

The difference is not subtle – it's like a train crash. And we had sufficient breeze on the day building up a big enough chop in Runaway Bay, to show the difference, that's for sure.

The little Dart is a nice boat. At 3.7m LOA, it's just big enough to go out in

the bay and deal with any crappy weather that comes along during the fishing session. No one goes out in the bay when it's too rough to fish, so what you mainly have to deal with is the weather changing mid-way through the fishing session. In that context, the Dart is a very safe, practical small boat.

It's nicely balanced with two up, and although the ride on the forward thwart (seat) is pretty bumpy in the rough stuff, the boat trims very nicely, stays dry and will easily handle choppy bay and big river conditions.

On your own, because there are only the two thwarts in the standard model (the middle or third lift-out thwart is an option), a lone fisho will need to ensure some weight is kept well forward to handle the rough stuff, especially if really strong wind is involved.

Then, it's best to put things like the fuel tank right forward, ahead of the front thwart (having previously made sure the tub-lead is long enough to do this), along with the tackle box, anchor, etc, because a bit of forward weight helps these smaller craft deal with wave surge and wind lift. With all the weight aft, it can be very hard keeping the bow down to enable the boat to handle properly.

The 15hp Mercury was a terrific match – it flew. The Mercury itself needed a throttle adjustment and its first service, but once we got away from idle and the tendency to cut out

when the skipper accelerated, it ran very smoothly and had heaps of grunt.

All in all, I was impressed with the Dart. It was good to touch base with a 'proper' boat shape again as distinct from one of their vee bowed punts. A little bit further down the track we're actually going to have a double test with a couple of Quintrex boats, where we'll do the actual comparison between the different types of hull shapes.

Until then though, make no mistake – the dinghy format is softer riding, and much drier. I believe it's more seaworthy too, especially in choppy not to say rough water.

Unless you have a particular interest in standing up in the bow of a small boat casting for hours on end, then I think the Dart philosophy results in a much more useful, practical and safer boat for most situations.

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You can have a lift-out centre thwart (seat) if you want it - a flat floor, too. Check out the glovebox let into the the seat - not a bad idea, and very handy for the car keys, wallet and the bat phone. Ruth reckoned the 15 was just about perfect.

