



Horizon 3.0m Creek Fisherman

They reckon that good things come in small parcels, and whoever coined the phrase must have been looking at F&B's creek fishing boat when they said it. The third boat in a series built for F&B by Bob James' Horizon team, this boat provides hard evidence that you don't need to spend very much at all to get a red hot l'il fishin' platform. . .

As most readers are aware, the little 3.0 m Horizon was developed as the focal point of the Genesis "mothership" program.

This boat is what the project was all about - putting a sophisticated, high tech fishing platform into a remote river or creek to fish and explore truly virgin waters in the top end of Australia. Or the bottom end. Gippsland, the Hawkesbury, the Myall . . . wherever a small fishing boat was better than a big one, and specifically, whenever lure fishing is the main focus

of the fishing activity.

Why? Because the boat (size) that you need to live on for a 7-10 day break, is invariably far too big to take up rivers and creeks where the really good fishing spots await a carefully placed lure, snuck in under the fish's guard 'cause the angler approached using a noiseless electric outboard.

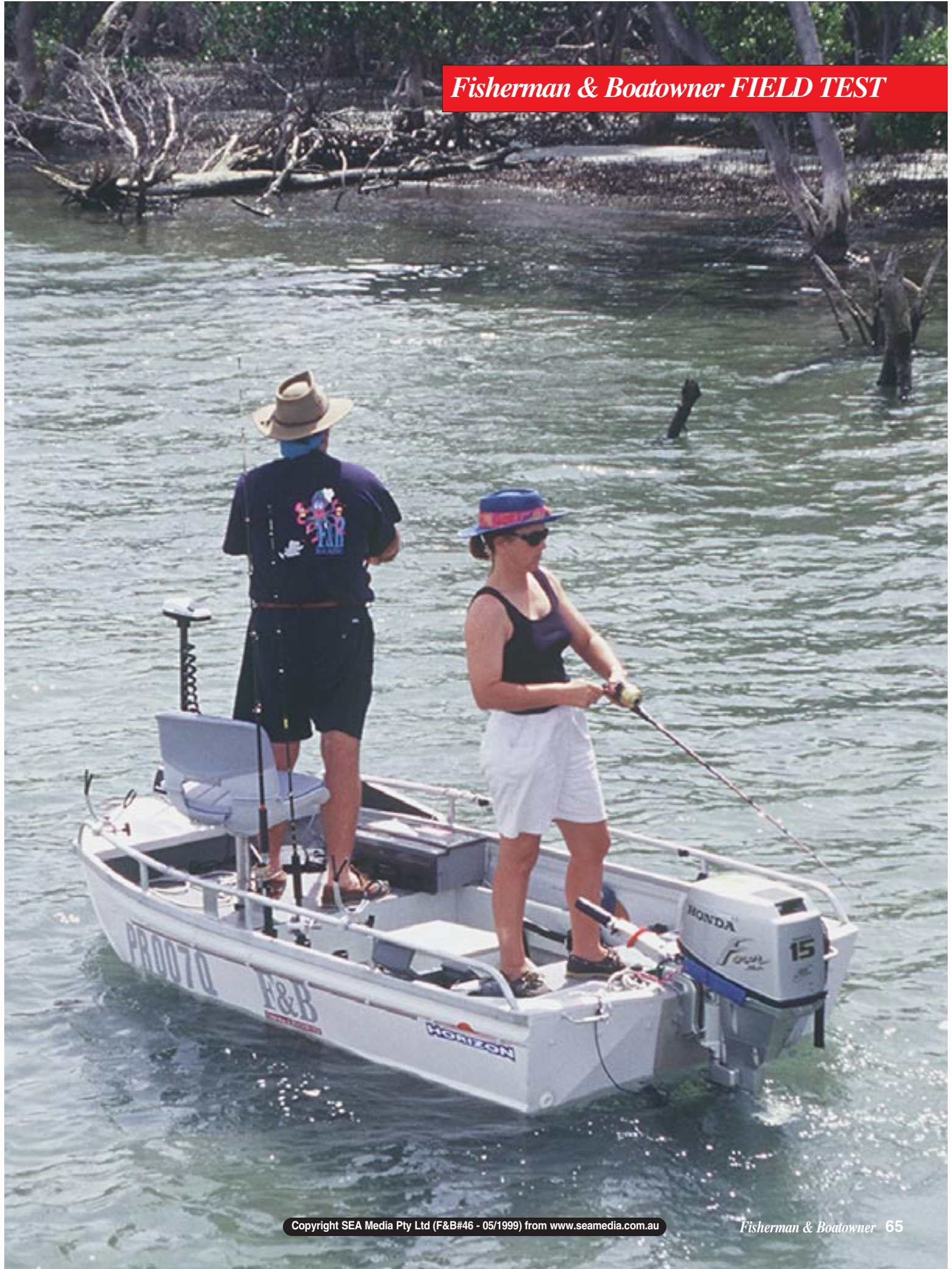
Hence F&B's interest in developing a 'mothership' approach where the big boat carries in the little fishin' boat as far as it can, before the little boat is launched and (then) goes on ahead, up

into the really interesting fishing country.

The concept of a fishing dory is centuries old. New here is the application of modern boat building materials - or specifically, aluminium, and being able to equip the boat with modern outboards and electronics.

The upshot is a remarkably efficient, 3.0 m (!!) fishing platform that can take two people across estuaries, rivers and dams with complete safety, and operate with an electric motor in stealth fishing mode for stretches of up

Fisherman & Boatowner FIELD TEST



to seven or eight hours at a time before the battery needs to be recharged - let alone refuelling the 4-stroke Honda.

We've actually not worked out the range of the Honda yet, but it is considerable. During our recent (inaugural) fishing run to the Creeks of Missionary Bay, with fishing sessions both morning and evening, over primary distances of 5-10 miles there and back before dropping the electric motor and switching over to stealth power, we'd been there for three days before it occurred to us to check whether the Honda needed refuelling!

We'd both become so accustomed to seeing the needle hovering around three quarters full (where it started) that we were almost lulled into a false sense of security before discovering on Day Four that we'd in fact used more than half the 15 litre tub.

Design: The little Horizon was designed with a very specific length in mind - it could be not one millimetre longer than the 3.0 m we had clear on Genesis' hardtop. As well, we aimed to restrict the weight of an empty boat to around 70 kg.

Now, understand the challenge from Bob James' point of view. He had to create a fishing platform for two adults (one of whom, let me say, is fairly large!) that would be safe, stable, easily driven, unsinkable and weigh less than 70 kilos so it could be put on top of the roof of another boat.

But Bob likes these sorts of challenges, and once again he and his team rose to the occasion with a cut down, adapted, pushed and shoved version of one of their regular vee bowed punts that provided an unusually wide 1.6 m beam with a relatively shallow body section or structure (500 mm from the external keel to the gunwale rail) and with extra wide 300 mm seats to pack in the foam necessary to keep the whole lot afloat should the boat be swamped and the crew anxious to stay onboard in case the 'gators get 'em!

Topsides and the bottom were both made with 1.6 mm sheet on the boat. Six ribs were then pressed into position, and the structure 'locked' up with two thwarts and the forward

bulkhead frame, shelf and foredeck.

Thus the 3.0 m Horizon was born. The Horizon guys did a fantastic job to build us a little boat that redefines what you can do with small craft in Australia.

Design features of note include the centre live bait tank with a cutting board lid and a manual pumping arrangement, the forward casting platform with offset chair (from Russ Hare) on a 360 degree swivel, side pockets, a covered shelf under the foredeck to keep the cameras dry in tropical rain, side rails and a specially reinforced battery compartment under the casting platform.

So to summarise, in 3.0 m LOA we have:

- Comfortable seating for two
- Casting platform
- Electric motor and 80 amp battery
- Provision for a 15 hp outboard
- Petrol tank shelf
- Battery shelf
- Side rails
- Covered foredeck
- Foredeck shelf
- Carpeted casting platform
- Deck hardware (two cleats and a bollard)
- Minn Kota electric outboard bracket
- Depth sounder bracket
- Transducer bracket

Performance: With a 15 hp outboard on the back and a full load consisting on the writer, (105 kg) Ruth (65 kg) camera gear (15-20 kg) fishing tackle (5 kg) the Century battery (27.5 kg) 15 litres of fuel, bait and the livebait tank full (30 L) the 15 hp Honda kicks the whole lot on at an easy 14-15 knots depending on the tide movement, and as you strip more weight away from the list, the speed obviously increases. In a dry ship situation with just moi at the helm, it does something in excess of 20 knots. It flies - so much so, that the 15 hp is obviously excessive at this point.

However, it's never used in a 'dry' ship state, so the speed then is really academic.

This is a tremendous load for a boat with a waterline of about 2.9 metres and it is a credit to both Bob's hull design and the power of the Honda 15 that it handles it all so well.

The 15 hp outboard in fact is just about perfect. It feels good, and the boat doesn't want for more horsepower. It has plenty of "zap" and

importantly, has the power to handle quite choppy conditions in the bay or dam.

Obviously, as the wind gets up and the waves increase, it's as wet as a shag on a rock - with water coming straight back over the boat in clouds if it's driven too hard, or it's out of balance, or the helmsman is just driving it straight into the slop.

We've discovered that putting my weight back on the livebait tank (using the cushion off the Russ Hare seat) we can achieve a measure of comfort, speed and dry performance even in two foot chop - because the boat has the power to keep the bow up, and push the wave break pattern about three quarters along the topsides.

This virtually eliminates spray - if you can keep the boat running head on into the waves. Obviously, if the boat is forced (by the course travelled) to run three quarters into a sea with 20-25 knots of breeze pushing up the spray, then you might as well give up and wear your swimmers and face mask, because you're going to get that wet, it isn't funny.

But hang on, this is not a boat designed to be used in water with a wave height of 600-1000 mm, is it? We used it in these conditions as much to find out where its limits lay, as anything else. And apart from the three quarter forward angle, it was surprising that with judicious use of the throttle, and a bit of skilful steering, you could pick your way through surprisingly heavy water with ease. The issue was never one of safety or seamanship - it was always simply about keeping the spray down for such a low freeboarded boat with such a bluff bow shape.

Of course, back in the creeks and rivers, and coming across calm water it's as dry as a bone - and for 90% of our activities, that's how it remained.

Base Stability: But if the overall performance and handling was impressive, the stability of the boat is simply amazing. We can both stand and fish (the preferred position for casting for long periods of time) and move around the boat quite easily and naturally without having that sort of "gosh, I shouldn't move like that again!" feeling.

After the first hour or so of using the boat, we stopped thinking about the whole issue and frankly, have never thought about it again - at 105 kg, I

can walk right up onto the bow or casting platform, stand there, cast, turn around, walk over to the other side of the boat, stand on the livebait tank, change lures, walk back again, and at no stage does the boat feel unsteady or tippy. Even with both of us over on one side gaffing, netting or photographing a fish, we still don't think about the stability - truly, it is a remarkably stable little boat.

The Electric Motor: The Minn Kota 42 lb thrust outboard with its new "autopilot" system is a real boon for fishermen. We'll be doing a more comprehensive evaluation of this Minn Kota system soon, when we develop some more data concerning battery drainage and recharging. But suffice to say here, we're thrilled with the Minn Kota and its autopilot, although yours truly did very well to position the long, skinny Minn Kota leg so that it folds right back into the middle of the cockpit. *Good one, that!* The bracket position is (now) being changed so that the Minn Kota folds down the starboard side.

Ace Hinchinbrook fishermen, Terrick Hamilton and Dominic Zaghini (*Heather, they paid me to write that, fair dinkum!* - PW) showed us a few tips on using the autopilot when we first arrived in the area, and we gratefully accepted their advice.

Having the Minn Kota with the autopilot option is really the same as having a third pair of hands on the boat.

Essentially, you point the boat where you want to go, click on the autopilot and the electric motor continually adjusts itself to the compass course thus chosen. Sure, it's not a true autopilot in the strictest sense of the word, but it is definitely a course correcting, ever changing pilot system based on a compass heading or bearing.

In quiet waters, it will steer unerringly for miles in a dead straight compass course, and it is only really put off when it runs into tidal streams or the creek current is simply too strong for it to overcome.

When this happens, you just lean down, click off the autopilot switch momentarily, reset the course and click it back on again. With practice, you get to do this really well with your big toe, and if you're really good at it, you end up doing it on "automatic" yourself.

We watched Dominic Zaghini use his MK Autopilot in and out of the snags around Creek 8 and Missionary when we were photographing the crew working their lure sets into the mangroves, and observed how he'd become so used to it, it was almost like second nature.

Solar Charging: One of our original targets was to create an environment where the electric motor could be charged by the solar panels on Genesis - and to our delight, this is how it proved to be.

Coming back of a morning around eleven o'clock, when the heat became too oppressive in the Creeks and the fishing went off, we put the little boat alongside the big boat, leaned over with the power cable from the solar cells, and snap-locked the power clips together, so the little boat's Century battery (running the Minn Kota), was being directly charged off the big Solarex solar panels on the hardtop roof on Genesis.

After three to four hours of charging like this (with 6-8 amps coming in from the solar panels) to our delight we found that we were almost keeping up with the battery usage for the morning and afternoon sessions.

Obviously, when we came back at night we couldn't use the solar panels (then) to charge up the battery. Instead, we planned to switch battery # 3 with battery #4 which had been topped up during the day whilst we were away fishing.

But as it worked out, we never had to use battery #4 at all - because we found that although we were slowly losing power (in a total sense), for the four days we were fishing mornings and afternoons, the solar panels actually kept the battery sufficiently charged for the next session.

As you can imagine, we were pretty happy with this set-up - but it's partly due to the fact that because the Horizon is so small, we were able to run for hours with the Minn Kota on a setting of 4 or 5 out of 10, so that the power consumption was kept down to minimum.

If you had a big rig like Dominic's 5.0 m Cairns Custom Craft with four anglers onboard, then the power usage would be considerably higher.

Nevertheless, we had achieved what we set out to do - we were able to recharge the Minn Kota's electric outboard with the Solarex solar panels.

Conclusion: The little Horizon 3.0 metre Creek fishing boat has proven to be a huge success. It's not just a success as far as the Genesis Project is concerned either - it's a success in many other ways, too.

It breaks down that furphy that you have to have a big capital investment to enjoy sophisticated sportfishing. Or that you have to outlay thousands and thousand of dollars to get into serious sportfishing of the inland river or estuary kind.

It proves that you can develop a trick sportfishing boat for relatively small amounts of money, and depending on how much work you're prepared to do yourself, you can build up quite an arsenal of tools and equipment to use - livebait tanks, electric motors etc.

The application for this boat is very wide spread. It ranges from caravanners, to off-road 4WD enthusiasts, to mothership systems like ours, to just small boat owners who because of a lack of space to store it, or simply a desire to keep the budget in check, don't want (or can't afford) a bigger boat.

It proves they don't need to. At around 75 kg, the Horizon is easily car topped on any modern family wagon, too, thus saving quite a bit of money on a trailer's purchase, maintenance, registration and insurance.

Utilising one of the new Rhino roof rack systems, it can be loaded and unloaded single handedly by a pensioner if needs be, such is the ease of the new Rhino self loading roof top systems.

All in all, for a recommended retail price in the range of \$1,500 - \$2,100 depending on the fit-out and special features installed, the Horizon 3.0 m creek fishing boat is a remarkable craft that we can highly recommend.

For further information, please phone Bob James at Horizon Boats (07) 5598 1033 or fax (07) 5598 1599

For further information, or the name of your nearest Minn Kota stockist, call Bob Mercer in Sydney on (02) 9748 0199 or fax (02) 9748 0803

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