

F&B's Small Craft Section

was small enough to acid wash at the paint shop for a second time if it was needed.

The performance was far better than we dared hope. In these pictures, we've actually loaded everything into the boat that we'd normally carry and whilst a lot of it wasn't bolted down properly (witness the electric outboard lying on the casting platform) the weight aboard



Upgrading F&B's 'Creek Fishing' Dory

Introducing the fourth in a fascinating series of so-called 'creek fishing' dinghies we've developed as the keystone in F&B's "Mothership" Projects. Each time, the basic concept (a 3.5 m long roof-topper) has been honed and refined to a remarkable degree . . .

There was great excitement around the camp last month when the new Bluefin 3.5 metre dory neared the completion of its boat-building program. Apart from its spray painting (purely for cosmetic purposes); the dory was all but finished. And what a fantastic sportfishing boat it proved to be.

No sooner had we picked up the boat from the Bluefin factory at Burleigh Heads (on the Gold Coast, Qld) than we broke a couple of rules which state that you really shouldn't put an aluminium boat in salt water before it's been etched, primed and painted.

Nevertheless, we figured the boat

was spot on.

During the building program, we'd been a bit worried about the Honda 15's ability to push such a heavily modified boat. The boat might only be 3.5m long, but it has as much in it, as many boats of up to 5m LOA.

Every nook and cranny is used and planned – so we were a tad nervous when Ruth Cunningham pulled the starting cord on this unusually long shaft 15hp 4-stroke.

Would it handle the load? Had we gone too far in our ambition of building the definitive sport fishing boat within 3.5m LOA?

We needn't have worried. Honestly, the 15hp Honda didn't seem to notice any difference between this boat or the much smaller 3.0m Horizon punt – despite the fantastic difference in weights of the two craft. As well, the wetted surface of the 3.5m Bluefin created considerably more friction – but against that, it clearly spread the



The Bluefin 3.5 is yet another fine example of how an entry level tinnie can be so easily developed into a red hot fishing platform. This boat easily fulfilled the fit-out specs listed below. Note unusual 20” transom and foam filled side decks.

displacement over a wider planing area, too.

With both of us, camera equipment and fishing tackle onboard, the little rig roared across the measured course to log a sensational 19.4 knots top speed, whilst cruising very sweetly indeed at around 14-15 knots. Being such a heavy little beast, the ride was remarkably modulated, without the hollow banging that you so often find in small tinnies like this.

But this is where the 2.5m aluminium pressed bottom really made its presence felt. Because it is such a strong, stiff and heavy bottom, the shape of the Bluefin worked particularly well in the estuary, producing an extremely soft ride for a boat of this length.

Obviously, the boat is going to ride harder than a big Signature or deep vee platey. But if we compare Jonathon apples with Granny Smiths (or to put it another way, if we compare this boat to a standard sort of light weight, 3.4 m tinnie from any of the big pressed factories such as Quintrex, Ally Craft, Savage, etc), then this particular Bluefin 3.5 has a markedly softer and more comfortable ride.

Test day was too flat to talk about its performance in rough water. However,

with the 20” transom (it backs up like a treat!) the deep, hire boat style floatation thwart, and a collar of foam around the top under the side decks, this is unquestionably one of the safest small boats of its kind thus far produced in Australia.

Time Out: Remember here that foam is funny stuff – where you put it and how it is positioned is almost as important as having it in the first place. What we’ve tried to do with the Bluefin 3.5, is to create a “collar” right around the top of the boat so even if it’s filled up with water, it will still float in a strongly upright position.

On the calculations we’ve made, we reckon it will support around 300kg – so as a survival platform it would be a beauty, providing the writer stayed out with the crocs whilst Ruth will hopefully fend off said crocs from inside the boat with the oar. Damn, wish I hadn’t written that . . .

Fitting Out: The Bluefin team, comprising Allan, Darryl, Marg and Samantha, worked really hard to put this boat together with our comprehensive list of special requirements. Because so many readers are interested in these features, we’ve published the working list we provided

to Bluefin, summarising all the features we wanted in the boat. As you’ll read, it is extremely comprehensive.

With all the metal work complete as per our list, all that is left to do is the installation of the manual live bait tank pump, a couple of drain hoses, and your personal effects.

Whether the boat is painted is a matter of personal choice – obviously it looks better, but then it is completely unnecessary if it is being kept out of the water.

(Oh, no !) . . . Our Cock-up

Unbelievably, we stuffed up a critical measurement in the creation of this craft, and ordered the boat with a beam of 1.6 m which should have been, with hindsight, 1.45 m. Further, it had to stay under 125 kg, although this was a desirable, as distinct from mandatory, figure.

The difference doesn’t sound like much, but when this boat has to fit under the targa on the roof of the Cairns Custom Craft and the whole damn project swings around the ease with which we can launch and retrieve this dory, it was an appalling blunder on our (my!)part.

It occurred because yours truly didn’t allow for the taper of the targa

from the base of the targa frame to the top of the frame. This “taper” (see pic) follows the toe-in or camber of the cabin sides of the Cairns Custom Craft.

When I measured the available space for the dory to fit under the targa, I measured it without the targa in place, across the base line, using the targa feet brackets (on the roof) as the guide – and didn’t even think about the taper of the targa arch above.



We could have changed the targa and made it wider. However, by moving the ‘feet’ of the targa, we changed the angles involved, fouled the handrails on the side - and what started as a quick fix, soon became major surgery.

There were other issues though, that we had to take into account.

At 139 kg, the basic dory was too heavy (by a big margin – about 30 kg) to carry on the roof of the tow vehicle, and added to the weight of the heavy Rhino roof racks, presented a burden that even our Suburban would be struggling to cope with.

More to the point, it put us completely out of the arena as far as Holden’s recommendations are concerned, and we take those recommendations seriously.

Conclusion When the mistake was discovered, as you can imagine, we were not happy chappies. But the mistake was ours fair and square, so this superb craft has been relegated to the home team and is being replaced by another (#5 would you believe!) in the very near future.

Once again, we’ll start out with the same basic work sheet.

Absolutely nothing has changed in what we require. We not only believe it’s possible to achieve the level of stability, performance and application we require in such a small craft, we now have the hard evidence – a 3.5 m x 1.60 m Bluefin, to prove it.

As they say in the classics, watch this space for further developments . . . **F&B**

F&B’s Building Sheet Included:

Length Not more than 3.50 m overall

Beam Not more than 1.60 m overall

Transom A full 20” (Long shaft) height

Weight In the 100-110 kg range

Topsides Thickness not less than 1.60 mm

Bottom Thickness not less than 2.00 mm

Transom Not less than 2.00 mm

A two thwart and fish-box set-up, we’d like the thwarts to carry the maximum practical volume of positive foam floatation material with either/or extra wide seats, and the deep, vee shaped thwarts as per hire boat practice.

In addition to this floatation, we’d also like to have a “collar” of foam right around the topsides. (see sketch F&B #58).

Please note that we are anxious to keep the topsides as high as practical, as freeboard in crocodile country becomes amazingly important!

Other Features

- Cast double bow eye,
- Cast towing eye (down really low on the stem – almost horizontal to keel).
- Foredeck material strong enough to stand on.
- Foredeck cross bollard mounted on the aft edge of the foredeck rib. It must end up under the side rail height (so it doesn’t bind on the roof racks).
- Foredeck pad for side mounting (see sketch) the Minn Kota 42lb thrust electric outboard.
- Foredeck shelf as big as practical but with a minimum access height of the 185 mm.
- Carpeted casting “platform” forward, formed by filling in the space ahead of the forward thwart, as well as the thwart itself.
- Hinged lid in (above) casting platform, big enough to allow a 105 amp/hr Century battery to be lowered down into a strong . . .
- Battery frame and base located ahead of the forward thwart, amidships, and as low as possible (recognising the hull’s “vee” at this point is pretty severe).
- TWO sockets (supplied) for the SINGLE Russ Hare adjustable, swivelling chair. One is forward of the

front thwart on the portside whilst the other is on the forward facing, portside ledge or frame of the central kill tank.

- Two (cast?) lifting eyes for the mothership’s davit hook welded into the stern (chine ?) section for maximum strength.
- Two Rhino ring bolts (supplied). These do double duty. They are the two ring bolts needed for the Rhini roof rack, but we can also use them as the forward lifting eyes for the big boat’s davit hook.
- Pair of rowlock holders built on to side rail to enable the boat to be rowed by a person sitting in the centre of the forward thwart, facing aft.
- Depth Sounder mounting pad on the port side coaming.
- (Nearly) Full length, low, side rails to lengths discussed i.e up to the start of the foredeck, and aft as far back at a comfortable arm’s reach for the skipper steering the boat i.e back to the aft edge of the rear thwart.
- Single central, plumbed live bait tank with a sealed off forward section for dry storage, or the catch, bait, whatever.
- The live bait tank side of the box is fitted with two inlet pipes coming in from (1) the scoop and (2) the manual pump. It has a single outlet pipe draining the excess water back overboard. The live bait tank is also fitted with a bung right on the bottom (facing aft) to drain the tank’s water at the end of the day.
- Facing side shelves between the thwarts.
- Lift handles on the transom (strong enough to stand the boat on when it’s being loaded onto the Rhino Roof racks).
- Box section pad on the transom to suit one of those standard “adjustable” stainless steel transducer brackets i.e so the permanent transducer can be easily raised and lowered for launching and retrieval.
- Water scoop, and live bait tank manual pump pipes run through a welded and sealed transom access before returning down to the floor and tracking along the formed keel to the live bait tank area.
- Extra large, screw-in bung operated from INSIDE the transom.
- Frames (on both sides of transom bracing strut) for fuel tank or anchor tub to keep them off the floor. **F&B**