

Refitting The 'Cheetah'



This is Part 4 of Aaron's 4 Part series fitting out Loche and Nicole Ahtong's 2600 Powercat to make it a viable heavy-tackle fishing platform. It's being set-up to help Loche's advancing itch to tangle with larger game fish, while not compromising the boat's capacity to be comfortable as a week-ender, cruising vessel for him and Nicole . . .
Aaron Concord reports

Final In The 4-Part Series By F&B's Fishing Editor, Aaron Concord

An Assault Off North Stradbroke Island.

Talk about generate a ground swell of enthusiasm! I had mentioned the re-fit of Loche's Powercat to several friends, so by the time it came to come to use *Cheetah* for the first time offshore, there were no shortage of very keen and willing volunteers to "break her in!"

A flood of mates who normally don't have access to a craft of this size wanted to feel what it's like stepping from a 4.0m tinny to a 26 foot catamaran. It's a whole new boating world to those who fish from smaller vessels, albeit for the same species the Powercat is designed to target!

As it turned out, a team consisting of "Crazy" Peter Lowe, Geoffrey Seeto, Loche and I would assault the great fishing grounds off North Straddie to get some more accurate fuel consumption with a full crew and enough gear to sink the Bismarck!

The Game Plan(s).

There were many aims for today. It was obvious that Loche and I were busting to see how the rod holders and outriggers would work, and out of our eclectic range of G.Loomis and Sabre short stokers and spin rods we have, which rods would best suit in the outrigger, flat line and shotgun positions to minimise tangles and help make the lures work hard?

Another obvious target was the fuel flow and subsequent range *Cheetah* has with her 480L of fuel.

This is vital since the heavy-tackle grounds we wish to concentrate on ASAP are on average 38-45nm from port, one way.

Now I can never see us bottoming out the tanks on even a big day's heavy-tackle, though it's a long swim home to find out that we were wrong!

This fuel usage would also give us indications of how much extra fuel we would need to do 2-3 day trips to say, the tip of Fraser Island, or even the bottom end of the Ribbon Reefs wide of Cooktown during the annual giant black marlin season.

Yep, plans were already being hatched for some very grand ideas

about where this boat will end up fishing!

Before we jump off the deep end here, the quirks of the vessel, its electronics package and also its fishability need to be assessed.

Is it better with 3 rather than 4 people?

Could 5 come out, or would that be a burden on the cruise speed, clutter up the cockpit or create other problems we hadn't envisaged?

Working with a crew base that know how to help and be an advantage when enjoying our recreation is a bonus too, so even the question of differing personalities needs to be sussed out if the onboard "mojo" is good - or not - with the mix of people fishing.

Being out 45nm is no place to find severe differences of fishing motives or preferences. As a group, we need to get along.

As such, it was proposed that Peter and Geoffrey come along since they are like-minded in their fishing ambitions; basically, anything is good!

Also, having their own gear to complement the gear Loche and I have, was important to be able to cast, jig troll or livebait; it's all about having the ability to change: having other options and the necessary gear should a change of tactics be required.

Friday, 07.12.07.

We were after billfish; little black marlin to be precise with attention towards dolphin fish, wahoo or spanish mackerel should the billies be in poor

form.

So with a weather forecast of SW in the AM turning NE in the PM, we knew it was going to be a nice day on the ocean.

Leaving in a golden hued sunrise from Raby Bay boat ramp, we did the usual hour long run up the bay to the awaiting, relentless surf pounding on the South Passage Bar, which was actually very benign.

The sky to the south looked like it had a full belly of water, though the clouds were hardly moving. It seemed we would not get a drenching from them though it would not have bothered me that much. I was on the water in a nice boat surrounded by mates. I was just happy being where I was.

Once we cleared the bar, my first thoughts were to scout around for some bait balls of pilchards, slimy mackerel and yellowtail scad that can be found anywhere along the submerged coffee rock reefs between the bar and the inside of Flat Rock.

It was a terrific run out along the top of North Stradbroke, looking at Flinders Beach and Adder Rock as we came off the plane about 4 clicks inside Flat Rock. The weather was spectacular.

It's moments like these which make getting out of bed at 3am worth it.

Loche motored us around, staring intently at the sounder for any patches of bait that may be hard against the bottom, or better yet (for us, not the bait fish) in a vertical tower or pyramid

Headin' home . . . there's no doubt the Powercat 2600 has the 'legs' for this sort of work.

