



Converting A Very Old Haines 17C - To A Brand New Centre Console!

Report & Pics by Steve Jones

At the time of commencing this project, there was little we could find on the market in the way of 17 foot fibreglass centre consoles.

My Dad and I had just sold our Haines V19R after finding it was just a bit too big and heavy for our needs. After much discussion we decided what we really wanted was a smooth riding fibreglass centre console, capable of being stored on a single axle trailer, and able to be comfortably towed on the highway with a standard 6 cylinder car.

We have always been fond of centre consoles, having had a 4.5m Quintrex Fish Raider for nearly 15

years. We love the amount of fishing room you can get out of a relatively small hull size, and as all our boating is done in North Queensland, the shelter offered by a cuddy or cabin, while a welcome feature in colder climates, is considered a waste of valuable space in our conditions.

When we made the decision to start looking for the new boat, we quickly found this was something that was not going to be easy to find. Signature and Cyclone now make some beautiful 5.4m centre consoles, but I don't think they were making them at the time we were looking (2000). I was checking all the brands stocked at the local boat shops but

they all told me the same thing – they could offer me numerous aluminium centre consoles in that size range, but no fibreglass ones.

I was familiar with the Haines Hunter V17R, C and L, and thought if only I could get that hull in centre console layout, it would be perfect. The hull is extremely soft riding, dry, easily trailered and goes really well with relatively small horsepower motors.

After unsuccessfully looking at new and secondhand boats for a few months, we realised to get what we wanted, we would have to do it ourselves. I went and saw my local fibreglass repair shop in Mackay

(Murraycraft Fibreglass) and Justin, the owner and manager, assured me his team had converted plenty of fibreglass boats to centre consoles. They even had a couple in the shop getting just that done, and I was very happy with how they looked. I told Justin my plan and he agreed the 17 foot Haines hull was one of the best around – all I had to do was find a secondhand one.

This proved to be very difficult. We had our hearts set on getting a new outboard motor for the boat once it was completed, so what we were really chasing was a sound hull on a good trailer with no motor. We found a few boat motor trailer combos, but we didn't really want the hassle of trying to sell a secondhand motor, and most of them were in really good condition (and priced accordingly), and it didn't seem right to be cutting them up. After months of searching for the right hull I saw an ad in the Trading Post that looked just right. A sound V17C with no motor on a good trailer for only \$3500. This was perfect - and we snapped it up.

We knew there were a couple of spongy spots in the floor, and the transom had a couple of soft spots too, where a number of fittings had been installed over the years. But we didn't consider it a problem to sort these out, as the boat would be going into a fibreglass shop to get the chop anyway, and these could be easily fixed then.

The first task when we got the boat home was to strip all the fittings off, degrease the engine well and generally give the whole thing a good waterblast to see what we were up against.

I then drew up a few sketch plans showing what I was after in the conversion and then organised a quote to get the fibreglass work done by the professionals at Murraycraft Fibreglass. I was happy with the price and work started straight away.

The first task was to strip off the rubber fender strip, remove the top deck and replace the spongy transom

The cabin and raised combings running from the cabin down to the stern were cut off using a 4" grinder and cut off wheel. This allowed the whole lot to be lifted off and left a very open looking boat. The top deck was then completed by attaching a

200mm wide vertical return fibreglass strip to the cut edge, reinforcing with fibreglass gussets at 1.0m centres in the void created between the deck and the return strip (see sketch). A small lip was formed with a resin and bulking mix on top of the join to ensure water drains over the side of the boat and not into it.

There were 2 small bunks up



under where the cabin once was, so these had to be cut out. Once these were gone, a new floor had to be installed. We considered having the one floor level all the way through the boat but this seemed to waste a lot of space up in the bow section as this hull has a very wide flare. If you tried to lean against the side of the boat whilst making your way around the bow, your toes would have been butting into the hull but your thighs would still be 200 – 300mm away from the deck, causing you to lean

dangerously and uncomfortably over the side. This problem was easily solved by having a 100mm step in the deck forward of the console.

While this floor section was being built, I got them to incorporate a 1.5m long x 400mm wide underfloor storage box. The cavity for this box extends under the console, with the door located on the raised floor section being just 600mm long. One of the main species we target is spanish mackerel, and storing them flat in an esky once caught has always been a problem. An esky long enough to store a spaniard (flat) takes up too much space in a small boat. This underfloor box is great. There is a drain conduit running through the hull into the bilge, and a couple of mackerel and some ice fit nicely, and will keep for the day in the tropical sun. When not targeting spaniards, the box is used for storage of dive gear, spearguns, buckets, cast nets or whatever.

A bulkhead with a waterproof door was built up in the bow section to store spare anchors, rope etc. Two side pockets were glassed in for storage of handlines, gaffs, tackle boxes etc. We have mounted the VHF radio aerial inside the starboard pocket, so when not in use it folds down neatly into the pocket out of the way.

The console was manufactured to our design from 10mm sheets of pre-made fibreglass. It has a large amount of storage incorporated, with a door to the front and one to the back. The front cavity has 2 shelves and houses all the safety gear plus an extra 20L of fuel in a portable plastic tank. The front cavity also has 2 shelves and is used to keep the stereo and VHF radio out of the weather, as well as giving somewhere to throw keys, wallet, phones etc. Given the console is quite wide for this size boat, we didn't want to restrict access forward along the starboard side too much with the motor controls sticking out from the console. Plus I had an idea for a fold down canopy that wouldn't work with protrusions from the console, so we had a recess cast into the console for the controls. This has worked very well, and the whole console is very neat.

We were considering a pod for the transom, as I didn't like the amount

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of room the outboard well took up. The only problem was I hadn't seen a pod on this model boat before, and was a bit afraid to go down that path. I had heard some horror stories of boats porpising and generally underperforming once a pod was added.

I knew that Murraycraft had added pods to many 19 and 21 foot Haineses, and these seemed to really increase space and performance on these hulls, but in the back of my mind I knew the hull worked well in its current state, so we decided to leave the engine mounted straight onto the transom, and try to modify the well to get some room back.

This proved to be quite easy in the end, although I must admit I stole the idea from the current Haines Signature transom set-up. The engine well in its original state protruded about 800mm into the cockpit. Basically we just cut the front of it off level with the front of the transom coamings, and fitted a rubber sealed, fold-down door to it. This still leaves a well that is about 350mm long, but with the fold down door on it, it is a simple exercise to fold down when the motor is required to be tilted all the way up. The well works well and we have never had it overflow despite its small size.

The final task in the shop was to fit a side pocket down each side (fibreglassed over ply, then glassed

into place), and give the whole inside a coating of flowcoat.

Once the boat came back from the fibreglass shop we were left with all the features we wanted in the hull, and simply had to paint it, complete the fitout, get the new motor and clean up the trailer.

Painting Issues

The painting proved to be a real learning exercise. My Dad's friend Joe has done a fair bit of painting so we had arranged for him to apply the top coats, whilst Dad and I would do all the preparation work and apply the primer.

We spent a couple of days sanding and filling the hull and then applied the primer. This all went smoothly and the hull was looking perfect. Unfortunately once the top coat went on small pin holes were revealed all over the hull sides. I found out this is the result of a bit too much sanding on the gel coat hull, so we were stuck with the job of going back over the whole hull, filling all the little pin holes with a resin filler, resanding, repriming and reapplying the top coat. The paint job came out beautiful the second time around.

Now it was time to tackle the internal fitout. All the removed fittings (bow roller, bollards, ski hooks etc) were reinstalled. A new aluminium 100 litre tank was made up and fitted down the centre cavity under the

floor. Marine carpet was cut to shape and glued in place.

A tinted perspex windscreen was manufactured by one of the local plastic shops, and this was installed with hinges on the console to allow it to be folded down when storing in a low shed or trailing on the highway. The bow rails were bent up in the back yard by bending a length of aluminium tube around an old car wheel rim complete with tyre. We just bent it little by little and with a bit of trial and error we could match the curve of the front of the boat without too much trouble.

One of Dad's mates welded the rail components together for us, and the rails were fitted with stainless bolts. A new battery was installed in a sealed box in the starboard transom corner, and the new electrics installed – a Lowrance X75 sounder and a Navman Tracker 900 Chartplotter, plus the usual bilge pump, VHF, marine stereo etc.

Trailer Mods

The trailer was pretty good, so all it really needed was a bit of a clean up and paint, plus we fitted a set of Retriever-Mate spring loaded rollers. These are an excellent product and the boat winches straight up the centre of the trailer every time, no matter what angle the boat is on, or what the current and wind are doing at the time.

Motor Installation The boat was now ready for the new motor. We have always had Mercury outboards without too many problems, so we were keen to get another. We wanted to keep the weight down, and considered the 3 cylinder 90HP would be a good match. Our local dealer gave us what we considered a good deal so we placed the order. Finally the motor was fitted up and we got to go on the first sea trials. I was absolutely thrilled at how the boat went on the first run. The console location was a bit of a guess and I was a bit worried the balance might be out, but everything seemed perfect. The motor snapped it up onto the plane very quickly and seemed like it was going to have plenty of top end speed when we were finally able to open it up after the run in period.

The boat was now ready for use and we had a few trips in it to try it

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out and see what else we were going to need, and to see what things had to be moved around.

The main thing the boat was found to be lacking was a canopy, plus some rod storage. We generally store the boat inside a shed with a 2.2m high roller door, so the canopy had to be able to be folded down.

I wanted something with a solid frame around the console to give everyone something to hold on to when travelling, plus it had to be strong enough to house an overhead rocket launcher system of rod holders. We had this setup on the back of the canopy on our last boat and found them to be absolutely necessary as I tend to get a bit carried away with the number of outfits I take out for a day on the water.

I looked on the internet at all the flash american centre consoles with their gleaming T tops to get some ideas, and then set about designing a canopy along similar lines, but with the ability to be easily folded down. What we ended up with was basically a canopy split into 2 parts:

The frame around the console (that is hinged at its rear legs to enable it to be folded down) and

The shade part that simply bolts to the frame.

The photos show how it works. It can be disassembled and folded down to get into the shed in about 5 minutes, the same to put it all back together. Dad and I bought all the aluminium, bent it and cut everything to size and shape, and then all I had to do was get someone to weld it all together. Luckily I work for a company that has a boilermaking workshop so I got one of our boilermakers to do the welding one weekend. A local upholsterer put the shade material on and the canopy was complete. We have 4 ropes that brace it all when travelling, but these are simply clipped off once you arrive at your destination.

Cost Issues

I guess the big question, when undertaking a project like this is what will it cost? Is it going to be cheaper to simply buy a new boat?

Well, as I noted earlier, our

motivation was more to do with the fact we simply couldn't buy the boat we wanted at the time, so we had to do it this way. When all the costs are added up, it still worked out to be quite a reasonably priced project:

Boat/trailer \$3500

F/glass conversion work \$4500

Painting and fitout \$2000

Electronics \$2000

Motor \$9000

Canopy \$1000

Miscellaneous \$1000

Total \$23,000

The project has turned out even better than we had hoped. There is heaps of room for 3 people fishing, the hull is very smooth riding and is very economical with the 90 Mercury.

I don't even know the rig is behind me when towing on the highway. It is small enough to use in the creeks for chasing barra, and seaworthy enough to take to the reef when the weather is good – the best of both worlds.

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