

This is another of "those" questions boating journalists and marine dealers have skirted around for years. Following on from our series comparing cats vs monos, this month we study another controversial issue. With nearly 40 years of recreational boating behind him, in dozens of fibreglass and aluminium trailerboats and cruisers, few people in Australia are better equipped to tackle this question than F&B's editor, Peter Webster. In this special report, nothing is held back, there is no hidden agenda, no advertising to protect, just the truth about the real differences between fibreglass and aluminium.

One of the most controversial issues to grace the boating industry over the last 30-40 years has been the perennial debate about which is the best boating material for family boats, and further, which type of construction generates the best family boat in terms of seaworthiness, seakindliness, and performance.

Recently, the writer was studying the latest brochure from one of the biggest pressed aluminium boat manufacturers in Australia, and was bemused to read the descriptions provided of the performance and handling of the boats in their big range. A 'rosier view' I don't think I've ever read, but then, the people writing it no doubt believed that what they were saying was a true and honest view, given that they've probably never been in anything other than the products about which they were writing.

This is a common problem. Both manufacturers and boat dealers, even those with many years service in the boating industry, frequently are the worst judges of overall boat performance (especially in terms of

handling and ride) because many of them never get the chance to really use the products of their competitors - and vice a versa.

Sure, they all get to drive different boats on different media and dealer days, but a quick zoom up the Nerang River or the Gold Coast's Broadwater scarcely qualifies them as having more than a very casual acquaintance with competitive craft.

Indeed, the more experienced and more entrenched the dealer is with particular products, the less chance there is they will be able to offer really objective or independent comment about other products in the marketplace.

This is a very natural occurrence, and applies equally to cars, caravans, outboards or boats; the evidence is there for anyone to see that most dealers have a somewhat jaundiced view about competitive products when measured against their own.

This manifests itself in a lot of ways, **Below: Two of our finest boatbuilders, Quintrex and Cruise Craft, coming from opposite extremes. Which is best, and how can a consumer know?**

but over the years, has led to many extraordinary falsehoods being spread through the industry.

Sadly, many of these falsehoods (or "Yes, but . . ." suggestions) have become ingrained in the boating world, to the extent that anybody who is game enough to offer an alternative view, much less a critical view, is leaving him or herself open to derision and scorn.

I should know, too. For longer than anybody else in Australia, I've stood behind the editorial desk over literally hundreds of boat tests, countless written test reports - and frequently had to defend what was written against often very hostile boat builders, or worse, angry boat buyers.

Time Out: Boat buyers are usually quite objective and dispassionate about the marketplace until they make their buying decision. However, once that decision is made, pity the hapless journalist who dares criticise that boat in the future. Objectivity goes out the window as emotional attachment takes hold.

Making matters much more difficult

is the reality that boats of whatever genre or manufacture do change even within that genre - even from model to model! A boat such as one of the 1970's Haines Hunter 17C half cabin runabouts could be set up by Dealer (A) in Sydney with a Johnson or Evinrude outboard, and if that boat was compared to a Haines Hunter 17C set up by Mercury Dealer (B) in Melbourne, very commonly, it was almost like testing two different boats.

It depended on how the engine was installed, the choice of propeller, the amount of fuel carried, people on the test, the difference between waterways - and so on. And so it was never easy to be truly objective, much less emphatic about the qualities of Brand A versus Brand B when we were having enough trouble trying to decide which of the Brand A boats were set up correctly and reflected the craft's full potential in the first place.

Fibreglass Came First

Following the plywood era of the 1950's, fibreglass boats took off in numbers that are almost incomprehensible today. Manufacturers sprang up all over Australia, embracing

Ally Vs GRP: Which Is Best For Family Boating?

