

The Fabulous 540s!

Trailcraft is setting a blistering pace, forcing change upon an industry often too sleepy to get out of its own shadow. Just look at the standard features of this T/Craft 540 Trailblazer - and take special note of the transom door and stairway design - it's the best in the industry. The Trailblazer 540 is the only 540 in this class with a true self draining cockpit.



I love 5.2 – 5.5m cuddies, or 17-18 footers, as we used to call them. This is a terrific size family boat, and a size where there are many things to contemplate between competitive models on the market. Better still, there are several dozen – no kidding – 5.2-5.5m aluminium cuddies available, so the consumer is certainly not lacking a terrific choice.

For the purpose of this report, we going to ignore whether the boat is pressed, plate (or a combo of both) and focus on the most popular features of the production 5.2-5.5m range cuddies from the likes of Trailcraft,

Quintrex, Savage, Seajay, Ally Craft, Stacer, Horizon – household names by any definition.

They all make a variety of models in this size range, because it is such a big market. Boats have incremental lengths with as little as 100mm difference between them within same brands, so it is fairly easy to line up all the 5.2's, against all the 5.3's, and all the 5.4's etc.

Again, for the purpose of this report we're going to look at 5.4m models, mainly because they sit in the middle of the range bracket, and embrace all the features of the larger (say) 5.70 models as well.

Indeed, there's not a heck of a lot of difference in the fit out of the 5.4s

and many of the larger 6.10's - beyond the obvious physical parameters.

Seaworthiness

These boats are all starting to become very useful boats for the family man. With a sensible, experienced skipper at the helm, they are all capable of running offshore on a good morning to fish the near shore reefs (say) 5-10 miles out, and have the speed and seaworthiness to scurry back home when the wind pipes up mid-morning.

As well, they usually only need outboards in the 90-115hp class, so they remain reasonably economical – but can still provide huge amounts of

fun for the whole mob when the time comes to go up the river or over to the dam for some serious tube towing!

Inherent seaworthiness levels are usually fairly high, and as the writer has written many times over the years, the cuddy configuration is the safest of all the various options now available – including bowriders, centre consoles and runabouts.

The cuddy cabin will always be better at sea in terms of brushing off heavy weather conditions because the front of the boat is covered in with, effectively, a 'bulwark' against the ingress of spray and water, whilst the skipper and passengers are also protected to a

Of the many different sections of the Australian boating industry, none are growing as quickly or as successfully as the hugely popular 5.2-5.5m cuddy cabin market. Every manufacturer has several, and this summer, hundreds of them are going to be launched for the first time. In this special report, Editor Peter Webster presents an experienced overview of the best – and worst – features of the 540s, designed to help first time consumers especially, to decide how they can best sort the wheat from the chaff. . .