

My IMPORTED Boat Experience

By Steve Jones



When I started thinking about upgrading my much loved 6.0m custom WA built Goldstar plate cuddy / Suzuki 140, I was really in two minds as to whether it was a good idea or not.

The Goldstar is such a great boat for what I use it for – serious fishing. It has so much room, a smooth ride, great economy, easy to tow and great looks / quality fit-out. But I wanted to go further offshore. I can see the way the Green movement is heading, and it's all bad news for us fishermen.

I think vast amounts of the Great Barrier Reef will be off limits within a decade, so I figure I need to get out there and explore some of the wider ground while we are still able.

Also, we have 2 young children – Isabella 5 and Ricky 3, and lots of friends with kids. If we want to take friends with kids out in the boat for a day at Magnetic Island (just a couple of miles offshore Townsville), the Goldstar just didn't have the capacity or seating to take say 4 adults and 4 kids.

I had been checking out big US built walkarounds for many years. Reading about them in magazines, looking at them on US websites, and crawling all over them at our

boatshows. The lines are so nice, the fibreglass tooling is generally of a very high standard, and the fitout is just superb. Most boats come with an amazing array of quality fit-out items as standard.

Also, at the time a boat upgrade was starting to be thought about, a few things were happening in the world. The Aussie dollar was running very high against the US (around 85c), the US boat market was very depressed as a result of the GFC, and there were some very well priced boats around.

I mentioned I might be selling the Goldstar to a few people, and pretty quickly one of my good mates Mark (who happens to be the partner of this magazine's Sally from Sally's Galley) said he and Sally wanted it. Mark has been out with me in the

boat before, knew all about it, and was dead keen. A deal was hastily struck and I had some confidence that I had at least some of the money available for the new boat.

So – once I knew the Goldstar was gone, the search for the new boat began in earnest. I did look at a number of locally available options, including 7m+ plate boats, Cruise Craft 685's, Haines 680's, Signature 675's, but at the end of the day I had been researching US boats for years, thought it's now or never, and was pretty keen to make it all happen for this next boat – just to try them myself and see if all the hype is actually worthy. My last 7 boats had been Australian made, so I thought I'll try something different for this next one.



I have a few mates who have done the US boat thing before, so had a few good contacts to ask questions. Also I found some of the local boating forums like Ausfish and Fishnet had a lot of information available on them posted by people with considerable experience (and some with seemingly none!)

The first thing people will find when they start researching US boat sites is the sheer volume of boats available in the US for sale. It can be overwhelming. As I've mentioned, I have been looking for years so I had a pretty good idea what I was chasing. Websites like thehulltruth, boattraderonline, yachtworld, yachtuctions and even ebay will keep you entertained for hours. Or just type into Google the model boat you are chasing, and lots of dealer

ads selling that boat will come up.

I wanted a 23 – 24ft walkaround, single 4 stroke power (don't want 2 motors to maintain and take up transom space), hardtop, lots of seating, no timber, full hose out cockpit liner, a fishing transom layout with large central live bait tank, underfloor esky – all brand new.

I had contemplated buying 2nd hand, but at the end of the day I figured that it was going to cost me the same amount to ship a busted up old faded 24ft tub, as it will to ship a brand spanker (shipping is based purely on volume – length x width x height), and I didn't want to run the risk of a boat that looked good in photos turning up here all faded and a bit sad, plus I didn't have the time to fly over and check out the boat.

So I decided it had to be new.

One thing to be wary of if considering 2nd hand boats, is the Florida sun – just like the Qld sun – it can be brutal. A lot of these style boats will come from Florida and the sun can really knock around boats that are left out in the weather.

I had checked out online lots of manufacturers to see what they had in the boat style I was chasing. The ones

that made the (very long) short list were Proline, Grady White, Seaswirl, Mako, Century, Cobia, Hydra Sports, Robalo and Sea Hunt. One by one I studied their equivalent models' photographs online and began to discount the ones that didn't meet my requirements. About half of them had cockpit layouts that I didn't consider suitable for serious fishing. That left a few for me to start looking very seriously at, then search all the boat dealers to see what they could offer, pricewise.

The 2 boat models that I ended up saying "I would be happy with either of these 2 boats" were the Cobia 236 walkaround and the Proline 23 Express. I ended up finding a dealer (Marine Connection) in Palm Beach that had both of these boats, brand new with brand new motors. Their