

It's common knowledge that second and third-hand boat prices have reached an all time low, and whilst that is not good news for people SELLING a cruiser in this class, it is fantastic news for people wanting to step up and BUY a bigger cruiser than they might ever have dreamed possible.

In this special report, we examine the pros and cons, the pitfalls, the delights, the potential and possibilities of buying in this critical BARGAIN price range.

# Buying A \$50,000-\$70,000 SPORTSCRUISER

As this report was prepared, a quick study of Boat Point data revealed that they had no less than 7,157 craft available in the \$20,000-\$60,000 range, with 8,877 boats in the 7m-15m range, which is even closer to the mark we are considering in this report.

Unsurprisingly, the Americans dominated with several brands having hundreds of craft for sale across Australia, including Bayliner who had some 546 boats listed, Four Wynn's 313 . . . and so on. And this data is from just one of the multiple classified web sites in Oz.

Imported American bridge deck sports cruisers in this \$50-\$70K class are scattered across Australia in their hundreds. Literally.

Many have been imported to Australia over the last 5-10 years, although the bulk of them have actually come in much more recently than that, thanks to the efforts of a handful of importers, all of whom are

closely connected to, or actually work in the Boating Industry.

The impact of so many craft of this kind lobbying into Australia so quickly, has had a devastating affect on local GRP

predominantly Australian-made craft (and the Mustang 2400 and 2800 Sportscruisers stand out here very clearly) it's been an

awful experience, because they've witnessed the value of their craft collapsing under the sheer weight of the imports coming in to compete directly against them.

Clearly, the market will correct itself over time (it always does) but there's going to be some pain felt for

several years yet, especially for the

buyers who used their home's equity to raise the necessary funds to purchase the cruiser, and are now having to deal with possibly a substantial loss on the value of their cruiser.

However, there is another side to this chapter, and that concerns the people who are *not* trying to sell a boat in this category, but who instead, have craft underneath or

manufacturing, and shattered the 'normal' concepts of sensible boat marketing.

As each shipment arrived, the retail price of existing craft available through brokers, private treaty and dealers went down with them.

For Australian families who brought



above it. People who are more likely to be able to take advantage of the incredibly low prices now being offered for craft in this \$50-\$70K class.

And make no mistake – there has never been a better time for boating enthusiasts to step forward and buy the craft of their dreams – in almost every category, but none so patently obvious as the \$50K-\$70K range which (generally speaking) covers sports cruisers made in the 1990s through to the early part of the new century up to (say) 2004. After that, the later model prices start to climb again, until they're more likely to top out in the \$90K-\$110K range - which in itself, for high quality craft that are only a couple of years old, is really hard to believe.

However, the real weight of sports cruiser numbers concerns imported cruisers built before 2005, running backwards to the mid-1990s when these popular cruisers started to arrive in earnest.

But hold on a moment - what are we talking about here? What are these boats like? How do they fit into the scheme of things in Australia? And are they suitable for our conditions and boating families?

Answering these questions one at a time may provide some real clues and hopefully, guidance for readers

contemplating purchasing one of these craft this year.

## Sports Cruiser Design

There are many pros and cons about the popular "bridge deck" sports cruiser concept wherein the cockpit is raised amidship to lift up the helm and passenger seats in such a way that a berth is then built underneath that area, accessed from the cabin, thus boosting the available sleeping accommodation in the craft.

This type of bridge deck sports cruiser design emanated from America in the early 1960s, when several of the major US builders realised that it offered an extremely cost effective way of building a fairly comfortable craft in remarkably little time.

The genius of this design is that you have a big hull mould (No #1) running from the stem (bow area) through to the transom (stern), and (No #2), a complex 'deck mould' that creates the top of the cabin, up to the windscreen, down along the sides, and across the cockpit sole (floor). Then there is (No. #3), a very cunning 'furniture' mould that builds in – in just one mould, usually – the whole inner fit-out including the berths, the galley, the head or toilet area, and the cabin sole (floor).

*There's no doubt the American boating industry has achieved extremely high standards in every aspect of their work - design, performance, engineering and handling standards. Craft like this SeaSwirl Striper 2910 sports cruiser are truly world class - and there are many 'pre-loved' models on the market now which represent exceptional value for today's boating consumer.*

Basically, it only takes these three principal moulds to assemble about 85% of the new boat.

There are at least a zillion variations on this theme, but the core tooling rarely changes – it's more that different builders will have variations to the central theme, especially in regard to how they make their hatches, companionways, etc. But through it all, the 'bridge deck' concept is extremely efficient to build with minimum labour and offers a surprising level of internal comfort which has immediate appeal to the women folk.

Virtually all of these craft have quite sophisticated toilet and shower "rooms" (or the "head") that is very pleasing to the eye. Standing there in the Boat Shows, women feel comfortable with a nice looking galley to port (with lots of cupboard space), the enclosed head to starboard and very