

AUSTRALIAN F&B

Fisherman & BOATOWNER

CONSUMER SURVEY



Part Three - 1998 F&B Consumer Survey

5.0 m Alloy Cuddy Fishing Boats

Not too big, not too small - alloy cuddy cabs in the 5.0 m range are great for a mix of family boating and fishing in coastal waters.

Special F&B Consumer Survey by Jeff Webster

After two big consumer reports on fibreglass boats in as many months, we decided that for this issue of F&B, we should bring you a report on a selection of aluminium craft.

The decision was made to continue with the cuddy cabin theme, but with alloy rigs in the 5.0 m size range. A quick flick through the brochures for the leading manufacturers, confirmed that most companies have at least one model in this category - some with two or more. This is a firm indicator of the popularity of this size of craft among Aussie families and fishermen.

As with the fibreglass cuddies we featured last month, the success of the mid size alloy cuddy cab has a lot to do with the protection provided by the cabin structure. In choppy waters, the cabin shields the crew from wind and much of the spray blown back across the boat in three quarter seas. The cabin also gives you somewhere to sit out of the weather, and makes for a great storage area.

But given that the fibreglass cuddy cabin offers the same benefits in terms of shelter and protection, why would you buy an alloy rig?

Well, the decision to buy fibreglass or alloy in this category comes down to the inherent advantages and disadvantages of each construction material.

As most readers will know, fibreglass boats are generally better looking, and provide a better ride. Aluminium boats, on the other hand, are normally lighter, tougher, more durable as far as surface abrasions are concerned, and to the extent that most alloy boatowners aren't fussed about a scratch or three, easier to look after. Remember, alloy boats don't actually need to be painted.

Further, when the paint on a big

tinnie starts to look a little daggy, stripping it back to bare metal, and then respraying it with a good two pack epoxy paint - will bring it back to almost as new condition.

Given (pressed) aluminium boats like this generally require significantly less horsepower to achieve quite acceptable performance levels and (thus) lower running costs, it will come as no surprise to learn that alloy cuddy cabins are most popular with fishermen and boaters who expect to spend many hundreds of hours out on the water, as well as those who like to fish remote locations with poor launching facilities.

For example, a 5.0 m alloy cuddy cab is the perfect rig for fishing out of remote places like Waddy Point on Fraser Island, Coffin Bay in SA or beautiful Coral Bay in WA. This type of boat is light so it can be easily towed on a single axle trailer - and hauled along the beach and up over the sand dunes as needed, then launched straight across the beach or coral sand, into the water. Who needs a launch ramp?

When it comes time to retrieve the boat, it doesn't really matter if the aluminium boat is 'skull-dragged' across the sand and up onto the trailer, even if you miss the rollers when winching the boat up. So you lose a little paint? It's simply not a problem.

Similarly, many top-enders prefer to leave the boat in the water at low tide, and they feel a lot better about an aluminium boat settling down on coral sand as the tide falls, than a GRP boat.

So what do you look for in a 5.0 m alloy cuddy? Okay, let's examine the key areas in this type of craft to identify the best features.

Seating: Not all that important. Many buyers of aluminium cuddies prefer to have no seats at all in the rear cockpit, while at the helm, two standard bucket seats are normally fine. Alternatively, many builders just install a big ice chest with a padded cushion on the lid. This works well, too, especially in the summer months when a constant supply of icy cold drinks helps with the debilitating effects of dehydration. More seats means less fishing space, and for this reason, rear cockpit seating is often an option in these craft.

In contrast to fibreglass cuddies, very few alloy cuddy cabins come with rear quarter seats - which is a good thing as

far as I'm concerned. If you want rear seating, the best seat type is the full width bench seat positioned up against the transom wall.

In most of the alloy cuddies available, the rear bench is listed as an option. The bench is normally designed so that it can be unbolted and removed from the boat for those serious fishing trips when you need to maximise the rear cockpit space. Alternatively, the bench will fold down vertically, so that you can walk right up against the transom wall.

Alloy cuddy cabs of this size will also have minimal cabin seating. Most of these craft have short, tall cabins - as opposed to the long, low profile cabins more common with fibreglass craft. For this reason, you'll find most alloy rigs will have good headroom below decks, but very small seats or berth cushions - or none at all.

Storage: Alloy cuddy cabs are usually pretty good when it comes to storage areas. Most craft will have full length cockpit side pockets, as well as ample storage under the berths or seats in the cabin. Cabin side pockets however, are rare in this type of craft - which is annoying because these pockets are needed for stowing life jackets, towels, water containers, etc.

Having said that, alloy cuddy cabins normally have at least one, often two large underfloor storage areas. Normally, you can leave one of these underfloor lockers for storage, while the other is used as kill tank or fish box.

Cabins: The alloy cuddy cabins available at present are, unfortunately, starting to all look the same. As noted, the cabins are usually short but tall, with good cabin headroom, but nothing like enough space to be used for overnighting.

Still, these craft don't pretend to be weekend cruising craft. If you want a boat of this nature, you should be looking in the 6.0 m plus size range, at a big fibreglass rig - something like a big Cruise Craft, or Whittley.

In general, the cabins in 5.0 m alloy rigs are smaller than those in similar sized fibreglass boats. However, alloy rigs tend to have longer, wider cockpits, and this extra space is great for coastal and offshore fishing.

The trend at the moment for alloy (and fibreglass) cuddies is to design the cabin structure so that it extends right out to the hull sides. This maximises