



# 1977 5.6m Shark Cat

*“ This new Shark Cat is a definite step from the professional fisherman over to the family man and sportfishing enthusiast, with a lower price and a much better finish . . . ”*

In May 1975 in a story entitled “The Shark Cat Revolution” I wrote “. . . (they) are big, brawny and tough; their design will not win any awards for beauty and grace, but their performance in a rough sea is devastating ...” Since then the fame of the Shark Cat has spread from coast to coast.

The original Shark Cat was designed in 1969 by Bruce Harris for his father. Later, Harris used it to supervise his shark meshing contract for Gold Coast waters. Little did the carefree swimmers along Surfers Paradise’s “Golden Mile” know that their lives were being protected by a rather strange looking catamaran, maintaining a constant patrol along the nets behind the breakers.

Actually, there is a rather delightful story to be told another day, in another article, about how the very first Shark Cat (the “Tippi-Willy”) came into being. Sufficient here to comment that a number of other professional fishermen were so impressed with the strange looking powercat they asked Harris to build them one. Within 12 months a set of moulds had been developed — if somewhat crudely at first, and the Shark Cat revolution was ready to be launched.

It wasn’t long before the word spread from the Gold Coast of Queensland down the professional fisherman’s grapevine, to areas as distant as the West Coast of Tasmania, to the north in Cooktown and Karumba.

Harris became so busy building “Shark Cats” — as they were soon

called — he had to give away professional fishing almost completely. Finally the sheer demand for his ungainly craft forced him to let go his sharkcat meshing contract for the Gold Coast.

Tackling the project full time, Harris then expanded his business to encompass not one, but three different models — a development of the original 16 footer, and finally the devastating 20/23 foot series.

It was these last two boats which built the Shark Cat reputation.

The 20/23 footers are virtually identical except the larger boat is 3’ longer. To this day argument rages as to which is the better boat. Some professional fishermen swear the 23 footer fitted with two 175hp “Black Max” Mercurys is the ultimate deep sea, rough water planing boat, but there are nearly as many fishermen who maintain the 20 footer is that little bit more agile, and quicker off the mark. Even Bruce Harris is not too sure, but he points out he is currently looking for a sponsor to finance a Trans-Tasman run from Sydney to Auckland. For this run, he would take the 23 footer which, “I would take anywhere in the world”.

Over the last eight years Harris has made a number of model changes.

The original 16 footer was replaced by an 18 footer, the forerunner of this month’s test boat. The 23 footer has just been given a completely new hull mould, which has greatly improved the finish and incorporates a number of design changes to below-waterline areas which have come to light as a result of Harris’ extensive ocean

racing experience. Very soon the 20 footer will be similarly modified, so that both big boats will soon share identical hulls, once again.

The new 18 footer incorporates more than just below waterline changes, as Harris has also changed the cabin structure to incorporate two quarter berths in the cuddy cabin.

## Design

The new 18’ Shark Cat in fact, is more than 18’ long — it depends where you measure the craft’s length from. The corner of the transom to the mean average centre of the bow, the boat is 18’3” long (5.56m) but if the 2’ x 18” deep duckboard is taken into account the boat is well over 19’ long. However, as this is out of the water and in no way affects the hull’s performance (other than suppressing some spray) it is still correct, we believe, to take the boat as a 5.56m craft with the maximum allowable beam in Queensland at 8’ (2.438m).

The boat is actually a cross between a catamaran and a tunnel hull — the distinction is somewhat dubious in either case. We tend to lean towards the description “catamaran” rather than “tunnel”, but would bow to comment otherwise. At rest you can see right through the tunnel, such is the buoyancy of the twin hulls.

Each hull has an interesting shape, with a noticeable step or chine running aft from the forefoot. I was quite intrigued by the shape of the aft sections of the twin hulls. Harris has made some very noticeable changes to this section, so much so they now

**TBM  
RETRO  
BOAT TEST:**

Unchanged, as first published, written and photographed by Peter Webster in April 1977