



The front locker is huge, with room to store all your safety gear, spare anchors and much more.



The centre console has plenty of room to either flush mount or top mount the electronics.



The rear view shows a clean and functional transom with a 15-degree deadrise.



Access to the forward sections is simple in a centre console.



The back deck has room for three or four people to fish.



Under way the Formosa sits nicely in the water and turns spray back down very well.

# Formosa fits the bill in more ways than one



## Boat Review

by MARK JONES

**R**ECENTLY, I have been doing quite a few trips out in a Formosa 550 Centre Console, which is the proud property of my regular fishing buddy, Johnno Dowling.

It was purchased with the intention of putting it to work to do a mixture of river, bay and close offshore work.

Experience however has led us to use this great little rig for some wide offshore work as well.

The performance and handling in the rough stuff has surprised and impressed me.

I am more used to much larger offshore craft, having not a lot of time for the hard ride of small tinnies in offshore conditions.

Well, I just have to eat my words on this occasion, because we have had the Formosa out in some seriously rough conditions and have never come back complaining about the harshness of the ride.

We have taken this boat to the Barwon Banks and Wide Caloundra on good forecasts that ended up turning into 20-plus knots and have also experienced its ride in the washing machine conditions that you get with 20 knots of southwesterly against the swell when you are 40km offshore.

So we have pretty well tried the Formosa in all the conditions you are likely to encounter in general offshore fishing.

It has never put a foot wrong in the handling department and it goes exactly where you point it, going head on to the sea or with a following sea.

I am not saying that we are tackling 20-knot wind and 2m seas running the boat hard at 20 knots.

Far from it!

But this little rig, when throttled back to under 15 knots in these conditions just pushes on all day.

The ride at this speed is comfortable and it doesn't crash off waves, but comfortably rolls over them.

It is important to have perspective, because a 23ft fibreglass boat is going to

be at least 5 knots faster in the same conditions for the same ride, so you just have to plan for taking some extra time to get to your destination.

Like most centre consoles, the lack of protection means it can be a bit wet in a strong cross wind, as spray can blow back over the boat.

The general layout of the boat is your typical centre console configuration.

The forward section has plenty of room to access the anchor well and a huge under floor locker.

This area is quite good as a casting and fishing area as well as being a good place to store bulky items like tackle boxes in front of the console.

It is functional with more than enough room to mount a full array of modern electronics.

The console also has good dry storage underneath for your gear and side pockets along the back deck add to the storage in the boat.

Construction is 4mm plate bottom and 3mm sides.

The ribbing on these boats is solid and closely spaced, giving plenty of strength to the hull.

It has an overall length of 5.65m and a wide beam of 2.4m.

Freeboard is also excellent at 750mm.

The fuel capacity of the Formosa 550 is 150 litres,

and coupled with the 115hp Suzuki 4-stroke, it gives the boat heaps of range.

One of the most pleasing things about this boat has been the fuel consumption it has returned on trips out wide.

We have returned figures of 57 litres for 120km travelled, giving a consumption of 2.1km/litre.

That is a fantastic result and makes a huge difference to the cost of a day out fishing.

To do a trip out wide to the Barwon Banks for a full day of fishing and use less than 60 litres of fuel was astonishing.

The Suzuki 115 has been a great match for this boat.

There is plenty of power available when needed, but it is not overkill, pushing the rig along to a top speed of about 35 knots at 5900rpm.

The standard aluminium propeller has also been upgraded to a stainless equivalent thanks to the great service and advice from Solas Propellers at Warana on the Sunshine Coast.

In the fishability department, this boat rates well.

It is still in the process of being fully decked out, as Johnno opted to do some of the final fit out himself.

That way he can get it just right after testing it for a while.

He has added his own supplied GPS (Navman 5507) and sounder (Furuno FCV620), a bait board and quality stainless rod holders set out in the right pattern for trolling.

Also, additional rod holders are being added at spots around the deck for storing rods out of the way when fighting big fish.

A removable Esky seat box was installed rather than a fixed seat set-up, allowing for extra room in the cockpit by relocating the Esky, if needed.

The next thing to do is to add a live bait tank, which will require some adjustments to the location of the dual batteries to fit it in.

The option of adding a kill tank is also being considered, as there is space behind the fuel tank to add this into the layout.

Fishing out of this boat is a pleasure.

There is ample room in the cockpit for three or four people to fish in comfort.

It is also very stable at rest, even in rough conditions.

The 15-degree deadrise is a good compromise between ride quality and stability.

The only downside would be that the bimini arrangement means you can't easily circle the boat with a fishing rod in hand, one of the normal advantages on a centre console.

Johnno originally wanted a T-top arrangement, but cost put this on the backburner to a later time.

The cost of a Formosa package like this one will set you back in the vicinity of \$35,000 to \$38,000 depending on electronics and level of fit out.

You can also save several thousand dollars if you opt for a 2-stroke engine.

Coastal Power Boats located on the Gold Coast Highway at Miami supplied this particular boat.

Kieran and Peter did a great job of meeting all Johnno's needs and dealing with them was a pleasure.

In all, this is a great boat package that is small enough to drop crab pots up the creek but still capable of mixing it up with the bigger boats on the offshore grounds.

If you are looking for an all-rounder, take a good look at the Formosa 550. ⚓



Ample ribbing on the Formosa gives good hull strength.