

Going Pro

Mark Ward tests a tough estuary and Top End sportfisher from Queensland's Formosa Boats.



THE FORMOSA 450 Barra Pro is a genuine inshore plate hull that has all the practicality of a tournament boat while being designed to fish estuaries, rivers and impoundments.

Queensland boat maker Formosa has produced a well designed and sleek hull with hot rod inspired graphics with loads of "ramp appeal".

The 450 Barra Pro as tested is a 4.5m hull with a 2.1m beam, complete with fully integrated bow-mounted electric motor bracket, casting decks, storage and a livewell with divider for the tournament fisho.

The hull is 4mm bottom and 3mm sides 5083 plate aluminium, which makes this hull over-built for its intended purpose – similar to taking the Land Cruiser to pick up the kids from school. Besides the obvious, plate hulls also allow secure fitting of accessories and electronics. Once you've fitted out a few plate hulls, drilling into pressed alloy is never the same.

The hull design is a basic v-nosed punt. And while the design is nothing new, getting into the shallows and effortlessly gliding around under the stealth of an electric motor is sometimes vital, and this

is where a v-nosed punt can't be beaten.

There's a well-appointed elevated forward casting deck with loads of storage for safety gear and some additional tackle. The side console configuration gives the 4.5m hull an open boat feel, allowing anglers to move from the casting deck to the transom with ease. The transom has what I jokingly call a "non-boaters casting deck" which houses the livewell below. The transom tapers off at a 45 degree angle to a pod style engine bracket.

FIT OUT

How much can you pack into a 4.5m open boat? Standard features include nav lights, carpet, underfloor fuel, rod holders, and a foam filled hull (giving basic flotation). Additional standard fittings include an engine pod with ladder, painted hull with graphics and sounder bracket. The two-tone paint, rod locker and livewell are optional, giving the Barra Pro plenty of bits and pieces to keep any fisho happy.

ON THE WATER

The 450 Barra Pro was tested during a stiff south-easter in the relatively open waters of



Brisbane's Moreton Bay. The large reverse chine did its best to keep me relatively dry in the open water with only some spray finding the console. I don't know any 4.5m hull that would have kept me dry in that weather and the Formosa did a lot better than most.

The the 60hp four-stroke Yamaha on the test boat proved to be a nice match for the hull. It didn't really rip the hull out of the water but with a dry weight of 400kgs, the total weight was well over half a tonne. That's a reasonable amount of weight for a 60 to move from a standing start. The maximum amount of ponies on the transom are 80 and the 80hp Yamaha four-stroke would make a great option for anyone wanting a little more power.

In the stiff chop, we achieved a nice cruising speed of 22 knots at 5000 RPM and

1 The 450 Barra Pro is one tough boat for its size.

2 The side console configuration leaves plenty of fishing space.

3 Yamaha's 60hp is a good choice for economy with the option of a 80hp for maximum power.

25 knots at 5600. The 60hp Yammie wanted at least 3500 revs to pull the Barra Pro out of the hole in the choppy conditions so my low rev speeds are not very accurate, however, even in the open water 16 knots was achieved at less than 4000 RPM.

The non-feedback steering was smooth and the hull performed well to adjustments from the helm. I could feel that typical skip that flat hulls give when turning hard in choppy conditions, giving me a much wider turning circle than a deep V hull would provide, but it was still smooth and responsive. Even reversing in the chop was not an issue. So overall it was a little bit wet (understandably so) but performed very well in the poor conditions.

FISHABILITY

Serious anglers are going to love the Barra Pro. The large casting deck, plenty of storage (including a battery tray for the electric and a bow mounted electric motor bracket) are all standard. There is ample room for a small sounder to be mounted on the bow and plenty of room for a main

sounder to me mounted on the gunwale or a smaller unit on the console.

Moving around the boat and getting from the casting deck to the live well is easy because of the side console. A seat base on the casting deck can accommodate anglers who choose to fish sitting next to the foot-controlled electric.

There's nothing new about this design but it is all there and makes for a very neat sportfishing vessel.

All up, this seems to be a well built and solid plate alloy boat. It's probably well worth checking out if you fancy the idea of a boat that will last you a lifetime. ■

Formosa 450 Barra Pro

LENGTH: 4.5m

BEAM: 2.1m

WEIGHT: (Hull) 400kg

POWER: As tested 60; Maximum 80hp

PRICE AS TESTED: \$28,990

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