



A great fun family dayboat for mixed water-sports

In the Formosa aluminium boat range there is a model for just about every trailerboat application in sizes from 4.3 – 6.6m in length. There are cuddy cabins, runabouts, consoles and centre cabs, along with a full range of great looking bowriders. On test this week is the entry-model bowrider, the 520 Classic, powered by Suzuki's evergreen 140hp four-stroke outboard.

OVERVIEW

- Expanded Formosa range for more choice

In recent years, Brisbane's Formosa Marine has revised and expanded its model range to encompass more than 60 models from 4.3m through to 6.6m and with two different product lines. The entry series is the Classic range, while the deluxe models are called Tomahawks.

The major difference between the Classics and the Tomahawks is that the latter are built with a sealed and self-draining alloy cockpit floor. The Classics make do with regular carpet over plywood cockpit floor – which is perfectly suitable for coastal boating and fishing. The plywood is also sealed to prevent rot or mould.

The use of a plywood floor in place of the alloy version (which is still an option) saves cost during construction and helps to reduce the purchase price of the boats within the Classic range. A lower purchase price is good news for budget boat buyers.

Within Formosa's two product lines there is bound to be a model to suit anyone looking for a well-priced, full-featured aluminium trailerboat – especially given the broad range of configurations and layouts to choose from.

The boats are also well made with plate-alloy vee-hull bottoms and topsides reinforced by a heavy duty external keel, and longitudinal underfloor stringer bracing system.

A few months ago we reviewed Formosa's 520 Classic Half Cabin – and were suitably impressed with its handling, performance, price and equipment levels. This review centres on its sibling in the Classic range, the 520 Bowrider.

PRICE AND EQUIPMENT

- Great price, good looks and lots of kit

The 520 Classic is the smallest and most affordable of the three models in the Formosa Classic Bowrider range. Brisbane dealer, Australian Marine Centre, has packages for this handsome looking craft starting at \$38,500 with a 90hp Suzuki four-stroke outboard and single-axle Redco braked trailer.

The test boat was packaged with the maximum power outboard in the form of Suzuki's larger 140hp four-stroke, giving the boat a very healthy turn of speed.

Other options included the two-tone paint, bimini cover, ski-pole, and cockpit floor lift-out kill tank. With boat and trailer registrations and inshore safety gear, the test package is still great value at \$43,500.

As you can see from the accompanying photos the 520 Classic has a pretty decent array of standard features – including the folding rear bench seat, elevated battery/oil platforms, transom door, cockpit carpet, bow seating/fishing platform (with infill board and cushion), glove box, super wide (fully welded) side coamings, rod holders, transducer brackets, boarding ladder and underfloor foam flotation to Basic standard.

We would have liked to see stern cleats fitted, but the boat does have rear handrails to which you can attach deck lines, etc.

INTERIOR LAYOUT

- Adaptable layout for fishing and family boating

The Formosa Classic Bowrider is designed for a mix of bay fishing and family boating and this is evident in the layout of the bow seating area – which has what is tantamount to a casting/fishing deck under the seat cushions. With the cushions removed and the included infill board slotted into place, this casting deck is a very useful 980mm wide x 2.1m wide.

The platform is sturdy too, so you can stand and fish from this forward deck or fit an optional lean seat or base for a pedestal chair.

With the carpeted infill board removed and the two vinyl cushions laid back down, the bow area reverts back to a very practical seating area. The padded back rests are positioned at precisely the right height to provide good back support so you can recline very comfortably.

A centre cushion can be slotted in between each seat to reconfigure the area into a full width sun lounge.

Beneath the side seats are lockers for stowing safety gear, towels, clothing, etc.

Low bow rails surround the seating compartment and double as excellent hand rails from within the seating area.

The large anchor well at the bow is neatly carpeted inside to dampen any anchor/chain rattles or clunks. A large bollard and bow roller complete the picture.

Moving aft, the helm, dash and windscreen configuration is practical, if a little plain. Starboard and port consoles are separated by a companionway which leads out through the centre-opening windscreen to the bow seating area.

The starboard side console has the helm with moderate sized fascia and steering wheel. There is provision for engine instruments, switch panel and possibly a small fish finder/GPS.

The side-mount throttle was very well placed and in fact the whole helm/steering position felt very comfortable, particularly when seated. The pedestal mounted helm chair is mounted on a fore and aft slider – so you can slide the seat well forward and tuck your legs under the dash.

The standard mechanical steering packaged with the test boat was a little stiff, but the helm position itself was excellent.

Opposite the helm there is flat dash space on the console to port, along with a hand rail and glove box.

COCKPIT AND TRANSOM

- A spacious, high volume cockpit

For its 5.2m hull length, the Formosa Classic Bowrider is a wide and high-volume boat. The maximum beam is 2.4m and this is evident in the size of the rear cockpit. Anglers will appreciate the space and 660mm high freeboard.

The cockpit itself has an overall length of 2.3m back to the transom while there is 1.3m of space behind the helm chairs. The width is an expansive 2.15m – measured to the hull sides underneath the elevated side storage pockets.

We were impressed with the neat, practical design of the rear cockpit and transom which has a folding and removable three quarter width bench seat up against the transom wall.

Behind it is a similarly wide shelf which houses the battery, oil tank, fuel filter, etc. These shelf compartments can also be sealed off with optional So-Pac hatch covers.

The transom door on the port side is a standard inclusion and this leads out to the wide boarding platforms and the boarding/diver ladder.

Other features include 250mm wide side coamings with coaming rails, two rod holders, optional ski pole, and an underfloor kill tank (optional) which can be lifted out so you can carry the day's catch over to the fish cleaning tables upon your return to the boat ramp.

ON THE WATER

- A comfortable ride, wide trim range and great stability

The 520 Classic Bowrider can be packaged with extra-longshaft outboards from around 90hp through to the maximum 140hp. Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes is likely to be ideal as we achieved a top speed 38 knots with a Suzuki 140hp on the transom. If you intend pulling a skier or dragging the kids around on tubes, then the 140hp would be ideal. If not, then you could easily throttle back to a 100 or 115hp motor.

The test package was not yet set up with engine gauges so we were limited to a top speed run. However, we did find a comfortable cruise speed of 16 knots at what we would expect to be between 3300 and 3600rpm.

At the 16-18 knot cruise the Formosa's 18.5 degree deadrise vee hull will handle bay and harbour seas with ease. The entry or forefoot of the boat is fine and it also has a very pronounced and sharp keel extrusion – which helps to cleave through chop.

The 520 Classic tracks very well and has a very wide trim range. This allows you to trim the bow down for running into the chop, or trim it out to run before the sea – or for maximum fuel economy in smooth waters.

With its wide beam and reverse angled chines the Formosa is very stable at rest and underway; it feels solid and substantial on the water.

We did find the Formosa threw a bit of spray about, but most of this was pushed out and away from the boat.

Through slalom turns there was some ventilation and prop slip, but we believe there was room for some adjustment with the height of the motor on the transom as well as the propeller fitted on the day.

VERDICT

- A keenly priced, versatile boat for bay fishing and family boating

Families looking for a versatile, multi-purpose day boat should give serious consideration to the Formosa 520 Classic Bowrider. You get a lot of boat for your dollar with this package, and it compares favourably with competitor models from other big name brands.

The Formosa is well built, well equipped, looks great on the water (or in the driveway) and it is easy to tow behind a family car – with a towing weight of around 1200kg. If ever there was a boat 'fit for purpose' this is it.

Formosa has recently developed a new transom design for its Sea Rod range, so keep an eye out for our full review of the Sea Rod 520 Runabout coming up soon!

LIKES

- >> Excellent family all-rounder
- >> Plenty of power from Suzuki 140
- >> Great value
- >> Excellent helm position
- >> Carpeted anchor well
- >> Comfortable bow seating area
- >> Bow area converts to casting deck

NOT SO MUCH

- >> Rudimentary/plain dash/fascia set-up
- >> Steering a little heavy
- >> No stern cleats
- >> No grab rail at helm

RATINGS

Overall rating: 4.66/5.0
Mechanical/equipment: 4.6/5.0
Packaging and practicality: 4.8/5.0
On the water performance: 4.7/5.0
Value for money: 4.9/5.0
X-factor: 4.4/5.0

Specifications:

Price as tested: \$43,500 including a Suzuki 140hp extra-longshaft (25") four-stroke outboard, Redco Sportsman single axle braked trailer, bimini cover, two-tone paint, ski-pole, lift-out kill tank, inshore safety kit for five adults, and boat and trailer registrations.

Priced from: \$38,500 including a Suzuki 90hp extra-longshaft (25") four-stroke outboard, Redco single axle braked trailer, inshore safety kit, and boat and trailer registrations.

Length overall: 5.35m

Hull length: 5.2m

Beam: 2.40m

Hull weight: 600kg

Towing weight: Approx 1,200kg

Deadrise: 18.5 degrees

Bottom alloy: 4mm

Topsides alloy: 4mm

Maximum power: 140hp

Engine as tested: Suzuki 140hp four-stroke outboard

Fuel: 115 litres

Maximum Persons: Five

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