

Formosa 520 Tomahawk

Plus-size interior and powerful, raised bows make the Formosa 520 Tomahawk a formidable offshore fishing machine. Test report James Hill, photos Baitbox.



In the last decade, Queensland plate alloy builder, Formosa Marine has quietly made a name for itself as a producer of really fine offshore fishing craft.

And what's really turned many offshore anglers especially is the Tomahawk series. You only have to glance over the Tomahawk models to see they're big, powerful hulls designed for pure fishing pleasure.

Recently, I had the chance to sample the very the latest of the Tomahawk tribe, the 520 Centre Console Tee-top. As the photos attest this one glorious fishing machine with powerful hull lines and plus-size interior that suits the big Aussie fishing bloke going offshore.

In fact, you get a lot of extra boat in the Tomahawk. For starters, she is actually 5.3m overall and sports a plus-size 2.4m beam matched by a high-sided hull.

Generous is the only way to describe the space provided by this Queensland-built plate alloy boat. The console design provides loads of room to fish 360-degree and you get a double helm seat.

Born and bred for the coastal fishing waters of Queensland it's no wonder the Tomahawk leans towards outdoor-style fishing, and big pelagic action. However, even on a cold Sydney winter's day as I tap away on this report, I'd take her offshore to fish our coastal waters. The big, Vee'd Tomahawk hull will just lap up our sloppy offshore Sydney waters and make a great reef-raider.

When testing on the warmer waters of the Gold Coast it was readily apparent the 520 Tomahawk is a darn nice boat in ocean swell and chop. She is a big, stable boat that's ideal for either pottering about the estuary system or heading offshore to coastal reefs and peaks.

Bottom bashers in particular are going to love the spacious interior with room to spread out a five-person party, no problem.

And just check out the features like a proper kill tank, a self-draining floor and a walk-through stern door! These are just some of the unexpected features you get in this mid-sized trailer fishing boat.

Other models in the Tomahawk range include the 550, 580, 620 and 660 models. All are a touch bigger than their model number would suggest and all come with the same sturdy plate alloy hull with raised bows. And they all feature the big interior space, self-draining cockpit and hydraulic steering. There are a number of deck versions too, including a centre cab in the bigger versions, but in the 520 you have the option of a centre console or rear console 'Territory' version. You can also have the 520 Tomahawk in a half cab, bowrider or runabout.

What's great about all the Tomahawk boats is they are solidly fishing orientated and come standard with things like a rear door, four rod holders in the gunwales, navigation lights and a split-bow rail for the anchor line.

While it mightn't quite be a Bluewater fishing boat, there's no doubt the Formosa 520 Tomahawk is a trailer boat you'll be confident in fishing medium range offshore. The stability of this hull makes the 520 Tomahawk a great platform for hauling big fish be it large kings, Spanish mackerel or even a sailfish.



Right now there are plenty of manufacturers who are chasing the plate-alloy offshore fishing market. However, a lot of these late-comers just don't have the experience of plate alloy like Formosa, which has specialised in this medium for over 16 years. You can see this immediately in the style of the Tomahawk construction and the clean and practical design of the boat.

For around \$48,000 as tested, the 520 Tomahawk looks pretty good value with a Redco single-axle trailer, 140hp Suzuki four-stroke motor, Tee-top, Garmin Echo 150 sounder and inshore safety pack. This is a dealer retail price and the good news is Formosa now has an extensive retail network, including A&J Outboards in Sydney (ph 02 9728 9311).

It would be possible to put a basic BMT package together in the range of \$43,990 using a 115hp motor and the same trailer.

I reckon you would spend an extra \$2000 on a decent sounder/GPS plotter and some offshore safety gear.

Design: This new 520 Tomahawk sports the same handsome style of her big sisters with smooth topsides and Carolina bow flare matched by a raked bow and fastback transom.

Our test boat looked a real stunner with her glossy black topsides and

two-tone colour scheme. The hull features lots of bow deadrise and the Vee'd bottom is carried right to the stern for a 17 degree transom deadrise. This is better than most alloy boats, especially ones not running water ballast.





The 520 Tomahawk certainly looks a serious fishing machine sitting on her Redco braked trailer and is enhanced by some classy topside graphics and quality paint job.

I love the balanced curved sheerline and the way all this flows to the fastback transom, where there's a full pod stern to support the bigger size four-stroke motor.

Access aboard is via a sturdy fold down set of alloy steps, stern landing platform and a rear cockpit door. This means you can actually carry a heavy fish box aboard and it's all very practical for real-life fishing trips!

Once on board you will find a spacious cockpit with carpet over a sealed alloy floor with drain scuppers

in the stern quarters. The latter have no-return flaps and is one of the better self-draining systems I've seen in an Aussie-built boat.

Another great feature of this centre console boat is the big two-seater helm seat behind a fairly wide console. This boat also had the optional Tee-top that gives you a canvas sun awning and also some extra grab handles. The whole unit conveniently folds down forward so the boat can be garaged when needed.

Now let's talk about construction. The 520 Tomahawk features an exceptional build-quality based on high tensile (5083 grade) 4mm plate alloy bottom and sides. This is backed by big 100mm x 90mm box-section ribs spaced well

apart. And the beauty of the box ribs is they provide a conduit system for the wiring through out the boat.

There are also gusset supports under the side decks and a box chassis in the floor. Foam filled buoyancy and a sealed cockpit floor complete the picture of a very safe boat for open water use.

The Tomahawk's sturdy construction ensures you don't get any squeaks or drumming noises when it's being pushed hard in rough water.

You can order this particular version with a 5mm bottom as well, but unless you were a commercial operator I reckon it would be over-kill.

With a hull weight of 700kg we estimate loaded trail weight of the



520 Tomahawk is about 1260kg, or comfortably within the tow range of the Toyota Kluger (2000kg), Subaru Outback (1500kg) or new Jeep Cherokee (2270kg). Certainly, she will be a boat suitable for under-cover parking because the Tee-top folds down at dash level.

Hull warranty is three-years with one year on all accessories.

Performance: Launching the 520 Tomahawk at the ever delightful Runaway Bay I soaked up the warmth of the Gold Coast sun after the chilly early morning start in Sydney.

Slipping the boat into the water was easy and once I kicked over the big Suzuki 140hp over she effortlessly glided out the calm waters of the little boat harbour.

Out on the Broadwater we found a freshening south south-east breeze kicking the bay into a steep chop against a run-out tide.

However, the sun was out and I wasn't going to hold back the horses as we hit the throttle. So once clear of the newly extended eight knot zone we had the 520 Tomahawk up and flying fast.

Size is a relative thing and this 'baby' of the Tomahawks really feels like a big boat and drives that way too. She just carved a path over the rough stuff and felt nice at speed.

I found the big volume hull likes a fair amount of up-trim to maximise her speed. However, we still weren't getting the full potential out of the 140hp motor. More about that shortly, but in the meantime the boat handled impeccably through turns and showed no signs of prop ventilation.

The big down-deflecting chines really keep the spray at bay and the ride was dry. Even going through the Seaway

entrance we didn't get spray drops on the windscreen!

Running the boat back from the Seaway we found the Tomahawk sat very nicely on the backs of the waves and didn't look like broaching. Admittedly, any idiot can broach a boat if you really try but the 520 Tomahawk is about as fool-proof as you can get for down-sea running.

One thing I also liked about the 520 Tomahawk is her particularly good balance underway – even in a cross wind. The helm position is also comfortable, especially with hydraulic steering making life very easy.

I also like the way the dash panel is kept clean so you can add your own choice of electrics, which is exactly what buyers like when they are serious fishos.

The one thing about the helm I didn't like was the vision for'ard became a bit limited when you steered sitting down. It's actually a better boat for steering in the standing position, which probably suits a lot of fishos. However, I'd like to see the floor around the helm raised just a bit to overcome this shortcoming.

Overall, the layout of the 520 Tomahawk is really sensible and especially great if you're solo boating as you can quickly walk from the helm to the bow or stern when docking or launch/retrieving the boat.

Power: The 520 Tomahawk is rated to run with single extra-long outboards of 115hp-140hp. It certainly is very happy with the 140hp Suzuki we used for this test as the following GPS results show:

3500rpm	17 knots
4500rpm	23 knots
5500rpm	31 knots

These figures didn't give the true potential of the boat and afterwards the Queensland dealer lifted the motor

a few holes and changed to a 21-inch propeller. This lifted top end speed to around 37 knots, so I assume the mid-range speed would also be a few knots more, though the bottom-end about the same.

I'd be pretty happy with this performance level, however, it would suggest to me the boat might be under-cooked with a 115hp motor. She is a big volume boat and at 700kg hull weight there's a lot to push. That said, it would be interesting to test her with the exciting new Yamaha F115B that's now the lightest four-stroke in her class. This is a brilliant motor and packs a 1.8-litre block for great get up and go. Another motor this boat could also suit is the Evinrude 130hp ETEC that has the extra perk of a two-stroke for getting you on the plane early.

The Tomahawk comes standard with an in-floor 115-litre fuel tank and this should give quite reasonable range for typical estuary and close coastal fishing. However, an optional long-range tank might be a good idea for fishing out wide to the Shelf.

Our test boat was also nicely presented for fishing with a closed rear battery compartment, dual batteries, master switch and fuel line filter, LED navigation lights and a six-ganger switch panel.

Deck layout: The business end of the 520 Tomahawk starts with an anchor bowsprit with split bowrail that feeds the anchor line directly to the anchor roller without a hassle.

Up front you also get an extra big, self-draining anchor well and mooring bollard. This is big enough to dump a lot of line when fishing in deep water.

Behind this is the for'ard fishing cockpit which is well protected and flanked by the low bowrail for extra support and protection.





The floor level is raised slightly here to improve the fishing angle but it's still pretty deep and more suited to offshore fishing than flat water river stuff.

Moving back you find wide walkways around the console and grab rails created by the console so crew can stand either side of the helm.

The helm console provides a nice, soft-grip steering wheel with high windscreen and an overhead console box for your radios. There's a double-level shelf under the dash for stowage and very comfortable two-seater console with swing-backrest. So this seat can be reversed for fishing!

A big, unlined stowage box in the console also provides plenty of dry-store for stuff like your life-jackets.

Moving into the rear cockpit you also find raised side pockets set high off the floor so they don't get in the way and are easier to reach into.

I also like the flat side decks that make a good spot to sit. It's also pleasing to see four rod holders provided standard and room to add extra ones as well.

The optional Tee-top gives you good shade over the cockpit and also a 6-pack rod rack overhead. Our test boat also came with the optional raised cutting board incorporating a live bait tank and four extra rod holders.

With waist-high freeboard, this is a terrific boat for bottom-bashers. You can really hook into big fish safely in this deep, walk-around cockpit with carpeted floor.

Verdict: Today's fishing enthusiast is extremely value-conscious and this is why they're more and more going for the console boat. In this respect we're only just catching up with the rest of

the world and it's a good thing too. It's better to buy a purpose-built fishing boat rather than a compromise craft with lots of stuff we won't ever need.

Some owners might like to add a bit more seating than what's offered here. The bigger Tomahawk 580 comes with an extra seating and this could be

arranged for this boat as well. However, I rather like the purity of this design with no-nonsense cockpit with few seats.

Importantly, the 520 Tomahawk offers very good value for money for the fishing enthusiast. Especially if you can share the cost with one or two mates, it would be a brilliant investment in future leisure time. Importantly, you would have a boat big enough to take the kids along – which is a nice thing as well.

I know many a fisho will certainly be proud to pull up to the ramp with this craft. She is an impressive looking machine and with care, this Tomahawk will look good for many moons and raiding parties to come!



BOAT TEST ANALYSIS

Boat supplied with Suzuki 140hp 4-stroke motor, Redco single-axle braked trailer, tie downs, Folding Tee top, plumbed kill tank, baitboard station, dual helm seat, two-tone colour scheme, Garmin 150 Fishfinder, self-draining floor, safety gear. Price \$48,000. Further information at www.formosamarineboats.com.au.

SPECIFICATION CHART

	Formosa	Quintrex	BarCrusher	Stacer	HainesHunter
Brand	Formosa	Quintrex	BarCrusher	Stacer	HainesHunter
Model	520Tomahawk	520Renegade	535SC	539Nomad	Prowler
Material	alloy	alloy	alloy	alloy	fibreglass
Style	console	s/console	console	s/console	console
Length	5.3m	5.2m	5.3m	5.3m	5.3m
Beam	2.4m	2.2m	2.1m	2.3m	2.1m
Rated power	140hp	90hp	100hp	130hp	115hp
Power as tested	Suzuki140	Evinrude90	Evinrude90	Evinrude115	Yamaha115
Hull weight	700kg	460kg	500kg	490kg	500kg
Fuel capacity	115L	95L	90L	80L	125L

STAR RATING

Finish	★★★★★	Helm Set-up	★★★★
Fitout	★★★★★	Fishability	★★★★★
Ride	★★★★★	Safety Features	★★★★
Dryness	★★★★★	Value for Money	★★★★★

*Data ESTIMATED by the TBF team when accurate information is unavailable. Maximum star rating 5 stars.