



Gone To Sea

Formosa Boats has refined its SEA-ROD 580 to be more practical and fishing friendly, as MARK WARD recently discovered.



Yammie's new 130hp four-stroke is a good match providing plenty of power and economy.

BRISBANE- based plate boat builder Formosa has been building and constantly refining its range of quality plate hulls for about 20 years. The development of Formosa boats has been relentless and it's interesting to watch this company grow as it continues to improve on what's already a very good product.

Customer and dealer feedback is the motivation behind many of Formosa's designs and this includes the SEA-ROD range of boats. The SEA-ROD incorporates a ballast system for stability at rest and is the flagship of the Formosa range. Whether it's offshore fishing where stability is a safety as well as a comfort feature, or you just enjoy the freedom of moving around the boat without the risk of being tipped overboard, the SEA-ROD hull is certainly worth a look. The ballast system is coupled with a reverse chine and the boys at Formosa have managed to get their hulls to sit with this chine at water level to add to the hull's stability.

The SEA-ROD ballast system incorporates four longitudinal chambers that run the length of the hull. Two chambers down each side of the keel and two chambers out near the beam. Most ballast systems simply fill the keel, which is effective, however, spreading the weight over the entire beam of the hull increases the effectiveness. Formosa has recently increased the deadrise of the hull and due to such a well designed ballast system, this has not reduced the stability of the hull.

For anyone who may be new to boating terminology, deadrise is the angle of the bottom of the hull. Deadrise is measured at the transom as most boats have a sharp entry point at the bow to cut through waves, but the actual measurement is at the rear of the hull. Yachts have a very steep transom, which is why they lean so much and are incredibly unstable. In contrast, a flat bottom tinnie is quite stable but at the expense of being rough as guts in choppy conditions. Formosa has increased the stability of its SEA-ROD hulls through the ballast system so much that they have recently increased the deadrise from 17 degrees to 18.5 degrees. This change seemed to make no difference to the stability at rest, however when the weather blows up and the trip back inside is a rough one, the increase in deadrise will make a huge difference. Achieving a stable hull with such good ride qualities is what the SEA-ROD is building a very strong reputation on.

The hull of the 580 has a 4mm plate bottom with longitudinal stringers and underfloor sub-frame. The ballast tubes are also part of this structure, ensuring that the hull remains rock solid even in the toughest conditions. Full welds to the deck and sides add to the build quality and as with all Formosa hulls I've reviewed over the years, the welds are hard to fault.

The 580 has 4mm side as well as 4mm bottom, a beam that's just under the legal towing maximum of 2.5m and dry weight of 790kgs. It has a maximum horsepower rating of 150 and a 150 litre underfloor fuel tank.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The central cabin position allows for good protection in bad weather while still giving all-round boat access; While the test boat had a small sounder, there is room to install a larger unit on the dash; Formosa now offers several transom configurations from fully enclosed to fully open.



Layout

The test boat was a walk-around cab and is ideally suited to offshore fishing with plenty of dry storage in the cab while providing a comfortable helm away from the wind, rain and spray. The helm had plenty of room to stand up while leaning against the seat along with a comfortable, adjustable seat for those who prefer to be seated. The control box is well positioned and on a clever angle, making it all very comfortable and functional.

The console has a standard but uncluttered look. Switches and gauges are all visible and in easy reach. The test boat had a Lowrance Hook-5 sounder and GPS and a setup like this would be required as room on the dash is limited due to a cutaway to allow entry into the cab. Having said that, there's enough room to have a large unit mounted but room for two separate units may be an issue. The test boat had a marine radio fitted low on the console but with the rocket launcher, this could be moved up high if preferred.

Underfloor storage includes room up front for safety gear and a good-sized kill tank at the transom. The kill tank drains and is removable for easy cleaning. There's additional storage in the side pockets and the transom has two large pockets for batteries, pumps and tools. Coupled with the cab, there's no shortage of storage.

The transom door opens to fold down flat, making a step that also extends the fold down seat, allowing it to go the full length of the transom. This leads out to a swim platform that's large enough to allow skiing or even a small diving platform with the inclusion of a boarding ladder.

SEA-ROD hulls now have a number of transom options that include opening the entire back of the boat up, having two transom doors, or a single door as in the test boat, or a completely closed transom. The option that allows the whole transom to be opened will suit small boat game or shark fishing anglers that can drag fish straight onto the deck without having to gaff or drag them



THE DETAILS

FORMOSA SEA-ROD 580
LENGTH OVERALL (LOA): 5.95M
BEAM: 2.45M
DEADRISE: 18.5 DEGREES
DRY HULL WEIGHT: 790KG
FUEL: 150 LITRES
MAX HP: 150HP (130 AS TESTED)
PRICE AS TESTED: \$52,990

over the side gunwales. This is a great idea for fish destined to be released.

Features that have been added include a fold down targa and rocket launcher, transducer brackets on both sides of the transom and an aluminium anchor well with a fully welded aluminium bowsprit. Formosa has moved away from a stainless bolt-on bowsprit to reduce electrolyses.

Performance

There's been enough said about the stability of the SEA-ROD and ride quality of the deep V hull. The test boat was powered by a 130hp four stroke Yamaha that had no problem pulling the hull up onto the plane and cruised at 51kph at 5000 RPM while pushing past 60kph at 5400 RPM.

The 580 SEA-ROD performed well when cornering at speed. Deep V hulls don't like planing at low speed – which is a fair compromise for the ride quality – but there was nothing else that could be faulted. It was simple to operate while doing everything that was asked of it from the helm.

Fishability

There are a number of advantages when fishing from a walk-around deck. Being able to walk around the cab allows the angler to play a fish in

from around the whole boat. This is a huge advantage, especially these days when so many anglers are fishing with light tackle. Spreading anglers around the entire boat means no more tripping over each other and having lines tangled.

The transom has a well designed bait board with room to store knives and spare tackle while opening up into a live bait tank. There were grab rails on the sides that extend from the swim platform to the rear deck that can be utilised by anglers while not getting in the way. It all works very well and is suited to both trolling and bottom bashing.

A new feature that's available on the SEA-ROD is the active transom. This allows the owner to choose from either a transom that opens up completely or a transom that's fully closed in. The test boat had the traditional single transom door and this, along with doors on both sides will also be available. This really customises the boat for anglers, depending on the style of fishing they do and the function of the boat. Set it up purely for fishing or add double doors for weekends away with the whole family.

Overall, the SEA-ROD has always impressed and the changes that Formosa has made just make it that little bit better while keeping the price extremely competitive.

The door to getting Australians onto the water

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