



Take a sneak peek...

Formosa 450 Barra Pro: Fishing Boat Review

Like Share 0 Tweet G+1



Image 3 of 16

A robust plate-aluminium side console with rock-solid stability, piles of storage space, and first-rate fishability

On a blustery Geelong day, Formosa's Barra Pro might seem like a long way from home. But this tough side-console plate boat was exactly what owner 'Wicky' ordered for his very special way of fishing. A great story to share here...

OVERVIEW

- Formosa's entry-level side console is built tough

The sub-5m aluminium fishing boat, aka tinny, rules in this country. But of those boats in this class with helm stations, rather than tiller steering, the once popular centre console is no longer king. Instead, the helm setup has been shunted aside, quite literally, to make way for the side-console boat.

A side console layout offers more casting space and fishability thanks to the helm being offset, usually, to starboard. That creates heaps of uncluttered flat-floor fishing area in the centre of your boat. Flat floor casting space is what every keen angler covets these days. Additionally, the forward raised casting platform means more room to store gear below.

Realising that anglers are standing to cast and stowing more stuff, good side-console boats are based on super stable hulls that don't lurch underfoot and which have piles of storage room. It's the hull shapes that have seen the most development and excitement in side-console boats these days

Formosa 450 Barra Pro built from a 4mm plate-alloy bottom and with 3mm topsides. It's different from most in that you get a robust, overbuilt, handbuilt, custom-built feeling in a small boat. It almost feels commercial... in the right way.

First released in 2012, the 450 Barra Pro has sold to anglers all around the country, says Duncan Blakely, the principal of the Brisbane-based boatbuilder. Although the orders for bigger offshore models are streaming in, the heavy-gauge Formosa side consoles are building a word-of-mouth following with adventurous fishos who might tow their rigs over corrugated roads and launch down embankments.

Enter our Formosa 450 Barra Pro owner onto the stage. Dressed in knee-to-noggin' fishing regalia — waders, waterproof fishing jacket, yoke-style lifejacket, beanie and polarised sunnies — Wicky is this boat's keen owner from Colac in the Western District of Victoria. The seasoned fisho and his Formosa 450 Barra Pro created a perfect pairing.

Wicky says he put a great deal of thought, experience and shopping time into his side-console purchase. He admits the boat cost a premium, but he weighed that up against lighter gauge boats on the market and compared stability, freeboard at rest when standing on the forward casting platform, and storage space in actual on-water tests.

No stranger to small fishing boats, Wicky has been a trout guide for 14 years in the Otways, a barra guide in Far North Queensland in the Eighties, and has done plenty of saltwater fishing. But his speciality these days is fly fishing for big trout in the lakes in the Western Districts of Victoria.

In particular, Wicky specialises in drogue fishing in places like Purrumbete and Bullen Mari, which are famous for their huge and wily trout. He needed a super stable boat that didn't lurch with the drogues (sea anchors) tied off to the rails, which slow his drift rate when casting to the mooching trout, and he needed superb stability when on his feet and shooting that fly line.

The local Formosa dealer Cameron MacDonald from Geelong Boating Centre joined us in the hire car to share Wicky's story about this 450 Barra Pro. As the boat sat on its trailer at Limeburners Boat Ramp in Geelong, showers scooted past and the wind gusted to 37 knots to the Fawkner Beacon on Port Phillip Bay. We had some sporty weather for a real boat test here.

Thankfully, the Formosa boats are made for rough and remote waters. They start with this 4.50m model with 4mm bottom and range up to a 7m model and a 7.2m commercial half-cabin in build at the time of writing for Park Rangers in the Northern Territory.

PRICE AND EQUIPMENT

- Optimised for fishing with the Yamaha F70 and fishing options

The Barra Pro looked pretty cool on the ramp with a blue hull wrap and jumping barra graphics, an economical Yamaha F70 four-stroke long-shaft outboard on the transom, and the Dunbier single-axle Glider trailer with GRP guards.

Wicky had the boat and trailer all tuned and tricked up for easy single-handed launching from his 4WD in back country. As we said, he is just the right buyer for this heavy-duty side-console fishing boat.

tank for fish holding, and a couple of other items like a rod locker.

"It's the bare necessities, which suits me fine because I can do the rest," Wicky says, showing us later in the day how he deploys his drogues for trout fishing. His tackle includes four Loomis fly rods from 5W-7W and a bunch of 6lb-14lb spin sticks.

"It's simple, it's easy... anything more complicated means you just have to do more before you can fish. It's your brain that catches the fish and you don't have to put batteries in it," he adds.

The base price for a Formosa 450 Barra Pro with F70 on Dunbier single-axle trailer is around \$33,500 drive away. Our special test boat with the aforesaid options cost around \$38,000 with all the additions.

So this boat costs a premium compared with a production boat, but remember it feels like a custom plate boat.

LAYOUT AND FISHABILITY

- A side console setup with oodles of storage

The Minn Kota 'Riptide' electric motor was mounted neatly on its integrated bow platform and sat nice and snug during some very bumpy bay testing conditions. The extra wide gunwales and coamings, which assist everything from rod holder mounted to sitting while, say, rigging, run to the transom. There are also heavy-duty side and stern rails that reinforce the robust nature of this boat.

The bow casting platform is headed by a lift-up section for concealed anchor storage, but the entire area is a catacomb of storage. With the hull's deep vee and freeboard, there's oodles of room in here for tubs of gear. The way Wicky had it set-up he could rip out all his tackle — you will be amazed just how much is in there when you pile it up — in just a matter of minutes.

There's a very supportive aluminium framework for the casting platform, the hatch lids are formply with plastic coating, but the flat floor itself is all carpeted marine ply. Under the floor hides a very decent 85-litre in-floor fuel tank to cater for a whole long weekend of fishing with this F70 four-stroke Yammie.

Back aft, there's a wide portside rod locker with room for a bunch of outfits. The boat has four seating spigots and two fold-down pedestal seats, so you can locate the passenger weight to offset the skipper's weight at the starboard helm. One up, well, side console boats do tend to run with a lean.

The transverse storage across the transom and raised aft casting area contained a central live bait tank with baffle that's big enough to keep a 4kg trout alive for photos before its release. Either side of this were battery storage, easy access to the fuel filter and separator and primer bulb, and a nice big locker to port for safety gear and stern lines.

The rakish 'Fastback' transom has a solid swing-up swim ladder, perfect as a step for accessing the boat on the trailer, non-skid platforms either side of the outboard, and what must be considered very neat dealer rigging. Thumbs up for Geelong Boating Centre for the set-up.

It's good to see heavy-duty grab rails built into the helm console, as part of the windshield frame,

HULL AND ENGINEERING

- Commercial build standards and very neat welds

It's the robust build — the 4mm bottom with 3mm sides compared with 3mm and 2mm sides on others — teamed with a side-console layout and the exceptional stability and storage space that attracted Wicky to the Formosa fold.

He says he went with Yamaha for reliability and Furuno because he's a real fisherman. Which real fishos might appreciate, as indeed they would his arsenal of carbon fibre Loomis fly rods.

Looking powerful, the hull shape is interesting with big downturned chines for lift and stability, to help displace water to the sides and keep you dry. There is also a lot of hull flare in the bow and a deep and sharp forefoot to slice the swells. During our test, the 450 Barra Pro did not bang. There were also no rattles. In concert, these things create the feeling of a high-quality plate boat.

"I tried other manufacturer's boats and brands and they are not as stable and then bang and, at rest, they have a low bow that is prone to shipping water. This boat has a bow-up attitude and is more balanced with greater freeboard," Wicky says, as we power out of Limeburners Ramp into some wicked weather.

ON THE WATER

- Smooth and super stable

With his drogue fishing method, Wicky does a lot of dead-rest and drift fishing. The full bow, 2.10m beam, buoyancy and stability of this boat is a real asset for fly and lure casting. With the bow and side drogues set, the stability is such that the boat doesn't heel with a gunwale down attitude but remains nice and level, dry and seaworthy.

"The reason for the whole boat and the best beam possible is because the side drogue pulls the boat down but this [450 Barra Pro] maintains its freeboard. And if caught in sloppy chop, the deep-vee sheers through it," Wicky adds, as he sets up his drogues.

Spinning a 12in Talon prop with the shift dampening system (SDS) in the hub, the F70 engages smoothly. After which, the Formosa 450 Barra Pro hull was quick to respond and plane. We were up and running at 22 knots in the 20-30 knot conditions and the boat was very smooth.

While turning the corner beam-on we did get wet. No stopping that in an open boat like this, I'm afraid. But a good jacket and the waders meant Wicky was just fine. I had my waterproof camera so all good here, too. Ordinarily, you would be powering well ahead of the spray. In 30 knots we had to back off.

VERDICT

A great side-console sportfisher and special boat

Somewhere mid-Port Phillip Bay I looked at Wicky and he proffered: "Just no bangs. I can't get a rattle out of it. We just gave it two big thumps [as we bashed into some decent swells] and there's not even a whack."

"I'm glad I chose it. My boat is stable as they come and just a great fishing platform. There's no other boat on the market that goes anywhere near this for storage, too," he says, following

The 450 Barra Pro certainly has a very solid feel about it and superb stability. It's perfect for fishing big rivers, bays, impoundments and wind-swept open waters from the Top End to alpine trout dams. It's a boat for big fish and fishermen and Wicky is pretty good at that...

"The wife asked me to bring a fish home for her dinner. 'Nothing too big dear' she said as I walked out the door. So I came back in that afternoon and slapped a 4kg brown trout down on the dinner table. 'Will this do love?' chortles Wicky, before retrieving his boat and heading back to the trout lakes.

LIKES

- >> Incredibly robust hull and build quality with no rattles
- >> Tremendous stability for lure and fly casting
- >> Heaps of freeboard in the bow for seaworthiness at rest and underway
- >> Cavernous storage for tackle and tubs
- >> Super economical fishing with the Yamaha F70 and 85-litre underfloor tank
- >> Great fishability from bow to stern

NOT SO MUCH

- >> Price premium for a robust -built plate-aluminium boat
- >> The very full bow will displace a bit more water and spray than conventional vee-hull designs
- >> Prefer to see marine ply or some other material than formply for the hatch lids.

RATINGS

Overall rating: 4.68/5.0

Mechanical/equipment: 4.6/5.0

Packaging and practicality: 4.8/5.0

On the water performance: 4.6/5.0

Value for money: 4.9/5.0

X-factor: 4.5/5.0

Specifications: Formosa 450 Barra Pro

Price as Tested: Our special test boat with Yamaha F70, Dunbier trailer and the abovementioned options cost around \$38,000 with Furuno sounder and more.

Priced From: The base price for a Formosa 450 Barra Pro with F70 on Dunbier single-axle trailer is around \$33,500 drive away.

Length Overall: 4.50m

Beam: 2.10m

Hull Weight: About 400kg

Transom: Long Shaft

Bottom Alloy: 4mm

Topsides Alloy: 3mm

Maximum Power: 90hp

Engine as tested: F70 Yamaha 80hp four-stroke outboard

Fuel: 85 litres

Maximum Persons: Four

Supplied by:

Geelong Boating Centre

Phone: (03) 5241 6966

Website: www.geelongboats.com.au

Read the latest Boatsales Network news and reviews on your mobile, iPhone or PDA at [the Boatsales Network's mobile site](#). Or download the [App for smartphone and tablet](#).

words & photos - [David Lockwood](#)

Published : Friday, 27 May 2016

Related Articles



New Haines Signature 550F fishing trailerboat

New wide-beam 550F offshore fisher with big boat...

Published: Monday, 30 May 2016



New Hanse 675 is a mini 'superyacht'

The biggest ever yacht from the German yard is...

Published: Monday, 30 May 2016



Riviera Festival proves a huge hit

Riviera celebrates its largest and most...

Published: Monday, 30 May 2016



2016 Boston Whaler 230 Outrage: Offshore Fishing Boat

Deep-vee 230 centre console with more comforts...

Published: Sunday, 29 May 2016

[More news](#)