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Journeying out when no other boat dared, David Lockwood discovers that when the big winds blow, the Sailfish 770 Platinum comes into its own. This maxi trailerboat is one cool cat.

There were no two ways about it: this was cat water. Cantankerous, uncooperative, and needing to be cut back to size with a cat of two hulls. With 25-30kt, or even more, in the gusts whistling across the shallow expanse of Sydney's Botany Bay, creating more potholes than the Hume Highway, our test bode well. You see, we had the cat for it. Indeed, the Sailfish 770 Platinum was eager to please with a pair of feisty 150hp Honda VTEC outboards – a \$3500 upgrade from the base 135hp engines – that, with variable valve timing and lift electronic control, had snappy acceleration at both top AND bottom ends (unlike ye 4-stroke outboards of old).

So, after running down wind, somewhere out past The Heads, we turned into the teeth of it, pointing the deep bows into the gale and planting the throttles. The twin outboards roared in unison, the big cat lifted up bodily and we fizzed across the top of the chop like a skipping stone. You had to hold on, of course, but there was tacit acknowledgement that, in these kinds of foreboding conditions, two hulls are better than one. And, to its credit, there wasn't any noticeable pounding in the tunnel of the Sailfish 770. Suffice it to say, it runs high off the water when you are on the throttles.

Of course, cats have long been popular in coastal ports where there are bars, large bays, confused waters and often long runs to reach the wide grounds. So it is with Sailfish from Ballina on the NSW North Coast, where there's one damn lousy bar and frequent onshore winds. Thus, the Sailfish is a product of its environment and, with a big spread of fishing options at factory level, you can make a cat well-suited to serious bluewater fishing right up and down the coast.

With the optional 2.5m trailerable beam (which doesn't require a permit to tow) instead of the 2.6m trailerable (with permit) and non-trailerable 2.8m beam, the demo boat was a beast. Even though it measures almost 28ft overall, the rig weighs just 3000kg, so it's potentially not such a burden to tow.

Having said that, it made the Toyota LandCruiser look like a Mini. The giant cat towers 3.6m from the ground on its custom Sailfish tri-axial alloy trailer with disc brakes and Al-Ko suspension. A lovely bit of work.

Although comparatively light, the cat was still an easy retrieval and, if you are familiar with towing boats, requires only some common sense when taking to the roads. Swing wide sweet chariot in the tight bends – for the rig measures more than 9m on trailer – select your service station to avoid taking out the hardtop and have a mate keep a lookout when reversing. Other than that, you're ready to hit the highway with a trailerboat that can fish when the going gets rough. Tow and go.

BUILT TOUGH

The huge Sailfish 770 is built (to USL code) from plate aluminium. The hull and transom are 5mm plate, the chines are 6mm and there's a solid 25mm keel. An externally and internally welded box-section grid provides stiffness. The custom extruded aluminium gunwale cap adds to the finish. Add positive (slab) foam flotation and a self-draining hull and little wonder NSW Maritime and Coast Guard are among Sailfish's customers. The warranty is two years on the hull.

BEYOND GOLD ... THIS IS PLATINUM!

I thought the welds were nice and clean. There's clearly a lot of pride in workmanship here. The two-pack paintwork was similarly professional, while the engineering goes beyond what you'd expect in a tinnie. That probably stems from the fact that Sailfish make big boats: the entry-level model is a 6.2m cat and the biggest measures 14.7m. Sailfish has grown to be the market leader in alloy cats.

There's also something to be said for NSW dealer Webbe Marine, which has been selling these boats for 12 years. After shedding its agencies for mainstream tinnies and bowriders, it's now concentrating on the specialist cat market – it also sells the Glacier Bay boats from America – where the customers are seasoned and know what they want. Due to the impending long-range nature of this 770 Platinum, there were some factory options fitted for overnighting and, of course, for serious fishing.

The boat has twin 180lt fuel tanks. Twin 250lt tanks are optional and you can go bigger again on the non-trailerable wide-beamed 770s. It also has 65lt of water (up to 200lt possible), a deck shower in the cockpit, and a step-down WC in the cabin with second private cold shower and electric Jabsco loo linked to a 40lt holding tank.

Add the transverse double bed in the cab (not to mention the sleeping potential on deck) and you have the goods to venture to outer islands, reefs, canyons and nearby ports for the weekend. The demo boat was also fitted with an 85lt Isotherm 12V cockpit fridge and a small sink. An optional cockpit lunch table was provided and stowed in the cabin.

A gas-bottle locker is built into the transom, requiring only a barbie on the rail for post-fishing cookups. Access to the dual heavy-duty batteries, with separate engine start, was nice and direct. The boat was fitted with optional underfloor electric bilge pumps, and I noted Racors fuel filters with clear inspection bowls under the transom, along with the dual Hydrive hydraulic steering system. With twins on the tail, there was no discernible torque at the wheel.

WHEELHOUSE ROCK

Besides the fine hulls, which flatten to running planks to assist with planing, onboard cruising comfort can be attributed to the hardtop that, with safety glass, creates an all-weather enclosure. I also didn't discern any spray from the station-wagon effect that plagues some other cats, either. So consider this a dry boat. Among the options, a wiper was fitted as well.



The fixed hardtop has a GRP internal liner for a real sense of class, side-opening windows for ventilation, and there was a toughened-glass windscreen with tinted side panes. Under the hardtop you'll find a handrail, radio box for the VHF and stereo, and storage compartments for personal effects. The boat's lighting plan included fluoros and trick LED cockpit lights, plus floodlights mounted on the hardtop for fishing.

The dash housed one of the new widescreen Navman 8120 sounder/GPS plotters with, I must say, a nice, bright colour display. The transducer was transom mounted and, in the conditions, I can't comment on its ability to read at speed. The screen was also wired to a supplied DVD player so you could watch movies as you fish.

The boat had a nice spread of switches and a Maxwell windlass for hands-free, shallow-water anchoring. You can order the boat with an optional deep rope locker if you're into swinging on the pick in 60 fathoms.

Twin throttles, a good sturdy wheel, Honda engine gauges, Sailfish helm seats (rebranded Relax models) on seatboxes, and plenty of head and shoulder room complete what was, during our test, a comfortable and pleasantly protected helm.

FISH READY

The cockpit on the Sailfish 770 is just huge and, with the inherent stability of the cat hull, it plays into the hands of the gamefisher – whether that be a light- or heavy-tackle angler, a lure troller or someone who prefers to berley all day. The floor was topped with manmade Flexiteak, which is more forgiving than checker-plate alloy (but it can get rather hot), and with padded coamings and toe kicks you can gain great support. The optional Relax Moreton Bay chair will suit medium-tackle duties. However, while nice and sturdy, the big above-deck cleats will have to be watched when tracing green fish.

There's a built-in berley pot, decent plumbed livebait tank with transom pickup and Johnson pump with QuickFit deckwash hose, plus a cutting board and insulated square subfloor fishbox for, presumably, table fish. If you want a longer fishbox there's an optional deck-mounted alloy number. Or chuck an Evercool aboard. Full-length sidepockets provide somewhere to stash the gaffs, tagpoles and suchlike.

The hardtop had a rocket launcher for seven outfits. There were welded in-gunwale rodholders, although each was seemingly angled out at about 30



SPEC CHECK

SAILFISH 770 PLATINUM

PRICE AS TESTED

\$191,500 with twin upgraded Honda 150hp VTEC outboard engines, custom tri-axle Sailfish trailer and options.

OPTIONS FITTED

Special 2.5m trailerable beam, larger outboards, deluxe roof extension and enclosed hardtop, double bed, step down shower and toilet with holding tanks and pumpout, freshwater sink unit, fridge, windlass, house battery system, Navman electronics, Reelax 14ft poles and folding bases, Reelax Moreton Bay gamechair, tackle drawers, Flexiteak cockpit sole and more.

PRICED FROM

\$145,000 with twin Honda 135hp VTEC outboards engines, custom tri-axle Sailfish trailer and options.

GENERAL

Material: Plate aluminium, 5mm bottom, 6mm chines, 3mm sides

Type: Catamaran with symmetrical hulls

Length overall: 8.4m

Beam: 2.5m

Draft: Approx 0.6m

Deadrise: n/a

Weight: About 2900kg dry

CAPACITIES

Berths: Two, plus on deck

Fuel: 2 x 180lt tanks

Water: 65lt (holding tank 40lt)

ENGINE

Make/model: Honda 150hp

VTEC outboard engine

Rated hp: 150hp @ 6000rpm

Displacement: 2.35lt

Weight: About 220kg

Gearbox ratio: 2.14:1

Props: Solas s/s 17in x 14in

SUPPLIED BY

Webbe Marine, 27 Marshall

Road, Kirrawee, NSW 2232

Tel: (02) 9521 7944

www.webbemarine.com.au

BUILT BY

Sailfish Catamarans,

Alstonville, NSW 2477

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degrees, which could see the line skip the tip roller on a fast-running strike. Plus Reelax 14ft outriggers in folding Reef Rigger bases mounted off the hardtop, so you can still scoot around the cabin sides when the poles are set. Good thinking.

Meanwhile, the co-pilot gets a nice view of the lures once their seat is swivelled under the hardtop. The seat box contains an insulated icebox in which to carry your lunch and/or deadbaits, and there were two five-drawer tackle lockers in the seat boxes as well. All told, fuel, bait, ammo and ice were all that was left wanting. And, as with most big cats, anglers and crew will love the transom walkthrough

between the outboards for closing out the fight on a stubborn fish or when sinking the gaff.

CAT ATTACK

Spinning Solas stainless steel 17- by 14-inch props, the twin 150hp Honda outboards, which is the maximum rated power for the 770, produced a top speed of 35-36kt at 6000rpm. This equates to some pretty handy cruise speeds: 28.6kt at 5000rpm, 26kt at 4500rpm and 19.5-20kt at 3000rpm. At 3500rpm, the boat held its own, punching into the tempest at 17kt with 45kt apparent wind, hence the reduced speed. You'll get a similar effect when you tow the boat, too.

From a standing start, the cat comes out nice and level with full intrim. Trolling speed produced a pretty foamy

wash on the demo day, but there's no disputing this boat's ability to get you to the fishiest grounds – wherever they may be – where the not-so-secret key to fishing success is getting a line and lure (or five) in the water.

Measuring 8.4m overall, the Sailfish 770 is a maxi trailerboat with the waterline length and height to bridge the worst wind waves you're likely to encounter. If it weren't for this boat (and this test, conducted when no other boats were about), two hapless scuba divers, who we discovered exhausted and waving for help as they drifted towards New Zealand, probably wouldn't be here today.

So next time you've canned the day's fishing due to lousy weather, take a drive to the ramp. It wouldn't surprise to see a Sailfish like the 770 there, with crew unloading gear and dragging something big on to the cleaning table. More power to the cats when that wind blows up. 🌪️



HIGHS

Maxi trailerboat that can fish greener pastures and even greener, or rougher, water.

Great rough-water performance from an easily driven alloy cat hull.

Good, tough build, tidy welds and big-boat engineering.

Honda VTEC outboards had snappy acceleration through the rev range.

Stable at rest, with a massive cockpit for serious fishing. Reelax outriggers and chair helped create a neat, medium-tackle gameboat.

Long-range performance and cabin with amenities for staying away for the weekend.

Established brand and dealership with expected good support and resale value.



LOWS

Big-ticket trailerboat.

Requires a maxi 4WD tow vehicle, and some nerve, to haul around town.

Above-deck cleats won't be loved by gung-ho crews trying to trace a green fish.

High windage will lead to a fast drift rate.

Destined to experience some typical cat tunnel slap when trolling into a short headsea.