


F & B FIELD TEST

Glacier Bay 2270 Isle Runner



Every once in a while a new boat comes along that is completely different from all the boats that have gone before it. Such is the case with the new American built Glacier Bay Cats now available in Australia. They bring with them a completely new attitude to the design and construction of power cats as we've known them. In this special report, Editor Peter Webster throws away the old benchmarks and looks at something old - and something completely new.



After what seems to be the best part of a lifetime working in and out of Australia's substantial fleet of power cats, we approached this Glacier Bay test with no little trepidation.

Elsewhere in this magazine we have a special report where we try and answer the perennial question about whether a cat is better value than a mono, and we examine the two most commonly asked questions. That concerns the issues of whether power cats do have a softer ride than monos, and the second part of the debate, whether they are more stable at rest or underway than their monohull counterparts of similar size.

Here though, we're looking at the very latest in thinking from Glacier Bay Catamarans, a company started back in 1987 by its charismatic founder Larry Graf. For nearly 20 years, Graf and his team at their sophisticated plant in Seattle, USA, have been working to develop a wide range of power catamarans that now runs from this 2270 model through to their newly released 3470 twin diesel flybridge cruiser which recently debuted at

the Miami Boat Show.

Glacier Bay cats are different to most cats in Australia because Australian power cats, by and large, basically use two small planing hulls, one on each side of the boat, that in operation are closer to a conventional planing boat (albeit with two hulls joined in the middle) compared to the Glacier Bay (and interestingly enough, Australia's Dominator Cats) which are in fact more closely linked to the design of asymmetric hulls and are closer to true displacement shapes.

It's not our intention here to get knee-deep in mumbo jumbo about hull shapes. Suffice to say that many years ago most Australian power cat builders decided that true displacement hulls such as those found in the Glacier Bay range, were not as good as the planing type hulls the Australian boat builders developed from the early 1970's.

Most Australian cat manufacturers felt that the finely drawn, not to say skinny displacement hulls, whilst offering an incredibly soft ride, were too sensitive to trim and lateral movement, resulting in most Australian manufacturers



opting to develop what is tantamount to the hard chine planing hull on each side of the powered catamaran.

Who is right? According to Glacier Bay, their fine, incredibly sharp displacement hulls are the only way to fly, because they offer numerous advantages - the most powerful of which is an incredibly soft ride in choppy water.

The downside is that because they offer such a soft ride in choppy water, they do tend to be a bit more wandery than most Australians like at the helm, and are much more sensitive to trim through the twin outboard motors.

With all this in mind, and having studied the Glacier Bays at first hand here at Runaway Bay over a couple of months since they arrived, we were very keen to try them out on our own, going through our usual test parameters.

Design

As noted, and as you can see in the attached photo, Glacier Bays have the most amazingly fine or sharp hulls I think that are in production today. They are truly a work of art from a fiberglass manufacturing

point of view as all of the bow sections of the boat have to be literally hand built.

This is where the Glacier Bay's northwest American coastline heritage becomes very evident - these boats are actually made to bounce if they hit logs or other imponderables such as ice and semi-submerged objects in the wild and woolly northwest country towards Alaska.

Over the years, Graf and his team have developed an exceptional reputation for the quality of their product, primarily because Graf, a highly qualified engineer, is passionate about the importance of doing a job correctly the first time. It's a discipline he's obviously drilled into his 250 strong team, because the fit out and finishing standard on these Glacier Bay cats is absolutely world class, and a long way ahead of comparable Australian built boats - cats or monos.

But in design terms, they are typical cats - high sided, narrow hulled, with a moderate tunnel and a nacelle down the throat of the cat.

Curiously, they haven't picked up on the one thing the South African's gave

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powered catamarans - the reverse lip or spray cheater that is installed nowadays in most cats in South Africa and Australia. This lip is fitted ahead of the nacelle usually, and its purpose is to stop the back curl of water rushing up the tunnel and then lipping around over the gunwale capping, to be blown into the face of the skipper as the boat moves through the seaway in anything up to 30 knots. This fine spray can be infuriating sometimes because it is simply a product of the tunnel mist

with a maximum beam of 2.56m (8'5"). With the engines up, it draws 400mm (16") and has an approximate dry hull weight of 1589kg (3500lbs).

Interestingly, it's only rated for 2 x 115hp outboards, and has a total fuel capacity of 476L (126 gallons).

As you would expect, the GB2270 is built for 25" outboard legs, and they specify a maximum engine weight of 195kg for each engine. According to the factory's figures, the craft is capable of around 40 mph

the port side through a lockable cabin door. This is clever, because it gives full height headroom and privacy down below when the toilet is being used, or if the crew just want to change clothes out of the glare of passers by at the marina.

The helm is traditional, as you can see in the photographs, and nicely set up with enough space for today's electronics.

On the port side, the crew have a sidesaddle double seat which is very comfortable, and like everything on this boat, beautifully made with the best of materials.

Further back to the cockpit, hatches open up all over the place to reveal a

boat that is obviously built by engineers who have appreciated the need to get into every single nook and cranny on the boat - and that's something Australians

could really study to good effect.

The two big fish lockers or kill tanks in the cockpit exemplify the wonderful attention to detail the GB team have applied to this boat. As you can see in the attached pic, lift up the locker and you'll find not only is it drained - but they even remembered to put a guard around the bilge pump in each locker.

It's this sort of meticulous attention to detail that distinguishes the Glacier Bay from anything we've ever seen before in Australia.

Also of note is an ingeniously simple cutting board set-up. It reminds the writer of dozens of similar Teflon cutting boards we've made over the years - but this one is seriously clever in the way they've located

the bait prep area over the transom; this is an idea we can all adopt very easily. (And I will!)

Features in this area abound, but we were pleased to note the Americans have also realised the importance of keeping the steering arms out of harm's way under a dedicated platform. Again, they've sensibly built in a hatch in the platform itself to give direct access to the hydraulic pump used for the steering. Full marks, again.

Overall Finish

As you can see in the attached lists, the Glacier Bay 2270 is comprehensively finished - so much so we were struggling to find anything they hadn't installed.

I cannot recall seeing such a comprehensively fitted out craft for many, many years - let alone one of this sophistication and size.

What is particularly interesting to the writer is that there is nothing really on the GB2270 that we don't already know about in Australia or can't buy at our local Bias chandlery.

What makes this American boat so special is not so much the quality of the fittings they've used, but the completeness of the boat's inventory - not only have they thought of everything that needs to be done to make the boat work properly, they haven't skimped on the quality of fittings, and when they installed them, they've used their brains to make sure the equipment works properly.

There are at least a dozen hatches around the boat which open up to reveal boarding ladders, battery access, fish lockers, storage areas - and in every case, the catch or latch, sink or drain is properly installed and goes somewhere as it should.

“ . . . these are true displacement hulls, meaning that they lift up and go faster than their waterline speed allows them by virtue of the buoyancy in the hulls, not the hulls' planing surfaces. . . ”

being squished back around the throat of the cat, and being blown, at the last minute, over the gunwale capping.

The South Africans developed a lip about 25mm high that actually catches this blown back spray, and makes sure it doesn't come around the gunwale - something we've become so used to it was surprising to come across 'lip spray' again in the sophisticated Glacier Bays.

Hopefully Larry Graf and his design team will do what all the Australian manufacturers have done - and copy their South African colleagues' innovation!

Looking at it in the big picture sense, the 2270 is basically a cuddy-cabined twin hull catamaran that measures 6.71m LOA (22')

(64km/h) and has a range with 10% reserve, of 273nm (506 km).

It does have a water tank - 23L (6 galls) and a wastewater capacity of 17L (4.5 galls).

They reckon it weighs 3,132kg with the trailer and as you can see from the attached features list, is comprehensively finished and built.

As a cuddy-cabin model, the downstairs accommodation is typical of this size and type of cat. The designers have basically acknowledged they're better off with a big wide, king size berth than try and develop athwartship berths, or come in through the centre of the cabin over the tunnel and have two side berths.

Here, the cabin is entered down two steep-to stairs on

It is so refreshing to walk onto a boat that is actually finished.

This is almost the complete opposite of most Australian boats which require the customer to have quite a high level of knowledge in order to get the boat ready for its chosen task - be it fishing, cruising, waterskiing etc. It's almost impossible to buy an Australian cat that doesn't require several weeks of additional fitting out and sorting out before it's ready to perform and achieve its maximum potential.

The GB 2270 is going to do to Australian cats what the Four Winns, Searay, Chaparelle have done to Australian standards of monohull building. These imported craft are forcing Australian boat manufacturers to lift their game to meet this competition from overseas, or risk losing the business altogether.

That said, I don't think Glacier Bay will have quite the same impact on the power cat market in Australia as Four Winns, for

example, has had on locally built trailerboats. Cats here have a more utilitarian or pragmatic foundation where-in most buyers spurn finishes that are too soft or can't be left out in the Aussie weather without covers, etc. Nevertheless, I suspect Glacier Bay will open up an entirely new, hitherto untouched market for very well finished cats in Australia that we didn't even know existed until 2006 when a small group of boats arrived from Seattle.

Ride Qualities

Powered by twin 115hp Suzukis, the Glacier Bay 2270 is hardly likely to win any ski race titles, and would actually qualify as being fairly slow by local standards.

I can see why Glacier Bay restrict the horsepower to 115hp outboards. Because the hulls are so fine, I'm not sure that putting more horsepower on the transom would actually generate much more performance. You see, what's so interesting about these hulls is that they actually don't

plane at all - these are true displacement hulls, meaning that they lift up and go faster than their waterline speed allows them by virtue of the buoyancy in the hulls, not the hulls' planing surfaces.

This is quite different to the Australian concept, and whilst Hookham's Dominators go down a reasonably similar sort of road, Hookham years ago realised the importance of developing planing characteristics towards the after section of his hulls - thus he too joins the rest of the Australian brigade by having his Dominators become planing boats once they've climbed over their bow wave.

Here, that doesn't happen - the Glacier Bays simply run along in the "tube" created by the hulls, and as they go faster, they actually lift up on the buoyancy created by the hulls themselves.

A very simple analogy of this is to imagine a long skinny 4 or 8 man crew rowing boats at the Olympic Games. These craft are

incredibly energy efficient, because they run on the buoyancy of their incredibly light hulls slicing along the top of the water within their own hull shape.

This is what is happening to the GB's - and it's one of the reasons why the boats are claimed to be extremely fuel efficient ie, the hulls are more easily driven along the water instead of trying to climb on top of it.

Now this is getting into hydrodynamic bump which is really a bit academic as far as the writer is concerned, because at the end of the day, what really matters is "How does the GB go?"

The answer my friends, is not blowing in the wind - you can feel it out in the ocean. This GB2270 is without doubt the softest cat in its class the writer has ever driven - bar none. It is exquisite to drive, and cat aficionados all over will absolutely delight in its sensitivity, its ride, its walking ability and its softness.

Even more amazing was the head sea test. We turned



it round and ran straight into a head sea which was rising 1.5-1.7m offshore to make quite certain we were filling the tunnel wherever we possibly could.

I have not driven a softer cat into a head sea in this class (size) before, and as we continued to increase our speed directly into the sea, it was head shaking, disbelief that quickly turned to joy at the sheer exhilaration and excitement of driving such a beautiful craft into such conditions, whilst producing such an extraordinary outcome.

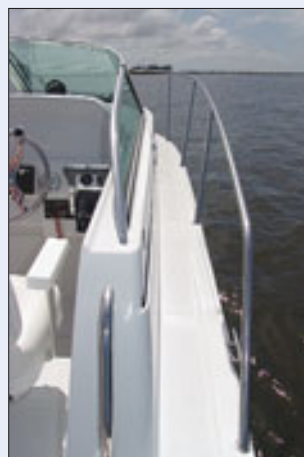
Now before readers start thinking that these GB's float across the water like a magic carpet, be assured they don't. At various stages of the performance envelope, on different points of the compass, sheer physics takes over and obviously enough, the boat has to lift and fall with the dynamics of the ocean state.

Driven too hard, it will start banging and thumping too, or getting decidedly rock and roly at really high speeds in beam seas.

However, back in the real world, and cruising out to the fishing grounds as we do on a beautiful Saturday morning, I don't think there is a softer riding boat made or available in Australia in its class. Further, I would rate it as being fully 10-15% faster than any of our cats straight into a head sea situation.

Off the wind, the gap isn't as much because there's some fabulous cats built in Australia too, let's not forget - but in an overall sense I think the Glacier Bay people can take great heart to know they have produced in this class at least, the softest riding cat in Australia and a craft that is so much softer than any other monohull of this length, the gap is embarrassingly wide.

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Handling

As usual, I did my 2 miles radius, 360 degree sweep which is a good test to find out how a boat performs on all points of the compass. We ran several hundred metres on every single point of the compass in a sea state that was very typical of the sort of conditions one finds offshore around Australia at the point where you start thinking that "in an hour or two I'll have to give it away and go back in."

So it was nigh on perfect for testing a boat of this calibre, because ironically, seriously rough water doesn't really produce meaningful test information because there are so many other factors that come into play ie, the skill of the skipper, the set up and balance of the boat, its fuel load, propping, and so on.

I much prefer test conditions like we had here off the Gold Coast for the GB 2270 because they more

truly reflect the sort of conditions that people encounter when they go out for a normal day's fishing or cruising.

In that context, the GB is very much a boat for cat people - and I think the more experience the cat skipper has, the greater will be his appreciation of this craft.

Conversely, I think that people coming out of monohulls will find the boat a bit hard to work out in the beginning, because it is so incredibly soft and unless you've learned to 'walk' the cat through the ocean, you really can't achieve its full potential - indeed, it will feel decidedly wandery and what initially feels like a degree of instability.

In fact, it's none of those things, it's simply a reflection of the fact that these hulls are so fine, so sharp, that every time they lift up and go down into the water, the weight of the boat drives them in much further than you'd normally expect in an Australian cat, much less a monohull. So you tend to get this 'roll' from one side to the other which of course experienced skippers very quickly latch onto as being the ideal structure to walk the cat through the ocean.

Once this technique is mastered, the GB is as noted, absolutely exquisite to drive. It is so sensitive to trim, it can be set up to the nth degree to suit the skipper as befits the conditions on the run out to the Shelf in the morning. Then, you are usually working in bigger, lazier swell movements across the ocean, as distinct from most Australian conditions in the afternoon when we tend to come back with 3/4 following seas that are standing up to 1.8-2.20m. In these sorts of conditions - 3/4 following seas - the

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Glacier Bay cats, like Australian cats for that matter, are absolutely in their element.

Such is the sensitivity that the skipper can pick and choose his way through the waves, stand back behind a curling break as he comes into the bar, stop if he wants to - come about and go out and do it again, just for the sheer fun of it.

They really are delightful boats to drive, and extremely safe in the right hands.

Now there's nothing to read between the lines there, either - but I do suggest that for Glacier Bay to achieve their maximum potential in Australia initially, they will have to put a lot more effort into making sure the people who demonstrate these craft know what they're doing and have considerable cat experience.

Otherwise Glacier Bay can find themselves in a situation where the blind are leading the blind - and the demonstration would be very disappointing as a result.

If I was in charge of marketing - I'd retain a

couple of veteran abalone divers who have probably given away diving, but still have the skills from working the Ab boats in their cats over half a lifetime in whatever seas that were running on the day. Ab divers don't go home when it gets rough.

These are the sort of people who will absolutely fall in love with the Glacier Bays - and they're the sort of people GB need to demonstrate these craft if they're going to make the impact they deserve to make in Australia.

In closing this point, I'd just like to observe for readers who may be a bit alarmed or worried about this reference to walking the cat offshore and 'sitting on the back of big ocean waves' (etc).

Don't get me wrong here. These craft are so good in their basic handling, you could put your 7 year old grandson Johnny in charge at the helm for the run down the Hawkesbury, because anybody - literally - could drive the Glacier Bay completely safely and competently in normal day

to day conditions.

I'm simply making these comments for our readers who do genuinely work wide offshore, run to the Swains, the Montebellos, wherever. Many F&B readers are extremely experienced bluewater seamen, and they want to know from F&B how the boat will perform wide offshore when the land mass has long since dipped below the horizon.

If they're putting out \$150,000-\$250,000 on a cat that is unknown to them, they look to magazines such as F&B for in-depth dialogue on the potential of the boat - and I don't want that to be misconstrued by people who do not have such expectations or need from their bluewater craft, to be seen as something that's a bit scary and requires a level of skill they've had no chance to learn at this point in their boating career.

The GB's though, are probably the perfect cross-over boat.

How good is it to know that if you live in Sydney, you have a gorgeous boat to work in the Harbour, to watch the festivals, enjoy the fireworks off the Bridge - and the following weekend jump into and quite simply steam up to Port Stephens and/or down to Jervis Bay? These boats have that capability and sure, it might take a complete beginner a little bit of training and practice to develop its full potential, but that training is what I'm talking about, and that GB need to focus upon.

If GB buyers don't have those skills on start-up, then it will be up to the GB team in Australia to find skippers who can impart that knowledge as part of the GB sales package.

Application

Well, we've really given

the game away in that last section, haven't we? This is a beautiful boat for just about anything, and especially for day trips on the Harbour, up the Hawkesbury, around to Westernport, up and down the Gulfs - there's just about nowhere these boats couldn't be used with great success and enjoyment.

They have a special role to play for some of our older readers like the writer who are troubled with back or possibly hip problems, and really are looking for a genuinely softer ride to make life on the water more enjoyable. As far as cruising across Sydney Harbour chop or running across Moreton Bay to Tangalooma, for example, I've never been in a softer riding boat of this size.

If an exceptionally soft ride - the softest in its class - is an issue in your boat purchasing decision, put the glasses down: the GB's have the solution.

It's beautifully finished, significantly better than any of the Australian craft and obviously very well built too, although I'm not sure it's necessarily any better than what we do in Australia, because as far as construction and engineering is concerned we build some pretty darn good boats in this country.

In design terms, it lends itself to day boat work of mixed kinds ie, cruising on the Harbour would be very pleasant in this craft, and taking a bunch of friends and kids out for the day would be an absolute delight. It's easy to get on and off into the water, really easy to drive and has all the comforts one looks for in a family spending a day on the water.

On the weekend, the fishing crew can jump onboard at dawn on Sunday morning and head off to

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Brown Mountain, or up to the Norah Canyons with more personal comfort than most fishos have ever experienced - in a boat that is so stable at rest and on the pick it's a fantastic platform.

It will be easy to clean and maintain too, because it's all very well moulded fibreglass and everything drains to a central sump pump, prior to being pumped overboard.

But whether the skipper is interested in light tackle sportfishing or bottom fishing for table fish, it's hard to imagine a more comfortable way of doing it.

Criticisms

Like so many of these American craft, Glacier Bay really hasn't spent quite enough time on this model developing the soft top or hardtop arrangement that it really needs 'downunder'.

They all look sleek and lovely when there's nothing to interrupt the flowing lines of that superbly shaped windscreen, but when some dill whacks on a typical Aussie blue canvas canopy it's going to look like shit and spoil the lines completely.

And I must say, I wasn't too impressed with the canopy set up that Glacier Bay made, either - I haven't seen it in the flesh, just studied the pictures in their media kit. (*See inset*).

I recognise this scarcely makes me an expert on how they do it, but it still doesn't look right. If I was in the market for one of these boats I'd have a serious talk to Phil Baker and the team at Craft Covers about getting this world ranked genius of covers to come up with something special that

befits the design integrity of the GB 2270.

Interestingly enough, all the Glacier Bay models, like most of those from the likes of Four Winns, Searay, Bayliner (etc) all have this American obsession with low, swept back windscreens. Yes, they all look fantastic on the Boat Show floor under the spotlights next to the potted palms.

But out there on the bluewater, the windscreen set up on this boat is bloody dreadful. We came back from a couple of hours on the water looking like a trio of well cooked lobsters. Because if the sun didn't get us, the wind sure as hell did, and given the fine mist of spray that flips over the forward gunwale rubber, the skipper (me!) ended up with too much salt, too much



wind and far too much sun for his ongoing health.

Obviously the Americans don't have the problem we have in Australia, nor the need for the shade and protection from the elements that the Australians have come to expect, not just demand, but expect in their craft.

And this is where the biggest disadvantage of the GB lies - the windscreen is set far too low for any sort of decent protection for the crew and it's going to look bloody awful having a

sloped "clear" half-oxygen tent arrangement up to the soft top.

Given that you have to stand in boats like this offshore when you're coming back with a summer nor-easter up your tail, as you drive home straight into the sun (as we do along the entire eastern seaboard of Australia) this means that if there's a fair bit of spray flying around in the afternoon (as there always is) the skipper's either going to have to guess where he's going, or open one of those silly little half-circle zip outs, and cop it in his face for the entire 25-40 mile run home.

Mr Graf, please, I'm sure your design team can come up with something better than this and we would urge you to contemplate building a fully enclosed wheelhouse for this 2270 model as you have done for some of the larger craft.

In the meantime, for readers interested in one of

these very special craft (and let's face it, it's not hard to get excited about them is it?) I would urge them to make a private consultation with Phil Baker, or his son Cameron and the team at Craft Covers on the Gold Coast and discover why they are considered to be one of the world's best canopy makers and people who are renown for dealing with problems like this.

Conclusion

Definitely one of the most interesting boats I've tested

in years - and one I'm looking forward to running again in the not too distant future. They have a beautiful 2680 model which does have the full wheelhouse arrangement and if it's half as good as the 2270 out on the ocean, then with its extra waterline length and displacement, it should be an exceptional craft too.

As tested, the 2270 seen here retailed from Bill Fankhouser's Mustang Marine Sales yard (the Qld agents for Glacier Bays) for \$130,00. They also have an American trailer available for it which is illegal in Australia, but could possibly be used as a canal ramp trailer or for legitimate highway towing if the owner is willing to travel with oversize signs front and back, flags, and twin flashing lights, etc.

But with the current boom in marinas occurring around Australia (well, everywhere except NSW) there really doesn't seem to be a case to keep the boat on a trailer when people like Trewin Transport can shift it so economically from marina to marina with the owner doing nothing more than picking up the phone.

The Glacier Bay 2270 Isle Runner is a fascinating new development in power cat benchmarking in Australia.

In its class, it's the softest boat we've ever driven - it's beautifully built and fitted out with a breathtaking attention to detail. From an investment viewpoint, in a world of penny stocks, this is blue chip material.

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