

Sailfish 2400



Gamefisher

Aluminium has been used to build powered catamarans for a long time, but few production manufacturers have achieved anything like the success of this manufacturing company based in the Northern Rivers district of NSW. Sailfish catamarans today have a mortgage on the East Coast ally-cat market, and with very good reason – they are making a beautifully finished product that is the equal of anything produced in this country.



Sailfish 2400 Gamefisher . .

We should acknowledge that we didn't need to be shoe-horned into this boat test. The F&B team have wanted to test various Sailfish models for some time, especially as we've come very close to achieving that immediately following various Boat Shows over a couple of years.

The problem has always been that the boats are invariably sold and anxious owners are hot to take delivery, and these are not boats that you can just pull out of the hat – almost all of them involve a degree of custom building, and just about the lot have been pre-sold and are borrowed back from owners for the Boat Show circuit.

Needless to say, this has been frustrating for both Sailfish and ourselves, but at long last, thanks to a determined push by the Sailfish marketing team at Webbe Marine, with Gavan Daly and Ashleigh Faraj finally pushing through two boats after the Brisbane Boat Show with the assistance of Honda's Rod Day. Every one was determined we'd get our bums into these boats at long last - and we'd like to say a big "thank you" to all concerned for the extra effort and trucking involved.

It was worth it.

As most readers are aware, the writer has been a cat 'believer' for as long as I can remember, especially as we've owned a lot of very good cats over the years, in both fibreglass and aluminium. We've always favoured the cat configuration for the special, high, "tower" photography that we do for industry and the magazine(s), a practice that evolved way back in the 1970's

The reason for this is fairly simple. If you put a tower on a boat, and then place the cameraman up on top of the tower, and start rolling over and down Riveria or Maritimo-type wakes, then you very quickly find out about the boat's dynamic stability! Having survived several major incidents in monohulls over the years, we've always tried to keep the catamaran configuration to the fore, although with no little heartbreak, we were forced to sell our last camera boat, the black Cairns Custom Craft based, aluminium "Whimaway" last year, due to a lack of

commercial work.

This put us back into the "one boat does all" category, which our Quintrex 670 Diesel Hardtop has been valiantly fulfilling to the best of its ability, but without any disrespect to Quintrex, this terrific fishing boat is never going to make it as a high performance camera boat.

Needless to say, we also make the point very clearly that never in their wildest dreams did Quintrex see the 670 Hardtop series as high performance camera boat, either!

No, this is purely a Sea Media/F&B aberration brought about by us trying to achieve an acceptable package the accountants will approve, as distinct from doing what Peter and Ruth would normally do ie, have half a dozen specialised boats for half a dozen different jobs! Unfortunately, our name isn't Packer or Forrest or . . .

So there we were, standing on the wharf last month watching as the two beautifully finished Sailfish came in to Runaway Bay Marina, fresh from the Brizzy Boat Show.

As it was Jeff Webster's turn to choose which boat he wanted to test, he leapt onboard the 2800 and headed for the horizon, leaving Ruth and I to test this 2400 model.

Before we start, it's important to note that Sailfish now have two different Series of craft on offer – they have this 2400 Gamefisher Series which is different in the way it's fitted out to the better known Sailfish "Platinum" Series. These have a more cruising, family bent, as distinct from Gamefisher we were testing, which was all about fishing, fishing and fishing.

Design

Let's run through some of the major design features of the 2400 Sailfish.

Firstly, it's actually 6.70m long but 7.40m overall, and when it's resting on the superb aluminium trailer, it measures a very healthy 8.15m from prop to coupling.

The height on the trailer is 3.6m to the hardtop, and it uses a standard beam of 2.44m. However, it is interesting to note this Sailfish 2400 can vary its beam width, creating a 2.6m, wide-beam model, for just a few more 'pieces of gold'.

Obviously, if you're going to leave this boat on a mooring (as so many people in this era of canal or waterfront

homes) then the wide-beam model would be worth the bit of extra investment.

Sailfish recommend the twin Honda 115's for the 2400, with a maximum rating of 2 x 135hp. We'll talk more of that a bit later, but suffice to say, 2 x 135hp is plenty.

Fuel capacity in the standard configuration is 2 x 180L, and that can be increased slightly to 2 x 200L as an option. Water capacity is optional because it depends how you do it – and there's about 4 or 5 ways to put in anything between 20 and 50L.

The outboards need to have 25" legs, and Honda 4-strokes are fitted standard.

Bottom thickness is 5mm, side sheet thickness is 3mm, which is consistent with industry standards.

In the big picture sense, the Sailfish 2400 Gamefisher is a classic Aussie cuddly, where the front cabin component of the boat is pretty much just for storage, although we all chuckled at discovering Gavan Daly was growing some sort of green, er,



'shrubby' in pots in the cabin.

I must confess, this is the first time in near 40 years of boat testing, I've ever seen potted plants growing in the front cabin of a test boat, so Gavan now holds a unique position in the annals of boat testing in Australia. (See photo). I did say these boats had just come from the Brisbane Boat Show so all those jokes about the Show's 'potted plants' suddenly had new relevance! (*Blimey, we're going to give Gavan and Ashleigh heaps over this for years to come, no kidding . . .*)

Seriously though, the Sailfish Gamefisher is not about cruising and sleeping onboard, although if you upgrade to the Platinum series where the bulkhead across the helmsman's position is moved aft a little extra, then



there is space to do more with the cabin – including the requisite toilet facilities and berths.

However, both Gavan and Ashleigh were committed to this boat being a Gamefisherman. They've discovered that most fishos would prefer to have the boat configured like this – with the absolute maximum of space from one end of a very long cockpit to the other.

This measures no less than 3.7m, with a net beam across the cockpit of 1.96m, and a beautifully designed centre bait prep, lure cupboard and work area, smack dab in the middle.

This reminds me very much of the set-up we used to have back in *Krazy Kate's* days, the 5.2 Kevlacat which featured a very similar box in the middle of the cockpit. This worked extremely efficiently for us then, and I have to say I admired this set-up very much indeed.

In truth, the whole cockpit set-up is absolutely first class for very experienced fishermen, and reveals a wealth of knowledge and experience that you rarely see in production boats.

The decision Sailfish owners Darren and Julie-Ann Foster made some years ago to appoint Webbe Marine the sole agents for all of the Sailfish marketing throughout Australia was seriously clever.

It means that Darren can concentrate

As Gavan Daly explains, the Sailfish's fishing facilities, such as the live bait tanks rod holders, racks, rails, etc, and the LBT plumbing, are first class. And it's done!



all of his energies totally on the production of the Sailfish, which are built at Alstonville on the northern NSW coast.

By removing the amount of time builders need to spend dealing with customers, the industry, looking into Boat Shows, conducting boat tests and media days, Darren has been able to save a terrific amount of time which in turn they've reinvested into building bigger premises, with better quality equipment and a bigger production team.

As it's been a few years since we actually stepped onboard a Sailfish, the lift in boat building standards and its finish was very evident.

Particularly so where it involved the fit-out in the cockpit. Small, important matters such as safety rails, personal hand grips, rod holders, cleats – all of the things you can do so easily in aluminium if it's planned in the beginning and the team know they have to do it before the painting – and that's exactly what's happened here.

So summing up the design, we have a big, 24' cuddy-cabined boat with a vast fishing cockpit, a cabin that's really only for storage, and as much deck space as boats 10' longer.

That's the genius of the Sailfish 2400 – for guys downsizing from Berties, Rivs and the like, this is one model that won't leave them scratching their heads trying to figure out where to put the equipment needed for serious fishing. This boat has space for the most dedicated fisherman and easily copes with the demands of high tech modern gamefishing.

Fit-out & Finish

The Sailfish 2400 has an exceptionally detailed inventory and

fitting out program, and is no doubt one of the main reasons why Sailfish are enjoying such success throughout Australia at the moment.

All those readers who ring up looking for assistance in choosing a boat, please note this point carefully: One of the great advantages of working with people like the Sailfish team and specifically, Gavan and Ashleigh at Webbe Marine, is that customers are buying into such a vast array of experience, they don't need to know very much about it at all.

They can leave it to these professionals to set the rig up for them and get a first rate job, right down to launching and follow through to make sure the new customer is 100% comfortable with every nuance of his new steed.

Alternatively, if you DO know what you want (and many of their customers are seriously dedicated fishos on their second or third Sailfish) they will respect your opinion, listen carefully, and then sit down and make sure it happens on the floor at the Sailfish factory.

I think this is one of the key features of the Sailfish philosophy – no matter how much experience you have or haven't had; they'll make sure the boat acquisition is quite painless and a satisfying process all round.

Given that they're supplying the boat, motors and trailer, as well as integrating the whole package, this is a very professional way to go about it.

Performance

Well, enough background – let's get out to sea!

Actually, I spent the first half an hour or so studying the boat Jeff was testing, whilst taking some

photographs of it for him, and he of me in the 2400.

Unbeknownst to most people, an experienced boating journalist will learn more from watching a boat work in a seaway than he will sometimes be able to appreciate from inside at the helm.

As boats get bigger, this is more obviously true because it gets harder to see the water flow off the hull, and the sound of the boat working in the seaway is often disguised by a hardtop or wheelhouse arrangement that is then dominated by the sound of the engines. So both of us like to watch the boats at work, and whether we're doing that in our own camera boat or working two test boats opposite each other, we then turn around and swap notes later in the day.

This was interesting because the 2800 working at sea, without pre-empting what Jeff is going to say, is a pretty impressive piece of kit, let me tell you. It's very easily driven and it has surprisingly high levels of lift and rebound in the twin hulls – especially in the forefoot area.

Having studied the bigger boat for a while, I then went back to work with the 2400 we were running almost alongside for a while, before taking the pictures and then going off on our separate ways.

Funnily enough, both Jeff and I prefer to do our "own thing" away from the other, so once the photographs are taken, it's 'all bets off and see you later'!

In this case, Ruth and I headed south towards Tweed, before putting the Sailfish 2400 through my favourite circular courses, which are designed to reveal every nuance of the boat's performance as you go through a 360



This is so good - the centre bait prep area houses a built-in berley tube allowing the crew to pilly straight down the tube - from INSIDE the boat where they are slicing and dicing!



Gavan relaxes at the helm, and shows just how comfortable - and practical - this set-up is for the skipper of a top flight sportsfishing rig that will call for hours on watch, at the helm.



degree circle.

This is not screamingly difficult, and it's something anybody can do when they're testing a boat themselves – just put it through a 360 degree circle of about a mile radius offshore, and by the time you've completed the circle, you'll have tested the boat on every point of the compass. This this will be quite revealing, I promise you.

Then, just when you think it's safe to go home, the idea is you turn round and do it the other way, because the difference a boat can make going clockwise through the circle course, and then anti clockwise, can be quite dramatic. (So if you are doing this yourself, hasten slowly!)

Here, we had a calm day but with enough water movement to get the boats working very nicely in the seaway, and big enough to stop them running hard into the head sea.

In typical cat fashion, the 2400 didn't like running really hard straight into the sea, although buttoned off around to about the 17-19 knot mark it was still more than acceptable.

Now, head off the wind about 10 degrees in either direction and the speed can be lifted immediately. Then, as you come further about the compass, until the boat is virtually beam-to, it starts to fly.

As it comes around even further, to approximately 3/4 downhill, it really starts to percolate, and like all really nice cats, it's an absolute weapon downhill with speed and softness, (and dare I say, excitement) that few monohulls can match.

It was really interesting testing the 2400 Sailfish at this point, because we've spent such a lot of time recently with the Cruise Craft 685 Explorer, surely one of Australia's foremost production GRP monohulls.

It was impossible not to make a mental comparison of the two craft.

On some points of the compass, the Sailfish is simply streets ahead – and I think most cats would be.

A good cat is, of its nature, at a given speed, going to be softer riding, because there are two fine hulls coming down into the water as distinct from one wider, flatter monohull. Even if the latter is deeply veed, it's still presenting a wider area of fibreglass to the surface, than these two finely drawn cat hulls.

That said, I think the Cruise Craft 685/Signature type boat would

probably give as good as they get going uphill, and even off the wind uphill, because the deep vee then starts to work better than the cat which tends to 'choke up' with the wave being trapped in the tunnel, and forcing the cat to slow down, whether the crew can stand it or not.

So yes, it's horses for courses and a very, very interesting comparison.

But I would have to say the Sailfish comes out on top in the overall soft ride department, and in some directions (such as off the wind and downhill) it is virtually impossible to beat, unless you've got another cat that's as good in terms of hull design, hull shapes, etc.

Trolling in the Sailfish was delightful, and I was particularly pleased with the off plane stance of our 2400 model, because many cats are often too fine in the bows, and will often pitch uncomfortably in short, choppy conditions commonly found offshore when you're trolling in choppy water around headlands, walls and bars.

The Sailfish has plenty of freeboard at all times, and we ran the boat with one and two engines, but really it was so nice with just the one engine, and the Honda was so easily driven at around the 2500 rev mark, you could troll in this boat to NZ, and it would be a very pleasant experience.

Handling & Ride

In a specific sense, the handling and ride of the Sailfish is exemplary. We didn't put it through whacko slalom courses, nor did we tow water skiers with it, because it's not that sort of boat. The Sailfish Gamefisher series is just that, it's all about gamefishing and the writer concentrated most of his energy on finding the point at which the rig could be run at sea for hours, and then we studied how that level of performance compared to other craft of a similar investment.

To the writer, this is what cats are all about – and in fact, it's not just cats, it's any boat.

The whole trick offshore is to get a boat that is sufficiently comfortable to run for hours on end, whatever the sea, without punishing the crew. They need to be able to walk around the cockpit to attend to the lines, lures, outriggers, work on the bait prep area, find a drink, go to the John – all those sorts of things that you actually do in a day's fishing as distinct from 'whackoville'

demos that you see people running on media days and the like.

I really don't know where some of these people come from, but what we do offshore fishing is very different to the sorts of conditions they appear to be testing these boats for – we concentrated on how the boats performed under typical fishing and boating conditions, and how the speeds related to other boats we've tested.

The sum total of all this is that a 24' cat of the quality of this one, is a very special boat.

It is a quantum jump ahead of most 21'-24' monohulls, mainly in the area of hull stability, crew comfort (in terms of walking around the cockpit) and it has the obvious advantage of being a true rectangle - in the sense that it's 24' long by 8' wide and thus it's significantly bigger than most monohulls of this size.

What Are The Disadvantages

Are there any disadvantages? Well, of course there are. Most cats of this size are wetter than monohulls of a similar length – and this is very evident when you get some of these newer, imported American sportfishing boats, let alone Aussie rigs of the Cruise Craft and Signature kind.

Most of our mono boats today are really very dry boats in all but the worst conditions, whereas the cats, of necessity, will all be wetter, just by virtue of the natural hull shape they all have.

Let me say that again, they all have. And the reason they all have this issue is that you can't take aluminium or fibreglass forward in a rectangle and then shape in two bows for the twin hulls and create any sort of real flare or shape that would otherwise deflect the water.

Study the photographs of this cat and then compare them to those in the Sea library of all the other cats we've had over the years from Cairns Custom Craft, Noosacat, Kevlacat, etc – and you'll notice they are all very similar in the way the bows are shaped.

Why? Well, the builder doesn't really have any choice – he has to bring the topsides in to make a pointy bit at the bow, and in so doing, there's not a lot of room there to develop a sexy flare or shape that would otherwise prevent the water running straight up the sides of the boat when conditions get rough.

So that's the principle disadvantage –

and it's one that only really raises its head in fairly choppy conditions, as it doesn't happen in calm seas and flattish days.

As noted, it's a fault of the breed, so much as any specific model.

The other disadvantage I think would include the need for two engines, although the writer is worried about classing that characteristic as a "disadvantage" in a dedicated offshore gamefisherman.

Nevertheless, by today's 4-stroke engineering standards, a heck of a lot of folks believe two engines are a totally unnecessary, over-capitalisation on any craft.

I'm not about to argue with that, because there's no doubt that today's engines are certainly of a quality that enables a single engine craft to go wherever the owner chooses, and 99% of the boating public simply don't need two engines.

It's just that I'm a bit old fashioned and grew up through an era of unreliable 2-strokes, where we needed two engines to make sure we had at least one going, to get us home!

And speaking of engines, one of the most impressive demonstrations I've ever seen of a twin engine installation we shared on this 2400.

By raising one of the engines, the boat literally took off like a scalded cat and planed just as you would normally, planing home at around 23 knots on just one engine – not fire walled, with the Honda just sitting on 4,000 revs.

How good is that? If you are going to worry about engines and you do have two for reliability and safety, how good is it to know that one of them will get home at pretty near full offshore cruising speed!

Wonderful stuff.

But, for a lot of people, two engines in a cat is a big expense they don't need if they buy a quality mono such as a Cruise Craft or a Signature where today, twin engines have become as scarce as hens teeth.

Trailing

The trailing side of the Sailfish BMT package is a standout – the Sailfish 2400 can be delivered with a beautifully made, custom aluminium trailer to cradle the boat to perfection, and they use all the best components to create a trailer that will last for years and years.

Good on the Sailfish team for biting

the bullet and building a decent trailer – isn't it wonderful to see quality trailer engineering coming into our world at long last?

So yes, you can get a trailer for the Sailfish 2400 Gamefisher, yes it's a superb aluminium trailer and yes, it's a cinch to load and retrieve on your own.

Full marks to Sailfish in this department, they've done a superb job of making the whole world of trailing that little bit easier in terms of maintenance, strength, reliability and light weight.

The all up BMT package of this big rig is only around 2.4 tonne, depending on the combination of engines, electronics and custom built gear.

Conclusion

Having worked with aluminium boats so closely for many years, and specifically aluminium cats, both Ruth and I felt very much at home with the Sailfish 2400 in a matter of minutes.

Ruth was especially taken with it, and was probably in a better position to feel the differences because she was the skipper of F&B's black cat (and before that the yellow CCC cat), so hundreds of hours at the helm of cats

in precision helming and offshore work, gives her a very solid grounding in this precise world.

She was comfortable with the boat immediately, hated the out of sorts Honda throttles (which badly needed adjusting) but loved the steering, handling and sensitivity of the boat at the helm.

All of which I agreed with, and added in that I felt the structure of the wheelhouse ie, clears over a hard windscreen was a really good way to go. We also acknowledged that Tassie readers and the like who work in the colder waterways, can get this boat with a fully enclosed hardtop.

In closing, I would draw potential buyers' attention to a couple of points.

Firstly, the Sailfish team have the most exceptional list of options and accessories I've ever seen, in any boating package, let alone a sophisticated aluminium cat.

Whatever your heart desires, I can promise you you'll find it listed in the Sailfish cattedog.

Secondly, I'd like to commend the Webbe Marine boys, Gavin and Ashleigh for producing one of the best sales kits we've seen in many years. It

is both visually exciting, technically accurate and carefully produced for potential boatowners.

Their DVD presentation is excellent, being both entertaining and informative.

So for readers contemplating the purchase of something of this magnitude in the near future, I would seriously recommend getting in touch with the Webbe Marine team, and putting your hand up for this sales kit – it's certainly worth the effort, and will leave you seriously impressed about the dedication of this whole Sailfish package.

And that's what Gavan Daly set out to achieve. He's said to Darren Foster "You look after the boat building – let us look after the marketing and customer liaison" and that's exactly what he's done in a very professional and dedicated way.

Obviously it helps that he's got a terrific range of boats to work with, and make no mistake, the Sailfish 2400 Gamefisher series is one of the better fishing boats the writer has been in for years.

F&B