

Year of the cat

Recently, alloy boat manufacturer Sailfish threw a cat amongst the pigeons – literally – when it released a couple of new catamarans into a very competitive sector of the trailer boat market. MICK FLETORIDIS reports.

AFTER MUCKING AROUND in and writing about fishing boats for quite a few years now, it's my considered opinion that owners of offshore fishing boats sit in two distinct camps. That is, blokes who like mono hulls – arguably the majority, considering the number of single-hull boats on the market – and devotees of the catamaran design. The two groups have followers that see the benefits of both hull types but mostly they're as one-eyed as a rabid Ford or Holden fan. In the case of cat owners, what they may lack in numbers they tend to make up for with enthusiasm. And Aussie

catamaran fans are sure to be excited about the new additions to Sailfish's line-up, judging by the time *Boat Fishing* had with the Reef Runner and Shelf Runner recently (stay tuned for the Shelf Runner write-up in an upcoming issue).

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Size-wise, the new models coming out of Sailfish's factory at Alstonville on the NSW North Coast are at the bottom end of a range which previously featured boats of 22-40 feet (6.7m-12.1m) in length.

Gavan Daley and Ashley Faraj of Sydney's Webbe Marine have had a long association



with Sailfish and along the way have had significant input into the final product leaving their showroom. With the introduction of the Reef Runner and Shelf Runner that input is more than evident, with a high level of fishability a major factor in the final design. These are boats that are clearly all about the fishing.

When you first step aboard the Reef Runner, which comes in at around 5.6m in length, it immediately gives the impression of a much bigger boat. Sailfish says the Reef Runner's cockpit offers the equivalent space of a 7m mono hull. If that's the case it's in no small part due to a healthy 2.45m beam that combines with a deep cockpit to afford the deck loads of real fishing space. Leaning against those high sides while fishing over a reef should work a treat. The boat's gunwales are nicely rolled and at an ideal width that they don't encroach into cockpit space while wide enough for leaning/sitting on. Padded coamings are an option and worth considering for buyers who see a lot of gunwale leaning in their fishing plans.



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1 Ideally set up for sport and light game fishing, the Reef Runner comes as a turn-key package.

2 Are two hulls better than one? Cat devotees will surely agree!

3 The twin Honda 60hp four-strokes provide good performance and fuel economy.

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The gunwales on the test boat carried four rod holders and there was good side pocket storage below for tag poles, gaffs and nets.

The stern gives buyers the option of a full width transom with ample space for storing a large ice box, or a walk-through version for easier rear boarding. Residing over the transom of the test boat were a couple of sweet running Honda 60hp four-stroke outboards, which coupled with twin 140 litre under floor fuel tanks are – according to fuel usage figures supplied by Webbe's – good for a range of around 580kms. With figures like that buyers could expect to get in plenty of fishing between fuel stops.

One aspect of the Reef Runner that impressed me was its completeness. Buyers can expect to get everything they see here with nothing to do post purchase. Hook it

up to a tow vehicle and go fishing. Seriously, there's nothing that needs doing apart from maybe opting for specialised gear such as outriggers if gamefishing will be a priority in your fishing plans. The Reef Runner features a well-designed cockpit complete with all-round clears, bimini top and a six-outfit rocket launcher. Importantly on a boat that will be seeing serious fishing action out on the ocean, the cabin space is situated as far forward as possible to maximise the fishing space on the rear deck. This all means the Reef Runner doesn't come with bunk berth accommodation, but instead uses the available space forward for storage, which nine times out of 10 most cabins on fishing boats are used for anyway. And let's face it, if you're out fishing how often do you feel like

lying down for a snooze when there are fish to be caught?

When you're up front on the Reef Runner a walk-through mid-section gives access to large storage compartments either side, wiring and steering components behind the dash on the starboard side, and importantly for those factoring the family into a potential purchase, a chemical toilet in the portside.

While underway, the skipper and fishing mate get to park themselves on a couple of plush slide adjustable seats that feature bolster support and storage under the skipper's mount. A great aspect of the mate's seat is its inbuilt plumbed live well that is accessed by lifting the hinged seat base. The live well looks more than capable of keeping a good supply of slimies healthy and is a standard feature of both the Reef Runner



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4 A forward steering position maximises rear deck space.

5 Excellent stability is a hallmark of the cat design.

6 Two transom designs are available – full width or walkthrough.



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and Reef Runner models. The dash on the Reef Runner was well equipped with electronics including a Garmin touch-screen GPS Map 750S sounder/plotter, GME GX600 VHF radio and a Fusion stereo system.

ON THE WATER

As a long-term owner of a small alloy cat, I admit to having been a little intimidated when manning the controls of the last Sailfish I reviewed for this mag, a 2400. Not a massive boat perhaps, but to put it in perspective a 24-footer is a fair step up from a 14-footer, ie my 4.3m Webster. The new Reef Runner, however, stretches the tape measure to 5.6m or just over 18 feet, and is a boat I quickly felt comfortable with. If I had to pick a standout attribute of a well designed cat it'd be excellent stability at rest,

a definite asset when offshore fishing. Let's face it, the last thing you want to be doing is bouncing around on the ocean like you're on a trampoline. In this case, Ash Faraj and I leaning out over the port gunwale had no impact on the boat's attitude.

As well as stability, a comfortable ride is another desirable attribute twin hulls slicing through the water can bring to the mix. We took the Reef Runner just outside Botany Bay for this review and at a steady 20 knots into light chop the ride was comfortable and controlled. As I'd found previously with the binnacle arrangement it took a little time to come to get accustomed with manually synching the dual Honda throttles with one hand. Practice in this case would no doubt make this operation more user friendly. Ultimately a synched binnacle arrangement would be much better.

Steering the boat around on Botany Bay proved hardly taxing due to a nicely responsive Bay Star hydraulic set-up that

The Reef Runner is 5.6m long and sports a 2.45m beam, which is claimed to afford it the same deck space as a 7m mono hull.



requires minimal effort to operate. Typically for a cat, the Reef Runner stays flat on turns and changes of direction and in this aspect isn't as quick to respond as a mono hull. With its dual outboards, though, this boat is well set up for precise low speed manoeuvring, a handy attribute when repositioning over reef

waypoints or attempting to get a better angle on a stubborn fish.

Overall, there's a lot to like about Sailfish's new baby. Priced at under \$80,000, it's a serious turn-key sportfisher that's poised to attract plenty of interest from cat and mono hull fans alike. ■

SAILFISH REEF RUNNER

LENGTH: 5.75m LOA

BEAM: 2.45m

HULL: 4mm bottom; 3mm sides

FUEL: 2 x 140 Litre

POWER: Rec. 2 x 60hp Honda four-stroke;
Max. 2 x 75hp

PRICE: As reviewed \$79,990

FIT-OUT: ★★★★★

RIDE/HANDLING: ★★★★★

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

FISHABILITY: ★★★★★

OVERALL FINISH: ★★★★★

VALUE: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

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