

A FINE, BUT NOT-QUITE-PERFECT BOAT, SAYS WARREN STEPTOE, THAT NONETHELESS SATISFIES THE AUSTRALIAN OBSESSION WITH TINNIES.

One of the few things the financial downturn didn't change about the Australian boating scene is the fact that an 18ft cuddy-cabin will always be a very versatile boat. They're big enough for serious offshore fishing, and equally capable of comfy cruising around the many picturesque bays and estuaries that Australia is so blessed with. They have ample room for social family boating or blokes-only fishing expeditions. They can also take on our nasty coastal bars with a degree of safety, yet they're not so big as to make launching and retrieving awkward for a couple.

For the Noble Boats International 5.8 deep-vee Cuddy Cabin this is a very accurate description. Add to that the fact it's strong as an ox because it's constructed from plate-aluminium, and this boat will happily satisfy our national tinnie mania.

SUBTLE DIFFERENCES

There are, however, two significant differences between this boat and your average tinnie — especially plate-tinnies which, while most of them would hardly wear a scratch if used to knock down your average brick outhouse,

invariably ride choppy water like one too.

The Noble deep-vee hull has been around long enough to have silenced any doubts about its innovative design. This hull has indeed proven to offer a superior roughwater ride compared to other plate-aluminium boats, although it's perhaps not quite up there with the best 'glass hulls. Even so, it's at least as good as run-of-the-mill ones, and is still every bit the tough tinnie we're so in love with (justifiably, as it turns out, given the lousy ramps and bad roads that come part and parcel in boating across much of Australia).

The other significant difference is that Noble boats are now built in China, thus the "International" moniker.

BUILT TOUGH

Precious little else seems to have changed. I guess I've been something of a fan of this design since it first saw the light of day some years ago in Dave McKenzie's "Sportfish" workshop on Brisbane's Redcliffe Peninsula. Some finetuning to the original design followed during the years it was built in the Noble

family's shipyard in Brisbane, although not much changed over the last five years or so. The end result is that the boat you see here is quite refined, and few people would change much about it.

Still, Noble Boats International, in the best plate-aluminium tradition, is prepared to tinker with a few things, albeit within reason.

There were in fact two things I'd change. The first is the helm position. I'm 170cm tall so the screen frame was right in my line of sight while at the wheel, regardless of whether I was seated or standing.

For me, the otherwise snug and comfy deep-bucket helm seat needed raising for my line of sight to be either over or under that frame. My view of the water in front of the boat was definitely compromised so I was constantly craning my neck to see. This is not a position I would like to be in for the time that it might, for example, take to cross northern Moreton Bay.

The helm seat is on a slide so my gripe about the seating ergonomics was all about my eye height as it related to the windscreen frame. Similarly, when standing at the wheel, I'd need my eyeline raised at least 10cm so I could

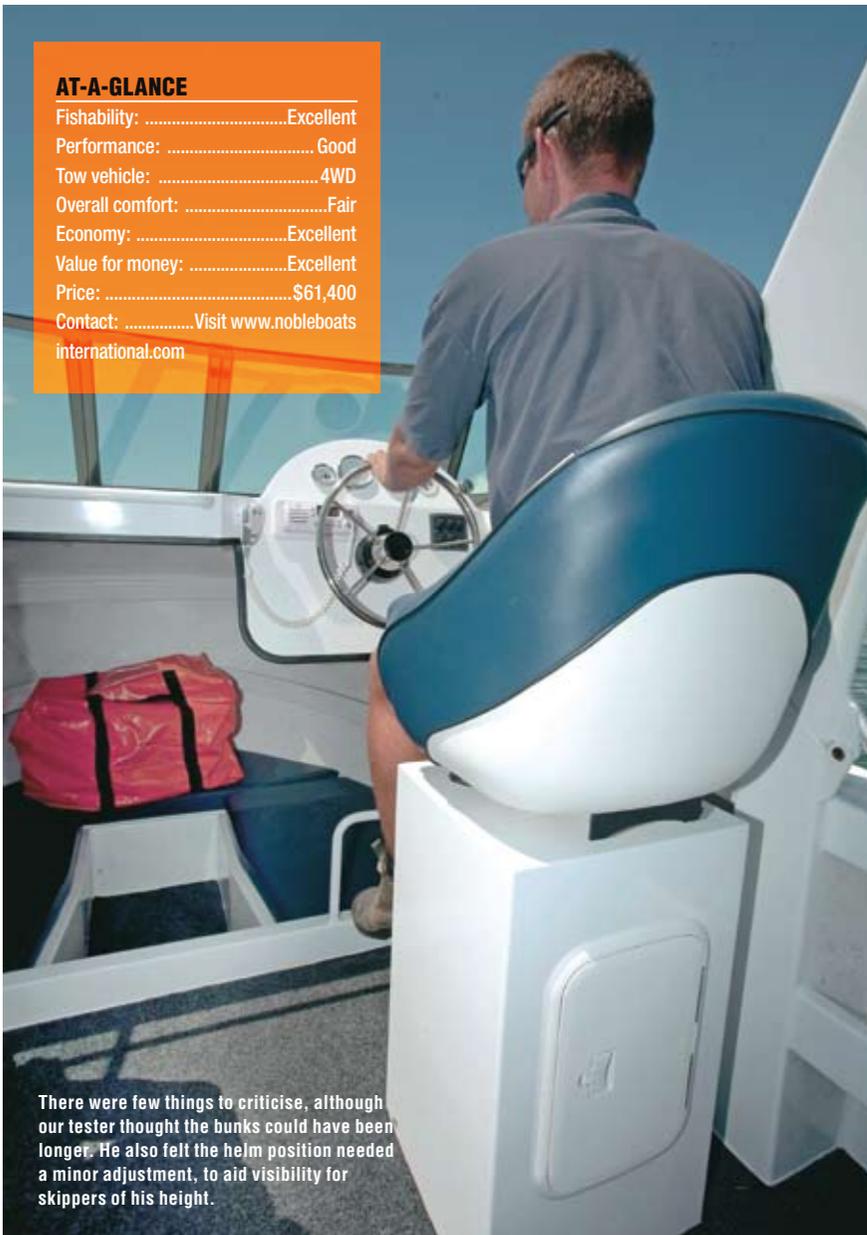
Noble's unique, wide-chine, deep-vee hull copes with wind chop noticeably better than other plate-aluminium hulls.

V-FORCE



AT-A-GLANCE

Fishability:Excellent
 Performance: Good
 Tow vehicle: 4WD
 Overall comfort:Fair
 Economy:Excellent
 Value for money:Excellent
 Price:\$61,400
 Contact:Visit www.nobleboatsinternational.com



There were few things to criticise, although our tester thought the bunks could have been longer. He also felt the helm position needed a minor adjustment, to aid visibility for skippers of his height.



These boats are tough. Even the transom door is set high to maintain safety in a following sea.

“Nobles are big for their size and can be compared with bigger boats from other brands.”



The transom arrangement is as good as it gets, with excellent freeboard and a big livewell on the port side.

again see over the frame. I assume the easiest way to achieve this would be to raise the deck below the helm.

They're fairly simple modifications, although quite important ones if I were to own one of these boats.

Not so simple was the cabin's bunk — it was simply too short for me to sleep on comfortably. Changing this would be a relatively major exercise, and if this was a boat I was looking at buying — and given its many other attributes and the places I'd want to take it — I'd want to sleep aboard sometimes.

Fortunately, the cockpit in this cuddy-cab configuration is spacious, so perhaps a few centimetres could be sacrificed for customers who agree with my sentiments. Other than that, you'll find precious little

else on the negative side of this boat's balance sheet — and a far longer list of positive attributes.

EASY PICKINGS

Our test boat had just been fitted with an outboard and controls, so it lacked many of the things you'd fit before taking it out on the water. These included important items like a bimini top, as well as fishfinding and navigation electronics. In both cases many people want to choose their own, so Noble's philosophy of leaving you the choice is a sound one.

Otherwise, the standard equipment list is comprehensive and includes a folding rocket launcher/rod rack, a transom door, a big fishpit belowdecks in the cockpit, a plumbed livewell in the port side of the

aft covering-board, and a float switch-activated bilgepump.

It also has side-windows and a hatch for the cabin, a glass windscreen, stowage lockers mounting deep-bucket seats for helm and passenger with waterproof hatches, plus two more to access the oil bottles and batteries inside the aft bulkhead.

Add to that a baitboard/workbench on the aft bulkhead, three rodholders aside in the sidedecks, and a ladder with non-slip surfaces to board through the transom door.

Other standard fittings that many boatbuilders include on their options list include the bowrail, bowsprit, well-sited grab bar on the passenger side of the helm area, footrests, and an enormous

anchorwell — I kid you not, at one stage I stood in it to take photos and it reached my thighs.

There are a few options, and their attractiveness will depend on how seriously you take your offshore fishing, and where you intend to fish. Things like upgrading the standard 180lt fuel tank to 240lt, a hardtop, an electric anchorwinch and maybe an icebox or two behind the bucket seats are about it.

I guess this boat by its very nature appeals to us serious fishing types, and while few buyers wouldn't have fishing on their mind, it would only take the addition of an aft lounge and perhaps some removable shade for the cockpit to make the Noble 5.8 Cuddy Cabin suitable for social boating too.

ON THE PLANE

- ✓ Softest-riding plate-tinnie in the business
- ✓ Quality construction throughout
- ✓ Complete inventory with short options list

SANK LIKE A BRICK

- ✗ Bunks could be longer
- ✗ Windscreen frame height

ON THE WATER



Shelter from the elements in the helm area would be excellent with the addition of a bimini top and clears. Most owners would probably add these as a matter of course.

PERFORMANCE

Performance-wise, the 140 Suzuki on our test boat was satisfying rather than scintillating. Top speed with a straight out-of-the-box motor and none of the gear required for offshore fishing was (a satisfactory) 30.4kts. And yet, while the Suzi hardly set the 5.8 Noble's world on fire at the top end, it had plenty of low-down grunt to get the hull planing cleanly at a mere 5.7kts. This certainly augurs well for trips home on those days where the fishing distracts you long enough for the afternoon sea breeze to get up and make things bumpy.

Despite all that (and without mentioning that this motor's reliability, economic

operation and wide torque spread has made it so popular among fishing guides), you'd be a fool not to consider it. It'd certainly be interesting to compare its performance and fuel efficiency with one of the 150hp four-strokes, though. My thoughts on the hull's rating from 90-150hp are that I'd definitely be looking at motors closer to the upper end of the rating.

THE WRAP

All in all, this is a great boat, and anyone looking at an offshore fisher in this size should consider the Noble 5.8 Cuddy Cabin. The only other advice I'll offer on that score is to also take a look at Noble's 5.8 Centre Cabin – another fine vessel. 🚤

NOBLE 5.8 CUDDY CABIN

HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: \$61,000
Options fitted: VHS, compass, bimini top, front side-clears, safety gear including EPIRB, registration

GENERAL

Type: Monohull cuddy-cabin
Material: Plate-aluminium
Length: 5.8m
Beam: 2.4m
Deadrise: 24°
Hull weight: Approx. 580kg
BMT weight: Approx. 1900kg

CAPACITIES

Fuel: 180lt (240lt and additional 180lt tanks optional)
People: Four
Min. HP: 90
Max. HP: 150

ENGINE

Make/Model: Suzuki DF140
Type: DOHC 16-valve inline four-cylinder
Rated HP: 140
Displacement: 2044cc
Weight: 186kg
Gearbox Ratio: 2.59:1

SUPPLIED BY

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