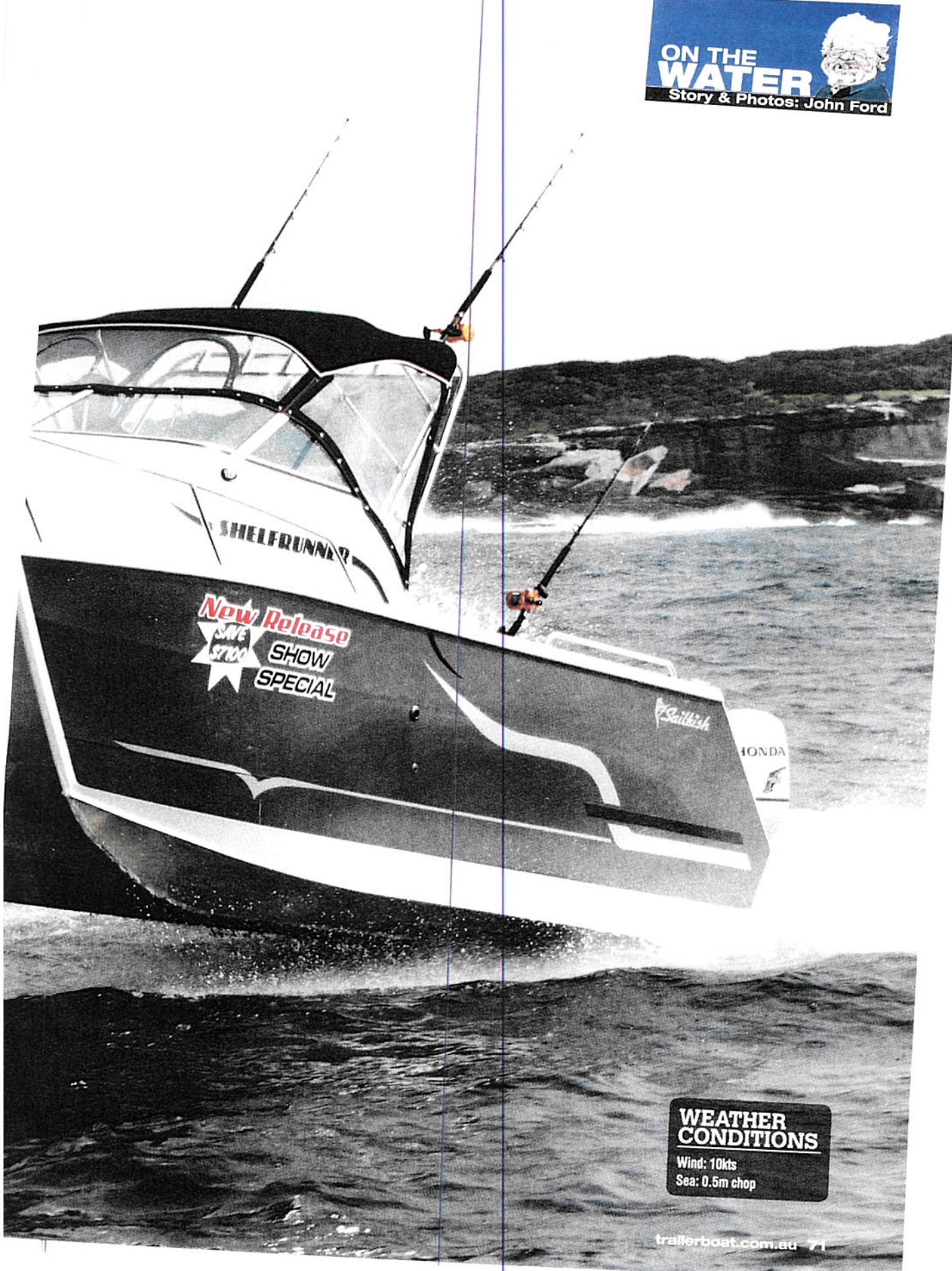


THE CAT EMPIRE

Two new alloy boats from Sailfish have set the cats amongst the pigeons. We sent John Ford to see if two hulls are better than one.





WEATHER CONDITIONS
Wind: 10kts
Sea: 0.5m chop

First off I have to say I have a soft spot for cats. Not the moggy type, which I don't particularly like, but the water-going version. It's probably because my first boat was a little two-hull, single-motor 3.8 Markham Whaler which I fondly recall being an incredible boat for its size. Later on I fished with a mate on an 18ft Shark Cat over several years, and it was during this time that I really developed a healthy respect for twin-hulls, thanks to their roughwater capability and stability at rest.

Two people who also like cats are Gavan Daly and Ashley Faraj. For many years they operated Webbe Marine in Sydney's south as a general purpose dealership. They eventually became so enthusiastic about catamarans that five years ago they transformed their yard into a dedicated twin-hull operation, selling mainly Sailfish.

Gavan explained that he decided to specialise in multi-hulls because he saw an opening for a business that could best promote and explain the cat concept to buyers. Over time, Webbe Marine developed such a close relationship with

“Stable like only a twin hull can be and like all fishing boats should be.”

Sailfish that it became the manufacturer's major dealership outlet, covering sales across Australia.

These plate-aluminium boats are produced in northern NSW in sizes from 22 to 40ft. Most boats are customised orders from well-heeled, discerning recreational boaters, with Government departments and commercial operators also accounting for a good proportion of customers. In recent times Sailfish seems to have notched up notable success with its larger models; consequently, the factory was expanded and more staff were employed.

However, customers kept asking for something smaller and easier to handle. This led Gavan and Ashley to notice a gap in the market for a twin-hulled fishing cat around the 6m mark, sitting in the same price range as similar sized monohulls (an especially relevant consideration in light of the collapse of Webster's Twinfisher — Ed).

Enter the 6.3m Shelf Runner and its little brother, the 5.8m Reef Runner. In a market awash with glass monohulls these new Sailfish alloy cats represent a real point of difference.

Our test day included both models and when they arrived at the ramp it was hard

not to be impressed. Their high sides carry their beam all the way forward to create the impression of volume and the isometric hulls are deep with high tunnels. These new “small” boats look *big*. The plan for the day was to head across Botany Bay and out to sea so we could put the boats into the sort of offshore environment for which they were designed.

TO THE SHELF (AND BACK)

At 6.3m (overall) the Shelf Runner is the bigger of the two models. It has a runabout-style layout and once you're onboard it's quite apparent that the design has freed up maximum deck space for fishing. The cockpit is a full 2.2m wide by 2.2m long, but the walkthrough transom provides another metre of access all the way to the back of the hull to play fish away from the motors.

While the cabin is low and only a meter or so long it has lots of space compared to a monohull thanks to the full beam right to the bow. With a flat carpet-covered floor there is room to get into the cabin for a lie down across the boat and provision is made for installing a chemical toilet. Entry is through a sliding, lockable door constructed from

TRAILERBOAT RATES THE SAILFISH SHELF RUNNER	
1 Fun factor / fishability	5/5
2 Innovation	5/5
3 Design and layout	5/5
4 Quality of finish	5/5
5 Handling and ride	5/5
6 Stability at rest	5/5
7 Ergonomics	5/5
8 Standard equipment	5/5
9 Value for money	5/5
10 X-Factor	5/5
OVERALL	5/5



very durable Kingboard.

Access to the bow is along the side deck and — although grabrails are an option — it is a bit awkward to get around. With this bow design most buyers would choose to fit an electric anchor winch so as to allow anchoring from the helm at the flick of a switch. Even so, a bowrail provides access and the vast anchorwell has a hinged hatch. An optional walkthrough bow such as appears on the Reef Runner (tested later) is also available.

THE HELM

Back inside, the dash area has a flat panel with a fiddle rail running the width of the hull and a four-piece acrylic screen that wraps around to the sides. The dash is easy to read and has Faria analogue instruments for revs, fuel, trim, and water pressure. Navigation is handled by a Garmin GPS, while music is handled by a Fusion sound system. There is a six-panel switch block and a single 12V outlet. Rounding out the dash is a GME VHF radio.

Twin controls are dash-mounted for the two Honda 75hp outboards. I thought they were quite high but were still easy to operate. The wheel is set low but it too falls to hand easily both from the seat and while standing.

Seating for driver and passenger is on comfortable, swivelling bucket seats, each with bolsters. There is plenty of room at the helm to stand, and even though the windscreen rail is at eye level, vision forward remains good. The driver's seat is mounted on



Above: The spacious, uncluttered layout of the Shelf Runner has one thing on its mind: fishing.

Right: The passenger's seat disguises a large livebait tank, so you can bait up out of the way of fellow anglers.

Below: The steering wheel, while set low, falls easily to hand.



On the plane...

- ✓ Excellent stability
- ✓ Fishable layout
- ✓ Smooth ride
- ✓ Big cockpit

Dragging the chain...

- ✗ Bow access a bit tricky
- ✗ Tendency to "lean" into turns could take a while to get used to



a storage box, while the passenger seat box incorporates a large livebait tank — accessed by hinging the seat forward.

Overhead, a neatly finished and well-fitted canvas bimini sits on alloy supports and folds back for storage. Height under cover is a generous 2.1m. You will also find an easily-reached handrail for support as well as a six-slot rocket launcher.

LAYOUT AND FISHABILITY

The cockpit is a large, uncluttered space with the floor covered in grey marine-grade carpet. Full-length sidepockets run along the sidedecks and the 750mm high sides are topped with rounded coamings

MORE THAN A KITTEN

Despite being the smaller sister in the Sailfish litter, the Reef Runner proves that it too can ruffle feathers.

The Reef Runner is the smaller sibling of the two cats, but it does not live in the shadow of its bigger sister. In fact, some aspects outshine the Shelf Runner, like the excellent bow access. While the Shelf Runner relies on an anchor winch to manoeuvre the pick, there will inevitably be times when you'll need to get up the front to sort out some other mess. On the Reef Runner it's a simple matter of opening the hatch and walking forward. The benefit of the cuddy-cabin on the 6.3, however, is the extra space for storage.

The Reef Runner has some storage space to each side of the bow walkway and, although it's a tight fit, the test boat had a portable toilet installed in the port side hatch. That's nice for emergencies and is also a bit more family friendly.

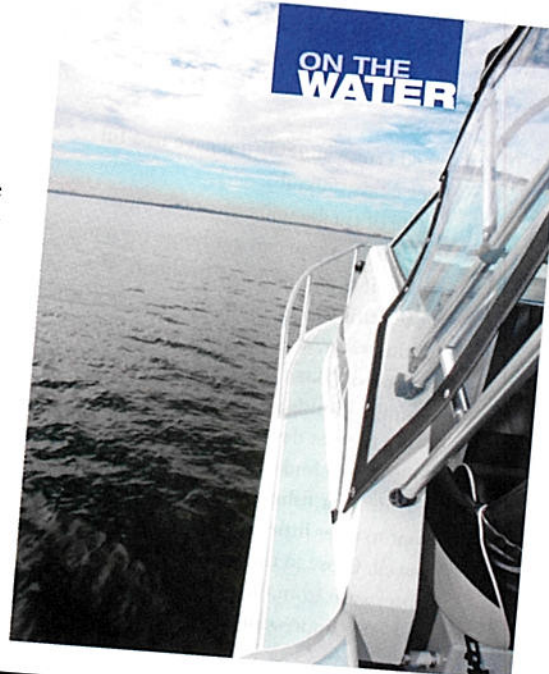
At the stern there's an access walkway between the motors, but the transom is solid rather than a walkthrough. It should be noted that both boats have the option of either bow and transom design, and that the boats on test were presented with different options to allow both to be scrutinized. The open bow will appeal to those who think forward access is important, and the step-over transom can save some initial cost.

Because of the walkthrough at the bow, the dash area and screen are slightly different to the Shelf Runner, but it retains the twin instrument display as well as the same Garmin GPS and radios. The screen becomes a five-piece arrangement with a central opening section. The great seats and livebait tank are retained



PERFORMANCE

14kts (26kmh) @ 3500rpm (plane)
 17.4kts (32kmh) @ 4000rpm
 22kts (41kmh) @ 4500rpm
 26.5kts (49kmh) @ 5000rpm
 30.5kts (56kmh) @ 5500rpm (WOT)



carrying over to generous 220mm sidedecks. Below the selfdraining deck a 140lt fuel tank is carried in each sponson, with the rest of the space foam-filled for buoyancy and noise suppression.

The twin-hull / twin-motor setup defines the layout at the transom, with a central walkway allowing easy access from the rear of the hull. To starboard is a very user-friendly Sant Marine baitboard, and each side has a raised compartment for a battery and fuel strainer.

The boat is solidly built on a 5mm bottom and 3mm topsides with a fully welded floor and strong cross-bracing in the hulls. The design has a squared-off bow entry for maximum waterline

length, and the hull carries its beam all the way forward to give the maximum footprint possible. The full bows provide lots of volume up front for lift and better performance in a following sea.

HANDLING AND RIDE

With the throttles planted the Hondas sent out a pleasant four-stroke wail that briskly got us underway to a top speed of 35kts (65kmh) in the sheltered waters of the bay. Around 3500rpm saw a sensible cruise speed of 19kts (35kmh), for a fuel burn of 15lt/h from both motors. Right through the range the Hondas were quiet and smooth, emitting a lovely, deep sound. Higher in the rev range, a high-

while the forward livebait tank allows fishers to rig-up out of the way of the rest of the crew. The sheer size of the tank is hard to replicate at the transom, where it is traditionally placed.

Other than the bow treatment, the layout of the two boats is similar. Beam is the same but there is 0.5m missing from the length. This translates into a smaller cockpit but still leaves enough room to fish in comfort.

Sure, the bigger boat feels more surefooted and handles chop a little better, but the 5.8's ride is still soft and it is stable over waves like a nimble cat. Don't go racing round the buoys with the Skeeters, but treat it sensibly and it will reward you with a predictable, safe ride and surprising stability at rest.

The Reef Runner is rated on an international standard at 5.8m, but when you consider that the waterline length of the smaller model is a diminutive 5.3m then its performance and volume is outstanding.

Two Honda 60hp outboards are fitted for their reliable four-stroke technology and frugal thirst. The Hondas have plenty of acceleration out of the hole, perhaps due to Honda's BLAST technology that automatically adjusts ignition timing.

In the sheltered waters of the bay we got 30kts (56kmh) at 5500rpm. Cruising at 22kts (41kmh) the motors sat on 4500rpm with a wonderful stereophonic wail (like a purr, would you say, John? — Ed) reminiscent of some of the Honda motorcycles I rode and loved in my youth. The sound is so sophisticated and complicated — if that's possible — and they accelerated smoothly and without any nasty resonance that you often get with less worthy motors at some stage in their rev range. That's true for the hulls as well — no nasty rattles or harmonics to drive you mad. As far as I'm concerned, that's a sign that things have been stuck together correctly.

Finish on the hulls is good too. The welds look strong and the paint has been applied with a professional finish. The test boat had an understated grey paint job, but there is a range of colours for the more flam boyant among us who want to make a louder statement.

Despite its apparent size on the trailer the Reef Runner has an all up weight of 1600kg, so you won't need a huge vehicle to tow it.

And when you get out on the water you'll be delighted with the way this little boat takes on the open sea.

SAILFISH REEF RUNNER



HOW MUCH?

Price as tested:\$79,990

GENERAL

Type: Powered catamaran
 Material: Aluminium (4mm hull; 3mm topsides)
 Length: 5.75m (overall)
 Beam: 2.45m
 Weight: 1600kg (BMT)

CAPACITIES

People: 6
 Rec. HP: 60
 Max. HP: 60
 Fuel: 2 x 140lt

ENGINE

Make/model: Honda BF60
 Type: Three-cylinder four-stroke
 Weight: 114kg
 Displacement: 998cc
 Gear ratio: 2.07:1

TO OWN THIS BOAT

Price as tested\$79,990
 Weekly Repayment TAP\$227.84
 Deposit\$19,997
 Final Repayment (%=)\$19,997
 Term (months) 60

* Customer rate is 8.99% comparison rate is 9.33% for all of the above payments. See rear of magazine for conditions.

On the plane...

- ✓ Great use of space
- ✓ Fishability
- ✓ Bow access
- ✓ Standard equipment

Dragging the chain...

- x Some alloy slap at rest

TRAILERBOAT RATES THE SAILFISH REEF RUNNER

1 Fun factor / fishability	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
2 Innovation	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
3 Design and layout	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
4 Quality of finish	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
5 Handling and ride	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
6 Stability at rest	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
7 Ergonomics	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
8 Standard equipment	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
9 Value for money	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
10 X-Factor	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
OVERALL	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

speed cruise at 4500rpm gave us a bit over 27kts (50kmh).


One of the benefits of a twin motor setup is that you can get home on one motor if the other has a problem. We tested this theory by lifting one leg clear of the water, and without stressing we achieved 15kts (28kmh) at 4000rpm from a single Honda.

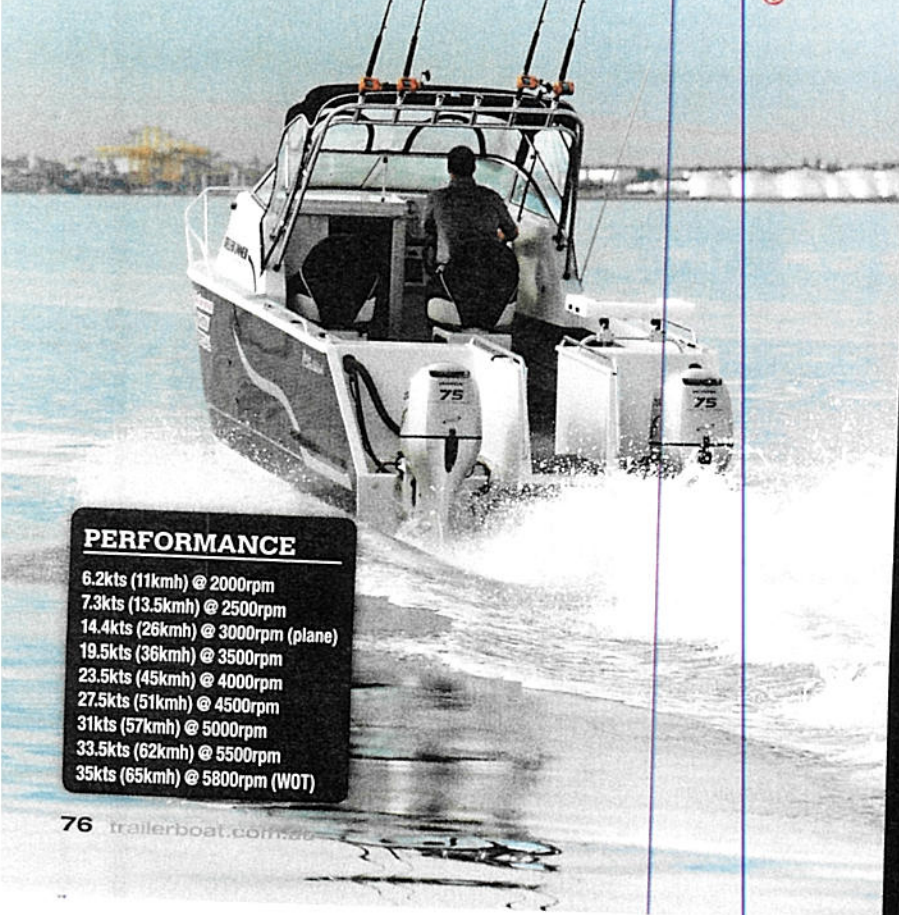
On the test day we decided to head offshore to find conditions that would be ideal for fishing, but which turned out to offer little challenge in the way of swell. Close to the shore there was some backwash from the cliffs, which gave a better impression of its roughwater capability. Over waves at 20kts (37kmh) we managed to get airborne and still land softly and in a predictable manner. This was when it became really obvious that air trapped in the central tunnel acted as a shock absorber as the boat settled. Through the short chop things remained smooth and quiet with no banging or shudder from the hull. Down sea there was no broaching, because the hulls balance themselves out as they fight for buoyancy as they dip into the water, bringing the boat back to equilibrium.

Handling is well mannered and

predictable. The wide beam and deep bows provide lots of lift which you can feel in the turns as the hulls work to keep the boat stable. There is a tendency for the boat to lean out in turns, but generally the Sailfish handles well across all quarters and loves to be pushed into a swell just for the sheer fun of seeing how soft the ride is. At low speed, the twin motor setup allows the Shelf Runner to turn a full 180° in its own length. Not only that, but at rest the boat really shines, remaining stable like only a twin-hull can be and like all fishing boats should be.

THE WRAP

Webbe Marine is confident that the Aussie fishing fraternity will embrace these new boats. There's nothing else like them on the market and the standard equipment level will have wide appeal. Included in the "as tested" price is GPS, radio, rocket launcher, deckwash, livebait tank and more. Yes, the initial price may seem high but in my view you don't need to add much else to the purchase price. The choice of bow layouts comes at no extra cost but the walkthrough transom on the 5.8 is an extra \$1400. 



PERFORMANCE

- 6.2kts (11kmh) @ 2000rpm
- 7.3kts (13.5kmh) @ 2500rpm
- 14.4kts (26kmh) @ 3000rpm (plane)
- 19.5kts (36kmh) @ 3500rpm
- 23.5kts (45kmh) @ 4000rpm
- 27.5kts (51kmh) @ 4500rpm
- 31kts (57kmh) @ 5000rpm
- 33.5kts (62kmh) @ 5500rpm
- 35kts (65kmh) @ 5800rpm (WOT)

SAILFISH SHELF RUNNER



HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: \$94,990

GENERAL

Type: Powered catamaran
 Material: Aluminium (5mm bottom; 3mm topsides)
 Length: 6.3m (LOA)
 Beam: 2.45m
 Weight: 1850kg (BMT)

CAPACITIES

Fuel: 2 x 140lt
 People: 7
 Rec. max. HP: 2x 75

ENGINE

Make/model: 2x Honda BF75
 Type: SOHC, four-cylinder, EFI, four-strokes
 Displacement: 1496cc
 Weight (ea): 163kg (L type)
 Gearbox ratio: 2.33:1
 Propeller: 19in x 13in

MANUFACTURED / SUPPLIED BY

Sailfish Catamarans / Webbe Marine
 17 Yalgar Rd
 Kirrawee, NSW, 2232
 Tel: (02) 9521 7944
 Web: www.webbemarine.com.au

TO OWN THIS BOAT

Price as tested \$94,990
 Weekly Repayment TAP \$270.24
 Deposit \$23,747
 Final Repayment (%=S) \$23,747
 Term (months) 60

* Customer rate is 8.99% comparison rate is 9.26% for all of the above payments. See rear of magazine for conditions.



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