

Run to the reef

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The Sailfish Reef Runner has a lot going for it in a compact, offshore package that will please both tinny and twin-hull fans. As you'd expect from an aluminium-hulled catamaran, this vessel is both physically tough and smooth-riding on rough water, while offering low running costs and plenty of fighting-room for its size.

Catamaran hulls have legendary status in Australia largely on the back of stories about old Shark Cats and how well they handle big seas and bar crossings. Adding to the aura around cats has been their use in very rough environments by abalone divers, rescue services and government departments.

Regardless of the hull design, many fishermen like alloy boats for their toughness and ease of maintenance. A well-built modern plate boat can have similar soft-handling characteristics as a 'glass boat, so the gap in performance has narrowed. Despite their popularity, there has been a lack of choice for cats and most of the ones available have been fibreglass. Recognising this gap in the market, Sailfish Catamarans recently married alloy construction and multi-hull design into a compact package aimed squarely at the offshore fishing market.

Sailfish have long been a builder of larger-sized boats, but their main outlet, Webbe Marine in Sydney, convinced them that there was a demand for a trailerable cat. This saw two new models introduced on to the market in the form of the Reef Runner (on test) and the larger Shelf Runner (reviewed in *BlueWater* 89).

Ocean conditions were up on the day of our test on Sydney's Botany Bay. This enabled us to get first-hand experience of how well the Reef Runner handles rough water.

LOTS OF SPACE

Even in its muted grey paint scheme and with a length of only 5.75m, the Reef Runner is an impressive sight on its custom trailer. Deep, flat sides running right to the bow create an impression of size that belies its overall length. Without the

overhangs it measures 5.3m, and once aboard I was surprised at the amount of room available.

Sailfish have made the most of the available space by locating the helm as far forward as possible, leaving the cockpit area uncluttered for fishing. Even more room is available by creating a narrow deck between the motors so that boarding is easy, but more importantly, it is easy to get right to the back of the boat to fight fish away from the engines.

The design still leaves space in front of the helm for an enclosed cuddy cabin either side of a bow walkway, leaving loads of dry storage to starboard and more storage and a portable toilet to port. While not a full-size bathroom by any measure, it is still a handy option to add some creature comforts to family fishing adventures. An acrylic screen and a lifting hatch allow access right to the bow for anchoring or an extra place for fishing.

To starboard of the walkway, the flat driver's dash has readouts for the twin Honda motors on either side

of a Garmin 750S colour sounder/plotter. The Hondas each get tacho, trim, water temperature and voltmeter. The lower section of the panel is stepped rearward to place the engine controls and the steering wheel closer to the driver. Electronics include a Fusion CD player with iPod dock and a VHF radio mounted on the passenger side.

A lot of thought has gone into using the seating area in an innovative and practical way. The driver's seat sits on a strong alloy storage bin, while the passenger seat lifts on a hinge to reveal a good-sized livebait tank that is plumbed and drains overboard. This seems a sensible arrangement to get the angler baiting up out of the way of those fishing, and also leaves space at the transom for other necessities. The seats themselves are fitted with bolsters to provide different sitting and leaning positions when under way.

Overhead, a folding bimini offers good shade, and along with front and side clears, it creates a cosy, enclosed area with good weather protection when required. The rocket launcher has holders for six rods with more tackle storage in the side cockpit shelves.

At 2m x 1.75m the cockpit is a big, very usable fishing space, which Sailfish maintains rivals that of some 7m monohulls. That might be true as the available area gives the little boat big-boat fishing capability, and with the high freeboard and padded, rolled coamings it is a very capable fishing platform.

The floor covering is grey Autex marine carpet and there is nothing to trip you up on the wall-to-wall flat area. There are two 140lt tanks below the floor, which gives the boat a range of over 550km.

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At the stern there is an icebox on the floor under the central bait table and batteries each side behind canvas covers. You will also find a deck wash and scuppers for the self-draining deck.

Power is provided by two Honda 60hp 4-stroke motors that can be optioned up to 75s if you feel you need more drive. My impression was that the motors fitted are a good balance of weight and power.

There are two options available for the transom – the one fitted, which requires a step over to the walkthrough, or a transom with a cut-out providing unfettered access to the rear. Similarly, at the bow the walkthrough can be changed to a full-width cuddy cabin, which would mean you lose the bow walkthrough, but gain storage space.

LIKE A SCALDED CAT

Driving the boat is comfortable on the well-padded seats that have sliders and rotate a full 360 degrees. The steering wheel is mounted low and the throttle controls are in front of the driver on the dash, rather than on the side, but it doesn't take long to adjust. The twin controls are light and the dual bullhorn hydraulic steering is smooth and easy.

As it was flat water across Botany Bay on the way to the heads we were able to run the boat to its full potential. Planting the throttles gets instant action from the sweet-sounding Hondas, and the boat accelerated smoothly through the rev range to over 30kt. It feels happy cruising around 4500rpm at 22kt, where Sailfish claim fuel consumption per motor of 9.4lt/h. As might be expected, when driven flat out to 32kt, consumption jumps to 22lt/h at 5800rpm. Handling is a typical cat experience of turning flat at lower speeds and a

tendency to lean out a little as the speed increases.

In the ocean off Botany Bay we encountered close to one-and-a-half-metre seas in the backwash near the cliffs, but we had no trouble maintaining a 20kt pace comfortably. Across the swell and into a following sea the boat handled well with no tendency to broach. Directly into waves the buoyancy in the bows kept the hull high in the water and the boat kept flat, with the lower-hull fighting to keep things level. Landings were soft and there was no banging from the hull or fittings. The twin Hondas made a pleasant howl, but not enough to hinder conversations.

At rest the boat is stable, and we would have had no trouble fishing in the unpleasant conditions. Occasionally, bigger waves caused some metallic slap from the hull to remind you that it's a tinny.

It is good to see this Sailfish on the market, as it will meet the needs of many anglers who like the idea of a catamaran matched with an alloy hull. Webbe Marine in co-operation with Sailfish Catamarans has put together a package aimed right at fishing enthusiasts, with lots of inclusions they will certainly want. Everything on the test boat is standard and includes all safety gear, so there won't be those unforeseen extras that can tend to blow the budget. 🛥

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lots of room for its size.
- Good soft-riding sea boat.
- Economical fuel consumption.
- Safety of twin motors.
- Good bow and stern access.
- High level of standard features.



SPEC CHECK



SAILFISH REEF RUNNER

PRICE AS TESTED

\$79,990

OPTIONS FITTED

60hp Hondas, trailer, bimini, livebait tank, Fusion CD, Garmin GPS, VHF radio and more.

GENERAL

Material: Aluminium, 4mm hull, 3mm topsides

Hull Type: Fishing catamaran

LOA: 5.75 metres

Beam: 2.45 metres

BMT Towing Weight: 1600kg

CAPACITIES

Recommended Power: 60hp

Maximum Rated Power: 60hp

People: 6

Fuel: 140lt x 2

ENGINES

Make/model: Honda 60hp

Type: 4-stroke

Displacement: 998cc

No. Cylinders: 3

Weight: 114kg

Gearbox ratio: 2.07:1

MANUFACTURED BY

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