

Remodelling a favourite

ChALLENGER Boats (New Zealand) Ltd has entered a new phase in its 15-year history with the introduction of Britisher Tony Hawker as majority shareholder, providing new ideas and a marketing focus.

Hawker arrived from England a year ago looking for the opportunity to invest in New Zealand, and after investigating a number of businesses, was impressed by the potential he saw in Challenger Boats. The company has been building boats in Te Puke since 1994 and has established a reputation for producing solid-performing runabouts, largely for the family market.

Though not previously involved in trailer boat construction, Hawker has owned a number of successful businesses in the UK. His boating interests lean more toward sail than power boats and he owns a 12.5m Hanse yacht, which is domiciled in Croatia – “a magical place to cruise”. He has also participated in numerous offshore yacht races.

Together with Allan McNearney (the founder of Challenger Boats), Hawker has remodeled the Challenger 720, adding a sleeker top line and larger covered area while retaining the fundamental hull design. He has also opted for diesel power.

The 720's hull has always been noted for its soft ride in choppy seas – a result of the slightly convex hull shape and lack of strakes, says Hawker. In addition to changes to the bow area, the redesign has seen the pilothouse extended backwards about 300mm, providing more covered area in the cockpit. The sleeker lines are enhanced by the new windscreen – it's now curved, toughened glass, supported by sliding side windows on both sides.

Other modifications include an enlarged anchor locker, new hatches and a slightly larger diameter stainless steel bow rail.

These changes affect the production process, and to that end the company has recently moved from its Te Puke factory to new premises in Newton St, Mt Maunganui. The move provides



Challenger Boats' trusty 720 has been given a revamp following new investment in the company, including the addition of an inboard diesel. The final package is versatile, an easy riding vessel equally at ease with a fishing gang or the family. **Gary Lovell** reports.



Boat Test Challenger 720 SD Diesel Hard Top

*Trade-A-Boat says...
Set up for serious fishing, the 720 can also
be configured for family boating. There are
enough options with the Challenger 720
to enable a prospective owner to give more
weight to one role without compromising
the other too much.*

much greater visibility to passing traffic and also improves access to a number of boat dealers in the area.

Diesel power

Buyers of the 720 Hard Top have a choice of a diesel or petrol-powered inboard, or the more conventional outboard engine.

The test boat was fitted with a four-cylinder Cummins Mercruiser QSD2.8 diesel, with an integrated Bravo 3 stern drive unit. While the standard engine produces 210hp, this one was upgraded to 220hp by the manufacturer.

Mercruiser's highly-regarded Seacore technology gives both engine and sterndrive improved corrosion protection – they come with a four-year limited manufacturer's warranty against corrosion.

Despite the horses, the engine is remarkably compact and takes up little space in the cockpit. It's also easy to access once the upholstered engine cover is hinged forward or removed. The 215-litre fuel tank occupies most of the available space under the carpeted cockpit floor, but there is a small hatch for bilge storage between the engine and the fuel tank.



Excellent access to the diesel comes with tilting the cover forward



BOAT REVIEW



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A full-width entry leads to the forward cabin





Fishing-friendly

In some ways the covered inboard creates a cleaner, freer fishing platform – no outboard to snag lines and rods.

Access to the cockpit is via a step-through on the port side of the transom (the other side carries the battery locker). A large bait board with a five-rod rocket launcher sits on the top of the transom. The entire unit is mounted on a stainless pole, which is easily swapped for a ski pole if fishing's not your thing.

But the test boat was definitely fishing-oriented. Anglers are well catered for, with a total of 15 rod holders on the boat – five on the baitboard, six on the top of the pilothouse and four in the cockpit coamings. Full-length shelves along both sides of the cockpit provide stowing space for items such as rods, lifejackets and fishing tackle.

Still, aesthetics haven't been sacrificed for fishing functionality: the cockpit coamings are trimmed with a teak strip.

The open pilothouse ends well aft of the Softrider pedestal seats and it offers excellent protection. The pedestal seats take up little room in the cabin/cockpit area and give the back of the boat a great sense of roominess.

While the new, curved windscreen looks good, it's also a more practical solution: it curves around the corners of the pilothouse, eliminating the need for corner pillars. This enhances the helmsman's view, particularly when berthing or coming alongside another boat. The sliding side windows also facilitate communication between the helmsman and others at the berth or out on the water.

The forward cabin is open to the rest of the boat and boasts a full-width V berth. A centre insert pulls out to improve the seating area or to accommodate a portable toilet – though you'd surely think twice about adding one in an open cabin?

A stainless steel hand rail surrounds the large opening to the forward cabin – a fixture you'd find very useful in rough seas. A large Weaver hatch provides plenty of light into the cabin and alternative access to the bow.

The Challenger 720 is fitted with a Freedom winch, operated from the helm station, and the large anchor locker will accommodate plenty of chain and warp for deep anchoring.

Performance

Launching the boat from the tandem-axle Prescott trailer was easy, although we found



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Boat Test Challenger 720 SD Diesel Hard Top

Specifications

Challenger 720 SD
Diesel HT

(Price as tested \$127,975)

LOA	7.20m
Beam	2.45m
Draft	0.38m
Deadrise	18.5°
Tow weight	2600kg
Engine	220hp Cummins



Looking for a Challenger boat?

There are currently nine for sale online at tradeaboat.co.nz.

Check them out by clicking 'Used' then typing "Challenger" in the search bar.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

contact Challenger Boats Ltd
142 Newton Street
Mount Maunganui
ph 07 575 0497

email info@challengerboats.co.nz
visit www.challengerboats.co.nz

TO OWN THIS BOAT:

EXAMPLE BASED ON

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retrieving it with the manual winch after our trip hard work. I'd definitely lean towards ticking the box for the optional power winch.

Shortly after launching, the 220hp Cummins Mercruiser proved its worth by pulling our six-metre photography boat away from the breakwater (a kink in the fuel line brought its engine to a stuttering halt). A rude reminder of how simple things can easily cause disaster.

At first the sound of the diesel seemed a little out of place in a boat of this size – the purr of an outboard engine being more the norm. But the diesel was

quiet, unobtrusive and provided a strong sense of confidence.

Out on the water a nasty little chop threatened to make things uncomfortable, but the Challenger hull cut through the waves with very little bounce and the wide reverse chine turned the top of the bow wave out and away from the boat efficiently.

Straight line running in the building waves was spot on, with the boat holding her course in all but the biggest cross waves – allowing the helmsman to relax and join in the conversation on a long run.

Likewise cornering was steady and, even at near to top speed,

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Diesel's cruising range
Curved windscreen

You won't...

The trailer's manual winch – too hard

the boat felt totally under control, with just the right amount of lean into the corner and no discernable sideways slippage. Top speed was just under 40mph at 3800rpm, with the most economical cruising speed (20mph) burning up about 16 litres per hour. At 25mph (3000rpm) fuel consumption rises to 22 litres per hour.

All in all the Challenger 720 is a boat that makes the journey out to the destination as enjoyable, if not more enjoyable than, finally reaching it.

Although the test boat was set up for serious fishing, it can also be configured to as a family boat. I'm not sure any boat can fulfill both roles,

but there are enough options with the Challenger 720 to enable a prospective owner to give more weight to one of the roles without compromising the other too much.

And, with the right options, whatever role you choose, this boat's basic characteristics will ensure that she will perform it very well. ↴

Other boats in this class



Buccaneer 735 Exess

Sporting a two-burner stove, electric toilet and fresh water shower, this is a supreme example of a luxury fishing platform.

Specifications

LOA	7.71m
Beam	2.48m
Deadrise	22.5 deg
Rec hp	175-300hp



Smuggler Stealth 720

A five-year structural hull warranty, built-in 300-litre fuel tanks and a built-in 80-litre water tanks are just some of the features on the Smuggler flagship.

Specifications

LOA	6.93m
Beam	2.4m
Tow weight	2100kg
Rec hp	175 to 250hp



Fi-Glass Warrior HT

The latest addition to the popular Fi-Glass stable, the Warrior Hard Top carries most of the manufacturer's signature features, and comes with a six-year written transferable structural hull warranty.

Specifications

LOA	6.4m
Beam	2.3m
Rec hp	130hp to 225hp
Fuel tank	140 litres

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