

# A quantum leap in offshore boating

**JOHN MORAN**

Photographs by: Tony Brownjohn

Sometimes it takes the opportunity to check out a new boat for an experienced, grizzled fisherman to fish water that he has dreamed about for many years. The boat test combined with a trip to the fabled Mokes produced a special day on the water.



*It was 70-80 metres deep within spitting distance of the rocks.*



**A**ll of us keen fishos have no doubt heard of some very remote fishing spots where tales of huge fish and major bust-offs seem to be the norm. I have been lucky enough to fish at some pretty exciting places over the last 50 years or so, but one such very special fishing place had always eluded me. This area is very remote and has a fishing reputation that dissolves grown men to blithering idiots when the slightest opportunity to fish this angler's eldorado presents itself. It is the haunt of gamefish species in summer, mega snapper all year round, and a hapuku ground of some repute.

Due to the seasonal warm currents it attracts, many unusual fish species appear and all in all it is one of the more mystical places to fish. I am referring to the Mokohinau Island group, more commonly known simply as "the Mokes".

I have in the past been booked on charter trips to this enchanted place, only to have the trips canned because of the weather. Being situated some 30 miles off the North Island's mainland there is nowhere to hide if the weather cuts up, so I suppose this is mother nature's way of protecting one of the treasured jewels in her crown.

As a fishing journalist, I realise how fortunate I am in getting to fish from some superb boats with some very nice people in some great places. My only request has been to incorporate some fishing with my boat reports, which has never been a problem. My definition of purgatory is spending the day on the water and not being able to fish. It doesn't even bear thinking about!

## WANT TO GO TO THE MOKES?

July is a bugger of a month, being in the middle of winter with the cold, unpredictable weather. I was on standby to go out on a boat test in a QUINTREX 650 Centre Cab, with our destination being either Channel Island or the top of the Coromandel Peninsular, when I received the call from my mate, Matt Hewetson at NZFW that the trip was on in two days time. A window in the weather would allow us to head out to the Mokes if it was alright with me. I just about did a double somersault at the prospect, then collected my thoughts and began packing gear for the trip, all the time daydreaming of all the wonderful adventures that lay ahead of me.

At 4am that day I loaded up my ute with



enough gear to open up a small tackle shop and laid rubber to the North Shore where I met Matt and transferred my stuff to the NZFW Challenger 595, and we headed for Omaha to rendezvous with the boys from Auckland Marine Centre. Matt towed his boat in his new Kia Sportage 2.0 litre diesel vehicle, which quite amazed me with its power and quietness. Read all about this outstanding wagon in our vehicle review on page 60 of this issue.

In the just-lifting light we arrived at Omaha boat ramp where we met up with our team for the day. Andrew Hope, the sales manager for Auckland Marine Centre, was my skipper for the day on the QUINTREX 650 Centre Cab. Pat Langevad, who runs the fishing and chandlery section for the company, was to accompany us on "Focus", a big 720 HTO Southern Sports, with the owner Bruce Hubrich, and Justin from Hooked on Fishing in Whangaparaoa.

The boys explained that owing to the remoteness of the Mokes, travelling with three boats is always a good option in terms of safety. Once all the gear was placed on board, all three craft were launched and secured to a nearby landing.

Looking down on the QUINTREX 650 Centre Cab from the landing, I just couldn't

help but be impressed with the general layout of this serious fishing machine, with the most striking feature being the full walk-around deck, yet with a very functional cabin area to store our precious gear.

## MERCURY POWER

Our demonstrator boat was powered by a big grunty 200HP 2-stroke Mercury outboard, quietly idling away as I stepped on board.

The largest boat in our small fleet, Focus led the way with Andy and I behind them, and Matt and NZFW photographer Tony Brownjohn following in our gentle wake in the Challenger, as we slowly made our way out of the estuary at low tide.

Once we were in the open sea it reminded me of a shotgun start as all three boats opened up and roared off towards the distant horizon. The familiar sight of Little Barrier was off our starboard beam as Andy fine tuned our Lowrance LCX 18C dual frequency Sounder GPS Chart Plotter, then indicated to me where our life jackets were, the location of the EPIRB and other safety issues as all responsible skippers should.

He handed me the helm as I tucked up behind Focus to take full advantage of the flattened water. The smooth hydraulic



steering was perfect. It was effortless to turn, yet held its course nicely if you took your hands off the wheel.

After about 30 minutes I became very much aware of the increasing northerly swells with a nor-west cap in evidence, when Focus stopped and we pulled alongside for a team talk once Matt joined us. My heart was in my mouth fearing yet another cancelled Mokes trip, so I was overjoyed when the decision was made to continue, even though we would be in for a rough ride. The forecast was for lighter westerlies in the afternoon, which was the major player in our decision.

"Where the hell are the Mokes, Andy?" I inquired. "Out there," he replied, pointing to a blank spot on the horizon, as I realised just how remote this island group really is.

In most boat reports I have done for NZFW, the seas have been really tame by comparison to what we were now encountering, which to my way of thinking is a fair dinkum test of a boat's ability to strut its stuff. These swells were breaking and very irregular, which is a good test of the craft's design features and the skipper's ability. The QUINTREX 650 has an offshore rating, which I can happily confirm is a rating it has justifiably earned.

The 2.4 metre flared bow over the millennium hull was quite frankly just bloody amazing. When punching into some of these really curly swells, she threw the spray well clear with absolutely no wash or spray coming on board. I even sat on the large upholstered fish bin down aft for a spell, and remained quite dry. I must comment at this point on Andy's skill as a skipper in reading these crappy sea conditions. He was always right in tune with what was ahead, and accelerated when he could and slowed down when conditions dictated, all the while steering our demonstrator to maximise ride.

## DEEP BLUE WATER

All in all, the two hour trip to the Mokes was comfortable considering the conditions, although it was a great feeling to finally arrive at our destination. We all hove to under the precipitous cliff faces of Fanal Island where we all enjoyed a hot coffee while planning

our attack on the resident fish population. I took time out to marvel at this stark, barren remote place. Little pockets of vegetation clung on the sheer rock faces, seemingly defying all logic, and the deep dark blue water was a joy to behold.

Justin is a well known expert on this area, and it is common knowledge that he has caught a large number of 20-pound plus snapper (most released) with some going over the magical 30-pound mark. He suggested we drift fish over the pinnacles he had marked on the GPS and target hapuku. We again played follow the leader while I rigged up my Penn 114H 6/0 Senator reel, fitted to my Penn standup Power Stick, with a 50kg mono two-hook ledger rig and a 20-ounce bomb on the end. A couple of 12/0 circle hooks were added and baited up with large strips of blue mackerel. Once the drift line was established, I dropped my rig over and controlled my 24kg mono line until after what seemed an eternity, I felt the sinker hit the bottom. I glanced at the Lowrance sounder - 125 metres, with a huge pinnacle looming up on the screen. I had a quiet chuckle to myself, comparing this scene to my Manukau gurnard fishing methods with 3kg line in 5 metres of water. Andy was on braid with a dual-speed reel, and when it was time to wind up I could see the benefit of his gear. He was up in half the time and a lot less effort. When I did finally wind up, I was amazed to find two quite small grand daddy hapuku (scorpion fish) or bucket mouths as I call them, cleanly jaw hooked on such huge hooks.

We all persevered with this technique on a variety of past proven 'puka pinnacles, but after an hour or so it became quite evident that hapuku steaks weren't going to feature on the menu for tonight's dinner so we all opted for plan B which was to target snapper, which is more up my alley.

The crew on Focus opted to anchor off a structure to the west of Fanal Island and set up a good berley trail where they would remain until home time. Matt was in favour of fishing right in close to Fanal where it is still 70 to 80 metres deep within spitting distance of the rocks where he caught his PB snapper a while back. Andy and I liked the look of a large area of sloping foul where it rose from



The snapper started out at pan size.

120 metres to just 40 metres, so we all went about our business and anchored up in our chosen spots.

## BIG REDS

Andy changed our plough anchor to a grapnel for very obvious reasons, and with a flick of the winch switch set it so our stern was nicely placed to flow our berley back to the target area. I selected my pet Penn 225LD 6kg rig from our overhead rocket launcher, fitted a home tied flasher with pieces of squid and a 4-ounce sinker, and slipped it over the side. Once I felt bottom, I raised it slowly so my baits were just above the kelp forest. I was thinking about a cuppa when my Penn Sabre rod tip took a dive, and I wound in to find a pair of nice pannie snapper. "Hell, that was quick," commented Andy, as he was rigging up his 15kg outfit on a beaut rod that he had built himself. I dropped down and connected within seconds. Two slightly smaller snapper this time. It was now 11am, just 2 hours before high tide, so we were very much aware of the need to make the most of the current while it lasted. Andy had cast out a big lump of blue mackerel with a 2-ounce sinker directly over the bait. It sure took a while to drift down, but Andy explained that once the berley kicked in, big snapper often rise right up and often nail then in mid water. I kept busy catching school snapper, bucket

mouths (which incidentally make delicious eating) wrasse, cod etc, as I really wanted a feed of fresh fish to take home.

Andy was slowly paying out his strayline when he felt the softest of bites, followed by a slow run. He struck hard and he was in, big time! Andy let out a whoop of delight as his line just peeled off the reel, which was set at 6kg. Thumping on the rod tip indicated a good red and Andy was playing it beautifully when the rod suddenly straightened, and he wound in to find his 40kg trace chewed through. He did not seem upset or surprised as he

seriously targets big snapper a lot, and this was just par for the course to him. He rigged with heavier trace, while I made the decision to change to my 15kg Penn 9500 rig. I just started to wind in my 6kg line when I got whacked really hard and line was just peeling off my reel at an alarming rate. Andy had just pulled in a reasonable snapper, so he grabbed the gaff and stuck by me, giving me all the encouragement he could muster. The serious thumping and punishing runs all indicated a mega red. The butt of the rod dug into my gut as the big fish put me under more pressure.



The fishing area is uncluttered.



I got it half way up and thought I had it tamed, when it dived to the bottom again. More thumping and runs followed as I gingerly played it in. Eventually I saw a silvery colour looming up and my heart skipped a beat. Then the big fish rolled over to reveal the top side of a 6-foot shark. BUGGER!!! My dreams of a PB snapper were shattered, but both Andy and I were gobsmacked as to how the hell it could imitate the fighting actions of a really big snapper with such precision.

"Bloody noahs," I muttered as I reached for my 15-kilo rig. Just then Andy was on within 30 seconds of casting out a whole skippy head. A seriously good fish was giving him all the grief he could handle. This was a big red for sure. He was having a ball, when it happened again. Busted off! After he had wound in, I put my glasses on and had a close look at the trace. I looked as if it was hit by a hammer on an anvil, just squashed flat.

This clearly indicated to me the work of the old rounded off teeth of a huge snapper. We both fished on, adding more school snapper to the bin and both experiencing further bust-offs to add to the excitement of the day. I caught yet another quite big shark at the top of the tide when the fishing just died.

### MORE BUST-OFFS

We called up the other boats on the VHF radio to see how they had fared. Both Matt and Tony were quite excited about the massive bust-offs they had encountered, but did manage half a dozen pannies for table fish. The boys in Focus did a bit better. Pat had an 18-pound snapper and several keepers in the bin for tea. As our



*The layout impressed the writer.*



The team - Andrew Hope (left) John Moran and Pat Langevad.

Mokes expert Justin explained, the area has a great reputation for running hot and cold, even on a day to day basis. It was comforting to know that we had done everything right in terms of places fished, gear used and berley deployment. I for one was not the least bit concerned as I had experienced a great day, fishing with some really nice people and above all, I had finally got to fish at the hallowed Mokes at long last.

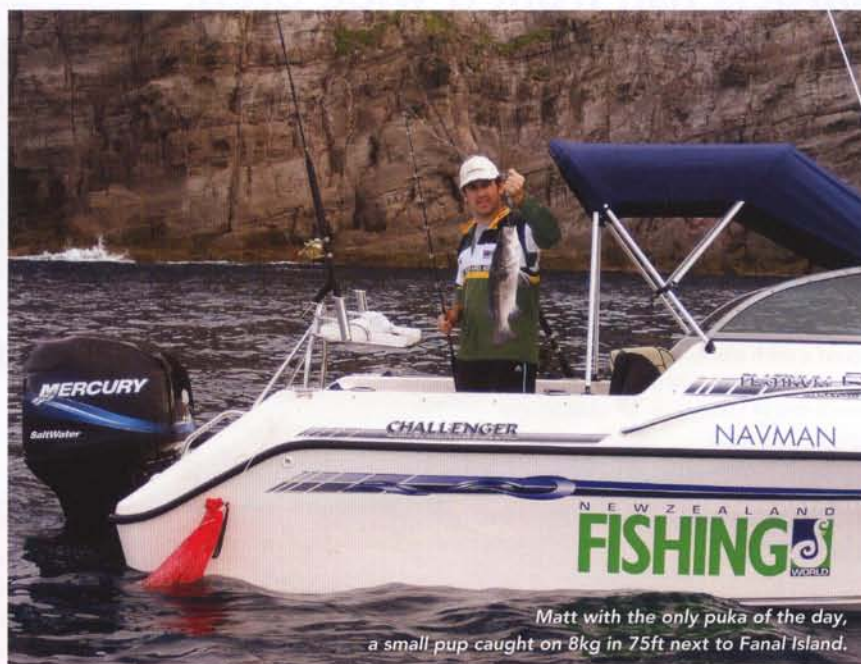
We all met up again with the NZFW Challenger under the shelter of Fanal Island, where we transferred Tony to our boat to take the last of the photographs. We were returning Tony to the Challenger when Matt's rod bent over, so we backed off to watch him bring in a pup hapuku of about 3kg in only 75ft of water. We were all just as excited as Matt as we stowed all our gear away in preparation for the long slog home.

The wind had not dropped much as predicted, so we encountered much the same snotty broken swells on our return trip in convoy as before. Despite the obvious boat movement of the hull hitting the swells which any boat would have experienced, our trip back was not really all that uncomfortable, so Andy and I were able to have a good old natter about QUINTREX boats.

### AUSTRALIAN MADE

I did not realise it but these boats are all made in Australia and imported into NZ. The company's 22,000 square metre purpose-built manufacturing facility has the world's most advanced machinery and robotic technology to produce in excess

of 15,000 boats annually! They are the largest producer of aluminium boats in the southern hemisphere, and have been in business since 1945. The QUINTREX 650 boasts the Millennium V-Flare hull with the aforementioned flared bow which really performed in the rough, as I was experiencing. As we were nearing Little



Matt with the only puka of the day, a small pup caught on 8kg in 75ft next to Fanal Island.



Barrier sea conditions worsened somewhat due to a change in current flow, when Andy demonstrated one amazing feature of this impressive craft. He further lowered the trim tabs which softened the ride quite considerably, although he did concede that this would increase fuel consumption. Still, with 160 litres of fuel in the underfloor tank, this was not a problem.

Andy has a fantastic knowledge of his product and was rattling off so many features of our boat that my mind simply boggled. Space does not allow me to go into any great detail, but Auckland Marine Centre, the sole Auckland agents for QUINTREX boats, have a fantastic glossy colour booklet covering all aspects of their great boats from dinghys right up to the 650's which they will happily supply upon request.

The main features that took my eye include the total accessibility of everything due to the full walk-round deck; moulded anchor well; bowsprit and rails with instant easy and safe access to the forward section; quality helm controlled anchor winch; superb hydraulic bullhorn steering system; extremely functional dash configuration

and layout and super comfortable seating.

This great boat has storage galore both underfloor and inboard, and the number one feature I always look for in a boat, a totally uncluttered aft fishing area with a perfectly placed bait station.

If you are ever considering the purchase of one of these magnificent boats, I bet you dollars to donuts that there will not be a single feature you can name that is not available to you. While the list of standard items is huge, you want to read about the optional extras! It will soon become very obvious to any serious boat buyer, that QUINTREX are major players in the alloy boat field, backed up with 60 years of experience by a company who employ over 330 highly specialised technicians. Quite mind boggling, eh!

We all arrived safely back at Omaha at 5pm. While the boys were retrieving their respective boats I reflected on my day. I had achieved my dream of fishing at the Mokes, an experience I thoroughly enjoyed every second of.

At moments like this, I realise how fortunate I am to live in such a paradise as

this. I had also experienced four hours of boat travel in quite shitty conditions that any lesser craft that our QUINTREX 650 Centre Cab would be struggling to handle in any degree of comfort. The highly impressive 200HP Mercury 2 stroke never missed a beat, and I can fully understand why there are so many of these great motors driving so many boats of all sizes.

But best of all was the supreme test of any boat in these conditions. When I woke next morning after a much needed sleep, I had really expected to experience aching bones and joints from the extreme sea conditions we encountered, but no.

I felt like a spring chicken and would have done the whole trip over again, then and there, if the opportunity presented itself. That says a hell of a lot in my book. I salute you, Queen QUINTREX!

For further information on QUINTREX boats, contact Auckland Marine Centre, 671 Great South Road, Penrose, Auckland (09) 579 7981 or 021 495 557, email [sales@aucklandmarine.co.nz](mailto:sales@aucklandmarine.co.nz) or visit their website [akmarine@extra.co.nz](http://akmarine@extra.co.nz)



**AUCKLAND**  
MARINE CENTRE

**MERCURY**

## Quintrex 650 Offshore Centre Cab



### Package includes:

- Mercury 200HP 2-Stroke
- Dunbier Trailer including Rego + WOF
- Fully painted hull
- Bimini top + clears
- Twin underfloor fuel tanks (230 litres)
- Hydraulic steering
- VHF
- Lowrance LCX 18c GPS/Sounder
- Trim tabs
- Auto capstan
- Twin batteries
- Deck wash
- Live bait tank

**Normally \$81,382**

**Demo Special \$64,995!**

(sorry woman in photo is not included)

Phone 0800 784 687 or Email [sales@aucklandmarine.co.nz](mailto:sales@aucklandmarine.co.nz)