







**ON THE  
WATER**

Story & Photos:  
Warren Steptoe

# SHARP SHOOTER

With its new Millennium Blade hull this Quintrex 650 Spirit represents a milestone in aluminium boat manufacturing, writes Warren Steptoe.

## WEATHER CONDITIONS

Wind: Light winds with  
afternoon sea breezes  
Sea: Some offshore swell



**T**his Quintrex 650 Spirit is something of a landmark for Australian boating, representing the marriage of our own unique style of half-cab family / fishing boats. These manufacturing and design practices have produced some of the most sophisticated aluminium boats in the world.

Several Aussie marques have developed such craft — typically between 5.5m and 6.5m, with a forward cabin for shelter and an open aft section for fishing — to the point of perfection. I'm talking names like CruiseCraft, Haines Hunter, Haines Signature, Haines Traveller and Seafarer, and more recently, brands like Evolution, Streaker and Whittley.

Of course there are plenty of quality

imported examples, too — especially since the Aussie dollar surged towards parity with the Greenback — but the brilliance of our local offerings in this category simply can't be denied.

Funnily enough, this style of boat is typically limited to fibreglass, while Aussie boaties have traditionally displayed a strong preference for aluminium. Aussies are obsessed with tinnies, and it's not hard to see why — with our rough roads and ramps and generally punishing conditions, aluminium boats present a tough and persuasive argument.

### A NEW BREED

A few Aussie manufacturers have tackled the aluminium 5.5m to 6.5m cabin trailerboat class before, but until this 6.5m Quintrex 650 Spirit came along (and its 6.1m and 6.9m siblings), such boats suffered in comparison to fibreglass competition when it came to offshore travel, and the formidable wind chop and swells it can entail.

The reason for this is simple: in aluminium it's very difficult to replicate the sophisticated compound curves of a moulded hull, which deliver a softer ride and better handling in heavy offshore conditions.

Apart from a few power catamaran hulls — a different kettle of fish — tinnies could rarely cut it offshore, with only a

few notable exceptions coming to mind: Noble with its deep-vee hull and Quintrex with its Millennium hull. The Noble is built with so-called "plate" aluminium, essentially placing it in a category of its own, while Quintrex adopts a pressed skin supported by an internal frame.

Quintrex is no stranger to innovation. Ever since its early days, when it began applying the aircraft industry's stretch-forming technology to aluminium boats, Quintrex has been a true pioneer of the aluminium boat scene.

The Quintrex of today is a different entity to that originally founded by Terry Quantrill, but leadership and innovation remains very much a part of the firm's corporate culture. That ethos flows through each and every Quintrex boat, but it's especially evident in this recent offering, the 650 Spirit, which to my mind is the most exciting Quintrex model we've seen in recent times.

Why is it so special? Because for the first time Aussie boat buyers can now buy an aluminium cabin trailerboat from 6.1m to 6.9m that delivers an offshore ride comparable to that of a fibreglass boat. Let's take a closer look...

### SHARPENING THE BLADE

The secret to the Spirit's inevitable success is its Millennium "Blade" hull, which represent a marked evolution of the

#### On the plane...

- ✓ Offshore ride and handling comparable to fibreglass boats
- ✓ Combines best attributes of an aluminium boat
- ✓ Brisk and economical performance with 175hp Mercury OptiMax

#### Dragging the chain...

- ✗ Finish could be better
- ✗ Needs more options to realise full offshore potential





original Millennium hull released some 10 years ago. With a tweaked underwater profile and a redesigned bow and transom, the Millennium Blade hull is only available in the 610 Spirit, 650 Spirit and 690 Spirit cabin boats, the 610 Freedom Sport bowrider, and the 610 Legend and 650 Legend centre-consoles.

I've tested all three formats in 6.1m and 6.5m since the Blade's introduction, my first taste being at the hull's press launch in Queensland. There were a few anxious moments when a 610 Legend centre-console found itself surfing a 1.5m wake behind the Couran Cove ferry, but any fears of the hull broaching in a following sea were quickly dismissed as the Blade took it in its stride.

I initially thought the 650 Spirit might be another matter entirely due to its cabin superstructure and the associated higher centre of gravity, but my fears were also unfounded — it passed a similar broach test with flying colours. That's all good news for anyone who wants to head offshore; the only way you're likely to get into trouble with one of these hulls is if you load it foolishly or trim the outboard badly.

However, the Blade's biggest step forward concerns its roughwater ride. Aluminium boats have a generally well-deserved reputation for beating up their occupants across any sort of wind chop, but the Blade's ride is right up there with its fibreglass

competitors. In fact, I've tested many a comparable GRP boat that didn't ride as softly or handle a big swell as well as the various Blade-hulled boats I've sampled.

I put the 650 Spirit through its paces offshore from the Gold Coast Seaway and around some of the channels inside the breakwalls, where the opposing wind and tide can combine to produce a nasty wind chop — and I was nothing short of amazed by the Blade's composure.

This groundbreaking roughwater performance has been achieved largely by an extensive reworking of the bow. The stem angle has a more severe rake than preceding Millennium models. As a result, the entry point where the bow cuts into surface chop, and the "shoulders" where the hull swells out to the fullness of the beam, have both narrowed significantly. Also, the fairly pronounced flat section of the bottom of the hull, a feature of the previous Millennium design, is now almost gone. Combined, these aspects of the new design produce what I would describe as an unprecedented roughwater ride.

### SPACE AND COMFORT

Right, that's the hull, but what about the rest of the boat? The 650 Spirit's cabin has also been improved. New lines and a new windscreen provide additional headroom inside, and to my eye the aesthetics have improved, too. There's also a new hatch

in the cabin roof, which provides access to the bow for anchoring. This hatch works very well indeed; I have no doubt the design will soon be copied by competitors.

The bunks are of a generous length and the stowage bins underneath them have moulded liners to keep gear dry and secure. An optional infill cushion will convert the single bunks to a double, while the cabin's carpet lining — which helps dampen the sound of the water against the hull, comes standard.

I imagine most 650 Spirit owners will add a set of clears between the windscreen and an optional bimini top to complete the weather protection for the helm and passenger seats. Serious offshore fishos will also opt for a rocket launcher above the bimini to stow six rigged rods and a transom workbench that will accept another four. The latter fits into a (standard) socket, set into the aft bulkhead, which can also take an optional skipole.

There's a solid grabrail in front of the passenger seat and a dash area big enough for all the electronics that are part and parcel of modern offshore fishing. The helm's ergonomics and the view ahead suited my 170cm height well. Both the helm and passenger seats in our test boat were comfortable buckets set atop stowage bins with aft-facing seat pads for lids.

The cockpit itself can be well set up for fishing. For the boat to meet the level

Right: A hatch running the full length of the cabin roof all the way to the bow is a great feature likely to be copied by competitors.

Far right: The 650 Spirit's comfortable aft lounge has stowage underneath. Families will find useful, but keen offshore fishers are likely to order their boat without it.

TRAILERBOAT RATES THE QUINTREX 650 SPIRIT	
1 Fun factor	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
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	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️







flotation standard (which means the boat will float upright if swamped), Quintrex has fitted the cockpit sides with moulded panels containing flotation material. However, although your toes tuck underneath them, these aren't ideally shaped to support your legs while fishing in rough water. You can also order this boat with standard flotation (meaning a swamped boat will still float, but not necessarily upright), in which case the cockpit sides provide excellent leg support. It's your choice: more safety or more fishing comfort...

Now to another choice — the aft lounge. Purchasers can specify a super-comfy, full-width lounge, a three-quarter-width lounge with a transom door and telescopic boarding ladder to starboard, or no aft lounge at all, leaving the cockpit set up for serious fishing.

Criticisms? Just the one. Some of the welding (around the cabin bulkhead, among other places) makes it plainly evident this is an aluminium boat. It's only a small disappointment but a disappointment nonetheless — and perhaps the last aspect for Quintrex to address before it can stand squarely toe to toe with its fibreglass competitors.

## POWER TO PLEASE

This 650 Spirit ran a direct-injection Mercury OptiMax 175 two-stroke swinging a 17in-pitch stainless-steel Mercury Vengeance prop. It was enough to push the Spirit to a top speed of just over 39kts (72.2kmh), and the amount of torque available throughout the entire rev range was impressive. Anyone who faces regular bar crossings will certainly appreciate this unit.

## PERFORMANCE


5.5kts (10.2kmh) @ 1700rpm  
11.1kts (20.6kmh) @ 2500rpm  
17.3kts (32.0kmh) @ 3000rpm  
22.1kts (40.9kmh) @ 3500rpm  
27.1kts (50.2kmh) @ 4000rpm  
32.0kts (59.3kmh) @ 4500rpm  
36.4kts (67.4kmh) @ 5000rpm  
39.1kts (72.4kmh) @ 5800rpm — WOT

The 870kg hull was up and planing cleanly at a mere 1700rpm and 5.5kts (10.1kmh), which bodes well for trips home at enforced low speeds in horrible weather (a feature of too many of my fishing trips). At 3500rpm and 4000rpm the GPS recorded speeds of 22kts (40.7kmh) and 27kts (50.0kmh) respectively, which also allows for economical cruising. For a fairly big trailerboat the 650 Spirit accelerated briskly — certainly briskly enough to tow wake toys — a desirable characteristic for family and social boating.

A fine set of on-water manners is only enhanced by the boat's hydraulic steering, a standard feature. A 120lt fuel tank is also standard, but for those going wide an additional 120lt tank is available as an option. A further option bound to find favour with the fishing set is a pressure deckwash.

## THE WRAP

A BMT weight of around 1500kg means you'll need at least a large sedan to tow a 650 Spirit; fair enough for a boat this size. Any medium-size 4WD should be right at home towing it on longer trips.

All in all, the 650 Spirit is a remarkable boat with many unprecedented attributes. It represents a whole new option in the best Australian tradition of highly developed family / social / fishing trailerboats. 

## QUINTREX 650 SPIRIT



### HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: .....\$58,500  
Options fitted: Bimini and envelope, transom door and ladder  
Priced from: \$57,370 (with Mercury 175 OptiMax)

### GENERAL

Type: ..... Variable deadrise monohull  
Material: Aluminium (5mm bottom; 3mm topsides)  
Length: ..... 6.35m (overall)  
Beam: ..... 2.40m  
Deadrise: ..... Variable  
Weight: ..... 873kg (hull)  
Weight: ..... Approx. 1500kg (BMT)

### CAPACITIES

Fuel: ..... 120lt (extra 120lt option)  
People: ..... 8 (7 with level flotation)  
Max. HP: ..... 200  
Max. engine weight: ..... 256kg

### ENGINE

Make/model: ..... Mercury 175 OptiMax Pro XS  
Type: Six-cylinder, direct-injected, V6, two-stroke  
Displacement: ..... 2507cc  
Weight: ..... 195kg  
Gear ratio: ..... 1.87:1  
Propeller: ..... Mercury Vengeance 17in-pitch

### MANUFACTURED BY

Telwater  
Web: [www.quintrex.com.au](http://www.quintrex.com.au)

### SUPPLIED BY

Tweed Coast Marine  
147 Pacific Highway  
Tweed Heads South, NSW, 2486  
Tel: (07) 5524 8877  
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### TO OWN THIS BOAT

Price as tested .....\$58,500  
Weekly Repayment TAP .....\$167.09  
Deposit .....\$14,625  
Final Repayment (%=\$) .....\$14,625  
Term (months) ..... 60

*\* Customer rate is 8.99% comparison rate is 9.46% for all of the above payments. See rear of magazine for conditions.*



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