



Living here boating

WITH WARREN STEPTOE

This Spirit sure can fly

AFTER first testing Quintrex's new Blade hulls during their launch earlier this year, I was satisfied they represent a profound step forward for aluminium boats.

It's difficult to make an accurate comparison between the new Blade hull and its 'glass competitors without the benefit of side-by-side testing, but since testing both 6.1m and 6.5m Blade hulls in both their cuddy cab Spirit models and the centre console Legend versions, there's no doubt in my mind that these boats set an entirely new standard for aluminium offshore fishing boats.

Especially the 6.5m tested here.

For this test we managed a day when gusty winds against a falling tide had the Gold Coast Seaway standing up as we all know it can, providing conditions sufficient to test any hull's soft-riding characteristics – or otherwise.

I was already impressed with the Blade hulls and this test of what is by any standard an excellent offshore fishing boat only improved on that.

Most of the development in this new hull over preceding Millennium hulls (which set quite a few new standards themselves) is to be found in the bows.

Quintrex fans will notice a more acutely raked stem and, if you look closely, you can see how this allows a steeper deadrise in that critical area where the bows cut into surface chop.

These new angles extend back to the hull's shoulders, where the new Blade hulls are noticeably slimmer.

Inside, the 650 Spirit follows a route well established amongst cuddy cabin offshore fishing boats.

It has high sides to provide the necessary thigh high leg support around the cockpit periphery and an aft lounge across the transom.

A workbench over the centre of the transom bulkhead is optional, as are a live bait tank and a transom door.

Above the helm seating, a rod rack 'rocket launcher' is yet another option that few offshore anglers would do without.

This can of course include a Bimini shade top.

Where the Spirit departs from



Viewed bows on the Quintrex Blade hull's new stem angle is easy to see. If you look closely the narrower shoulders and steeper deadrise are also evident.

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offshore cuddy cabin convention is a centre-opening windscreen and extra long cabin hatch, which facilitates very easy access to the bows for anchoring and other tasks.

We're used to Quintrex leading the way with so many aspects of boat design so no one will be surprised if some of the Spirit's GRP competitors soon follow their lead here.

New cabin and windscreen lines for 2011 Spirit models are yet another significant improvement over their predecessors and I think they make it a much better-looking boat.

Optional two-tone paint on our test boat helped here too.

Performance-wise, the 175hp Pro XS Mercury Optimax outboards powering the 650 Spirit tested provided a top speed well over 35 knots.

In my opinion, Mercury Optimax motors are too often forgotten when power alternatives are being considered and the Optimax on this boat certainly makes you sit up and take notice, delivering a shove in the back reminiscent of the good old days of carburettor two-stroke power.

I'm not arguing the popularity of four strokes (I own one myself) and unless they intend to use their Spirit for towing the kids on wake toys or something I suspect many people

would be happy with 150hp on either of these hulls.

However, if a 150 four-stroke is your choice, my suggestion would be to look at one of the V6 150 four-strokes rather than an in-line four-cylinder motor.

Thanks to Mercury's SmartCraft instrumentation, I can report remarkably miserly fuel consumption to go with the shove in your back.

We were burning less than 20 litres/hr at 3000rpm and cruising speeds around 25 knots.

Test boat supplied by Broadwater Boating Centre