

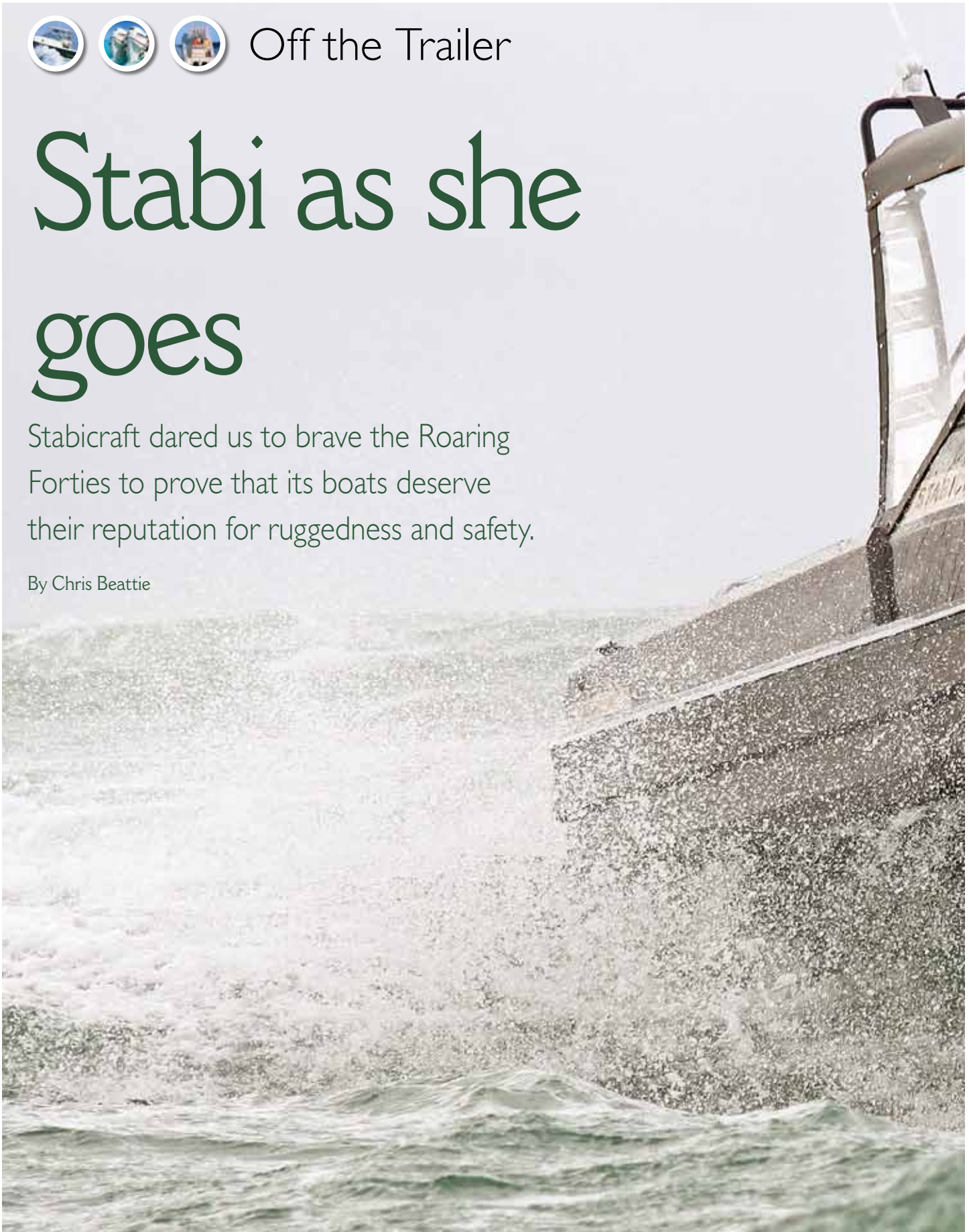


Off the Trailer

# Stabi as she goes

Stabicraft dared us to brave the Roaring Forties to prove that its boats deserve their reputation for ruggedness and safety.

By Chris Beattie







*anywhere  
else I'd  
reckon that  
most sane  
people would  
not venture  
outdoors*

Through the mist and raging wind I could just see the cabin roof as I tried to wedge myself against the gunwale of our boat to take the shot. Then it exploded straight up, clearing the water by around a metre, before disappearing behind another wave in a shower of grey foam. This boat fighting the elements cleared the water again almost instantly and, amazingly, it kept coming back for more. Welcome to Stabicraft country.

At the time, I was beginning to wonder how wise I'd been in accepting the offer from Stabicraft's marketing man, Tim van Duyl. Since I was coming to New Zealand for the BRP product launch (see p108), he had asked if I'd have the time to pay a visit to NZ's largest and most successful trailer boat manufacturer. It seemed impolite to decline, but I was now beginning to think I may have been a tad premature.

With a capacity for up to 1000 boats per year, the Stabicraft factory is located in the city of Invercargill, at the very bottom of the South Island. After having a wander around the very modern manufacturing facility, we then ventured even further south, around 15km to the final bastion of land at the absolute end of the South Island at an historic little weather-battered village called Bluff. Here, with the wind blowing hard enough to require leaning at a fairly severe angle just to walk, we were going to launch both the 2150 Supercab and the new 2050 Fish'r – a boat the company particularly hopes will win hearts and minds on the opposite side of the Tasman.

Fortunately, there is what might pass for a protected ramp in the inner Bluff harbour,

where hardy souls can launch boats. I don't have an actual figure for the wind on the day, but anywhere else I'd reckon that most sane people would not venture outdoors in such conditions, let alone actually deliberately launch a boat.

## FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

But as I said, it seemed impolite to decline, so first Lindsay from Stabicraft, on the 2050, then I, snuggled cosily into the cab of the 2150, slid off our respective trailers. Lindsay made it seem almost mundane, whereas I, due to a suddenly dead engine, was immediately flung into a fight for survival, having barely got the hull wet.

Just clear of the ramp the engine died, while the wind, howling directly onto my starboard side, picked up pace significantly. I would estimate that it was now blowing at about 400 knots – at least that was what it felt like as a rock wall to my south began to grow alarmingly in size in direct proportion to the speed of my approach.

This was turning nasty, while the engine was not turning at all. I gave the starter one more try and the only reason myself and the 2150 are now not permanent fixtures of Bluff harbour is that it finally, mercifully, barked into life. Not a good start to any boat test, but given the location and conditions, all I could say was that it was 'character building'. It turned out that, distracted by the need to get the boats in the water before conditions worsened, we had forgotten to prime the fuel line. Lesson well and truly learned.

I quickly began to get some idea of why Stabicraft needed to be invented. It was the desire

*Tough boat, tough seas ... the  
Roaring Forties are a tough  
breeding ground for Kiwi boats.*

of local paua (abalone) divers to have stable and safe craft while venturing offshore in the Roaring Forties that batter the southern NZ coastline that spawned the first Stabicraft around 23 years ago.

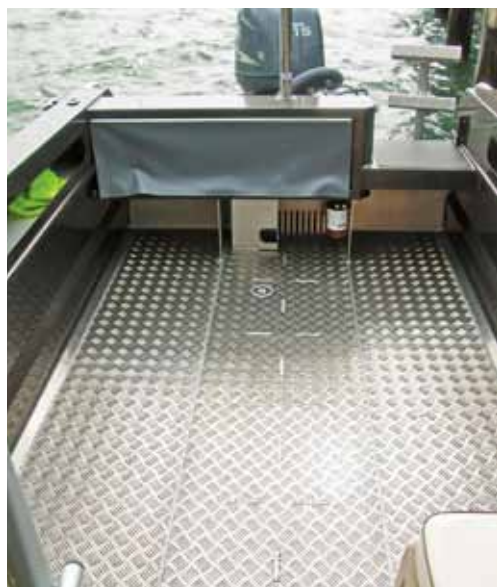
## MUTINOUS THOUGHTS

So, it was precisely these conditions for which the boat was created. I must say, though, that telling myself this at the time did little to improve my state of mind as we headed out into the main shipping channel. We were the only boats not tied to the South Island at the time and blind faith was the only thing between me and a sudden, panicked mutiny.

Directly ahead of us was a sea that had absolutely no idea what it was doing. Which probably accounted for its bad mood. With wind raging one way, and a tide going at a fair rate in exactly the opposite direction, waves were just standing up where they felt like it, rearing up to 3m before getting blown over backwards in a hiss of spray.

As we sat off this crazed patch of Southern Ocean in the lee of a wharf, Lindsay launched into it on the 2050 with a gusto that would have seemed like a death wish from a less experienced boatie. The plan was that I would take a few shots of the 2050 – and at the time I was thinking they might well be the last – while Lindsay put her through her paces.

You'll see some of the results of our efforts on these pages, but suffice it to say that I came away mightily impressed by the prowess and



*The vast majority of Stabicraft are bought by fishos, and looking at the spacious cockpit on the 2050, it's not hard to see why.*



foul weather capabilities of our two craft. I was given the opportunity to drive both boats on the day, and cannot think of a single other boat I've tested that I would rather be on in those seas. Both craft gave as good as they got, taking every hammering wave without ever provoking more than the normal fear of a fair weather boatie like myself.

## POSITIVELY BUOYANT

The 2050 and its larger stablemate share the unique Stabicraft positive-buoyancy combination hull shape, which fuses the air-filled flanking aluminium pontoons with the distinct shallow V hull, the result being a boat that rides and turns well, while providing an almost uncannily soft ride in ugly seas.

I was particularly impressed by how dry both craft remained, despite having a fair bit of water flung both at, and over us. The ride and impact absorption would be particularly appreciated by hardcore fishos, who aren't daunted by the sort of



evil seas in which we found ourselves. In fact, after a little while, the confidence-inducing nature of the Stabis had me thinking I was a far better boat steerer than I actually am. Cresting waves and getting a little air started to seem run-of-the-mill, although I never let it go to my head enough to push it too far. I left that to Lindsay, who seemed to spend more time out of the water than in, for most of our time in the channel.

Another impressive aspect of both craft was their stability at rest. I deliberately sat beam-on to the more milder but, nonetheless, fear-inducing seas at the side of the channel, and soon understood why they called them ‘Stabicraft’ in the first place. As company founder, Paul Adams says elsewhere in this review, the fact that occupants don’t have to constantly brace themselves while at rest means that they can save their energy for other things, like fishing.

Stabicraft also has a reputation for being well behaved in a following sea and this was amply demonstrated on the day. In fact, by the time



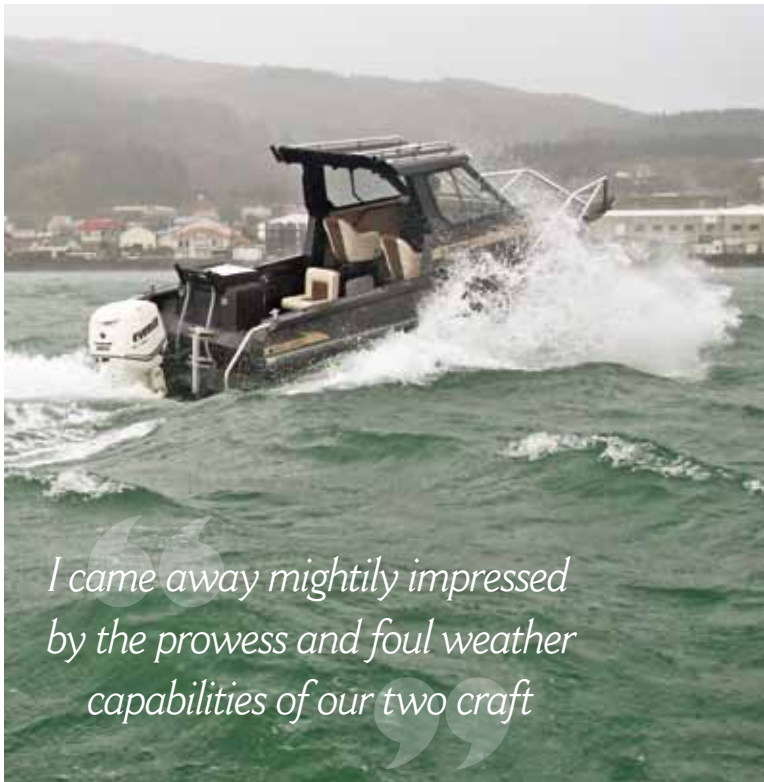
we had both boats back on their trailers, I had developed a glowing respect for these tough, though not necessarily pretty craft built literally within the angry roar of some of the world’s roughest seas.

## FACTORY FORAY

My earlier factory tour had also given me an insight into their build quality, the evolutionary

*Is it a bird, is it a plane ...?  
Rough water boating is part of  
the Stabicraft DNA.*

*Left: You can’t go any further  
south on the South Island  
than Bluff.*



*I came away mightily impressed by the prowess and foul weather capabilities of our two craft*

process that has produced the modern Stabicraft and the company's design parameters.

Much thought has obviously gone into the layout and production process, with all of the staff encouraged to take an intellectual stake in the



*Stabicraft are created in a spacious, modern facility. Quality of workmanship, particularly the welding, is impressive, to say the least.*



business, whether it is the actual design of the craft or the intricacies of the manufacturing procedures.


Quality control begins with the raw materials, including the aluminium plates that make up the basic hull and pontoons. Apparently, sourcing aluminium of a high enough standard means that a significant proportion is rejected at the factory door. What remains goes through a computer-controlled cutting and shaping process dependant on the model run at the time, but with a high human production component in the form of expert welders and finishers. With an engineering background, I have to say that the standard of the welding alone is about as high as I've ever seen on any welded aluminium product.

In an annex of the main production area is a space set aside for custom, one-off projects and if what I saw there (I have been sworn to secrecy for the time being on threat of being taken back out into the Bluff shipping channel for another sound flogging) is any indication of the future direction of Stabicraft, in terms of both boat size and some startling drive technology, then I would suggest you stay tuned for further news from this innovative Kiwi outfit.

Prior to my visit, I'd known of the Stabicraft reputation for dependability and agility in heavy seas and know of one experienced boat tester who bought one on the spot after his first Stabi' test. Also, the company has won numerous contracts for commercial versions of its boats, including with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, which has purchased a total of 17 boats in the past two years. Stabicraft is also growing in popularity with volunteer coastguard organisations around Australia.

Having now sampled two models on the water, I have to say that I came away impressed, not only by the crafts' on-water prowess, but also by their build quality, and the production processes employed and the valves upheld at the Stabicraft factory.

And, given reports I've seen and heard from owners of the distinctively-styled Kiwi craft, I would not be surprised to see a lot more of them at Australian boat ramps in the future – particularly in the hands of fishos keen to tackle more inaccessible offshore fishing grounds. They're not necessarily the prettiest boats on the water, but they're definitely a tough boat for a tough environment.

For more information, go to: [www.stabicraft.com](http://www.stabicraft.com) or call MY Marine on (03) 5987 0900. 

# Starring this summer – the 2050 Fish'r



The focus of a major push into the Australian market this coming summer, the 2050 Fish'r is intended as a no-frills fishing platform, but is offered with a large range of options should buyers want to up-spec their boats.

The newest model in the line-up, the Fish'r is an evolution of one of Stabicraft's most popular hulls, used in both the 589 Supercab and 589 Fish'r. Over the years, the 589 has sold in the hundreds.

One of the main changes from the previous model is the smaller cuddy, based on feedback from the more hardy owners, who said they would prefer cockpit space over crew amenities.

With a length of 6.27m and a capacity for seven adults, it is an honest, utilitarian craft, with such fishing-friendly features as walk-through access to the bow and anchor via a windscreen



*The 2050 Fish'r is a no-nonsense platform for boaties who are serious about their fishing.*

hatch in the centre of the small fibreglass cuddy cabin.

It also boasts a spacious and uncluttered cockpit and an auto bilge pump.

Rated for 150hp, our test craft was fitted with a 115hp Yamaha four-stroke, which provided more than adequate power and holeshot for the hull. Fuel capacity is 150lt.

Steering on our test craft was hydraulic, which was really welcome in the conditions we experienced on the day. Standard fitment is a cable 'non-feedback' system claimed to neutralise engine torque steering.

In addition to the standard fittings, our full-spec test craft boasted such refinements as V-berth squabs, boarding ladder, extra coaming rod holders, Stress-free anchor winch, cabin lining, Softrider pedestal seats, bimini top with clears and rod holder rack, and a pretty stylish exterior graphics treatment.

I'd reckon that these options, and some of the others listed, might be worthwhile considerations for those who occasionally venture out with significant others and small kids.

Recommended Australian retail price for a base model, according to Victorian dealer MY Marine, is \$59,000, depending on engine choice and electronics etc.



# Super Stabi' 2150

Also new to the Stabicraft fleet is the 2150 Supercab, which boasts the company's Gen 3, 20-degree deadrise hull, which also incorporates a more stepped-down chine to flush water away from the boat. Measuring 6.7m, it is rated for seven adults and our test boat was more than adequately powered by a 225hp Evinrude E-TEC engine.

Boasting a beam of 2.3m, the Supercab is a serious fishing platform, more than capable of tackling the most punishing offshore expeditions.

It offers almost complete protection for skipper and crew in the form of the near all-enveloping cab, which offers close to 2m in head height.

From a fishing point of view, there are not many other boats of comparable size out there with so much fighting room in the cockpit. Offshore range is pretty good, too, courtesy of the 200lt tank. And, from a safety point of view, with over 2000lt of trapped air in the pontoons, it's going to take a direct hit from a torpedo to cause it any stress.

As with its smaller sibling, our test craft was 'glamorised' for the occasion, with plenty of option boxes ticked, including Stabicraft's 'Super Fish Transom', which includes a live bait tank and bait-prep board. Other extras included a boarding ladder, trim tabs, windscreen wipers, Stress-free anchor winch, porta loo, and upgraded pedestal seating. Hull graphics complete the package.

In Australia, the 2150SC comes standard with a multi-fit engine pod, hydraulic steering and an under-floor fish-bin with pump. It also boasts an extended cabin roof overhang for protection from

the elements, with the option of a rear curtain for cooler climes.

From a handling and sea-keeping point of view, the large Stabi' felt pretty much unflappable in the circumstances and would inspire confidence in any skipper wanting to head beyond the horizon in conditions that might deter lesser souls.

Australian recommended retail price for a base model, according to Victorian dealer MY Marine, is around \$100,000, depending on engine choice and electronics etc.



*You won't bump your head in the Supercab unless you earn your living playing basketball ...*



# Pride and passion

The Stabicraft formula for success.

*The four product pillars we have are safety, stability, rough water capability and quality.*

While visiting Stabicraft, we couldn't decline the opportunity for a quick chat with owner, MD and founder, Paul Adams (pictured above). A recipient of New Zealand's Order of Merit for his achievements in business, Adams is an animated and dynamic personality, who is obviously proud of the success of his company. He is also quick to credit his staff for much of that success.

In a thick, southern Kiwi accent laced with anchor-heavy vowels, Adams explained that the reputation and ruggedness of Stabicraft boats over the last 23 years were originally born from necessity. Geography also played a part.

"Our local paua divers were having problems with the rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) at the time – they were getting damaged and the rubber pontoons just weren't up to the job," he said. "The fact that we're right in the middle of (latitude) 47 South, the Roaring Forties, didn't help things."

Adams admitted that his earlier designs were an imitation of the existing RIBs, with the intent of using aluminium instead of rubber for the pontoons to lessen the risk of puncture or hull damage.

"Their boats simply weren't cutting the mustard, so the idea of the aluminium tubes came up," he explained. "The original aluminium tubes

were round, and they had cones on the end, only because we thought we needed to emulate the rubber boats.

"That was our absolute target in the early days – to emulate the existing boats. But as we went on, it became obvious that the inherent properties of these little boats were fantastic and we thought: 'How can we transform that and improve it?'.

"But when we understood that we didn't have to fit the mould of the rubber boats completely – that we could actually change the shape of the tubes – we went from a round tube to what we called a D-shaped tube. We just flattened off the internal side of the tubes and at the time it gave us around 150mm of extra interior room. In a little boat, that made a big difference and was one of the significant things that contributed to our evolution."

Adams says the success of the company is down to a simple philosophy.

"The four product pillars we have are safety, stability, rough water capability and quality. Those are the four key things that a Stabicraft must have – full stop. We keep that in front of mind when we're designing anything new and so long as we stay true to those pillars, then I believe we're on the right track."

Adams explained that to make the transition from a small, niche company catering to a relatively limited commercial market, he had to begin listening to buyers, and, in particular, their wives.

"Listening to customers' wants and needs has helped us transform our boats and the business into what it is today.

"We went through the mainstream buyers coming along and saying, 'Yeah that's what I want; it's tough and it's rugged, it's safe and it's stable and the quality is good'. But those same guys were bringing along their wives and girlfriends and they were saying, 'Oh, it's cold, it's aluminium and it doesn't have all the nice things that the other boats have'.

"So at that stage we had to become good listeners and we had to say that, in order for our business to grow, we had to add some other features. We added some internal cabin lining for some warmth, good upholstered seating – the commercial guys didn't need upholstered seats – and paint and graphics for some colour.

"In doing those things, we really transformed Stabicraft into what it is today."

So, apart from the unconventional hull profile and design, what sets Stabicraft apart from the rest of the recreational trailerboat fleet?


"For a start, you think about stability. A lot of people go out fishing or boating all day and they come home and they might have had a lot of pitch and toss," he said. "So during the day you imagine the amount of muscles that will be reacting to all that movement in the boat. But if you've got a much more stable platform, your fatigue levels are going to be much, much less. I think we all agree that when we go out to sea, we usually come back and sleep well that night. That's the key and that is really one of our key features – our stability.

"The stability is all about hull shape and has nothing to do with the buoyancy – the buoyancy is really an added bonus. The stability is the chine design and chine beam. Our boats have a very wide chine beam in comparison to most conventional boats.

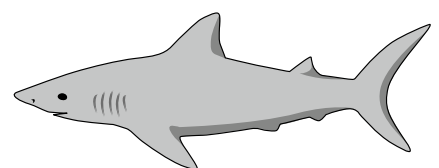
"Also, I think our boats are very, very dry. We've got good turn-down and good chines, and they are very important. Users of our boats tend to go out in conditions that owners of other boats might not and they want a boat that is going to be dry."



Adams is clearly proud of the quality of the boats coming out of his factory.

"Everyone here is proud of what they achieve. For instance, we've got a number of guys out there who can weld and who are trained to a very high level, and that's evident in the fact that none of our welds are ground or sanded off. Everyone has a lot of pride and passion in what they do here." 

*none of our welds are ground or sanded off.*



— australia yachts —

**Zara Grigor 0400 220 716**