

SETTING UP FOR SPORTFISHING

By Grant Dixon



The NZ Fishing News Stabicraft raring to go

The Stabicraft MWS 1720 is an all-round sportfishing 'pocket rocket' designed by Matt Watson with input from NZFN magazine staff.

It is rare to get the opportunity to have input into a new boat from the hull up, but that was the case with the magazine's new Stabicraft Matt Watson Special 1720 centre-console.

We had been in discussion with Stabicraft regarding a project boat for some time when Sean McColl told us they were building a new centre-console boat for Matt Watson to use on *The ITM Fishing Show*.

Matt had previously campaigned a Stabicraft 389, from which he had caught some great fish, including bluefin tuna, marlin and mako sharks, despite its diminutive size.

"We are doing a Matt Watson Special, upsizing it to 5.25 metres – would it suit your purposes?" Sean asked.

Matt supplied Stabicraft with what he saw as his requirements for the ultimate sportfishing machine of this size, as did we. Interestingly, our ideas were very similar.

What we sought was a boat suitable as a solid casting platform for both salt and freshwater use – soft-plastics and fly-fishing in the main. We also wanted to use it for conventional

fishing – jigging for kingfish and straying for snapper – and it needed to be capable of blue water gamefishing. Another requirement for the magazine was that staff could tow it with a four-cylinder vehicle.

What we have arrived at is something quite versatile, which will be equally at home casting soft-plastic lures into the wash and kelp lines for a snapper, trolling plastic for billfish, or fly-fishing for trout.

There are two main casting areas: in the bow and at the stern, where either tube-matting or chequerplate alloy offers secure footing. The craft lives up to its name, providing a stable platform even when there are a couple of the crew hard up against the gunwale playing or netting a fish.

Underneath the forward platform is more storage, where currently the spare anchor is stowed. On the port side forward, the MinnKota Riptide 55 electric motor is bolted to a compact mount, its battery secured in the forward storage space. The latter features a hinged cover with air-strut supports – a nice touch. The electric motor will be used for stooping

around the shallows soft-plastic fishing or flicking flies to trout alongside the weedbeds and drop-offs. It will be our 'stealth mode' go-to option.

The Stabicraft is fully walk-around, although it is a bit of a tight squeeze for the 'front rowers' to get past the bimini frame where it joins the centre-console. There is good toe room against the gunwale when tangling with a good fish.

The centre-console itself is topped by a grab rail and a windscreen that offers the helmsman plenty of shelter from the wind and the odd bit of spray on a cold winter's morning. The boat runs remarkably dry, even into a quartering sea.

There is plenty of room on the helm station for the Lowrance sounder, Fusion stereo head and Lowrance VHF radio, along with gauges and 'cigarette lighter' connections for charging cellphones and running the spotlight. The top of the station is topped off by a lipped ledge, and is an ideal place to keep cellphones and car keys safe and dry. The console also has two low-level lights that illuminate the deck and surroundings – great for night fishing. A

couple more lights forward and in the stern would make a welcome addition to our setup.

Beneath the steering wheel is a dry compartment where the twin batteries are stored, along with a shelf where we keep the flares, first aid kit, spotlight and EPIRB, as well as the instruction manuals. Hey, we just might need to read them one day!

At the front of the console is another dry stowage compartment, accommodating our lifejackets, tackle box, cameras and water bottles. A padded seat on top makes this one of the most comfortable places to sit while underway, braced in by the bimini frame and with a back pad attached to the front of the console.

The helm station is completed with a padded and removable 105-litre IcyTek bin. We have had IcyTek bins in all of our recent boats and they have proven to be robust and efficient. This model has a permanent divider that enables you to separate bait and the catch, which is often useful, but does limit the size of fish you can put in there. My preference would be for an undivided bin, which



The centre console, incorporating the helm station with dry storage below the wheel.



The Stress-Free system works well. A chequerplate cover fits over the top of the drum to protect it from the worst spray.



This is a toy

When it comes to water safety we don't play around.

FREE life-rings available at all authorised Stabicraft dealers



stabicraft.com 0800 4 STABI - (0800 4 78224)





This compartment was designed specifically with the John Hewinson Canvas sea anchor in mind.



A bracket has been created to carry the MinnKota electric outboard.



The best seat in the house, beneath which is more dry storage.



Wide shelves running down the length of the hull are perfect for fenders, gaffs, tag poles and the like.



The jury is still out on the practicality of the bimini.



is also available. It's also good to see the shift to closed-cell foam padding for the upholstered seat, as this does not absorb water.

This is the first Stabicraft to come out with a bimini as an option, and I am in two minds about it. While providing a reasonable amount of shelter from the sun, it does not keep out driving rain. This would be fixed by simply adding clears that dropped down to attach to the inside of the gunwales. Drop sheets would be a perfect shelter solution.

For fly and soft-plastic casting, the bimini can be a bit of an imposition. The good news is that it is easily removed via six accessible bolts. It is an optional feature, so purchasers can make up their own minds.

A boat of this size will fish four in comfort. The trick is to ration the amount of gear on board. There is always the issue of anglers each bringing individual tackle boxes that carry enough gear for a multi-day trip, rather than a session of a few hours. Limiting the gear to a few essential trays is a must. There is ample storage in the wide gunwales to keep trays of

hooks, jig heads, jigs, sinkers, and soft-plastics – the Gulp! style pottles are perfect – without cluttering up the limited deck space.

Those same wide gunwales, lined with tube-mat to reduce vibration and noise, are big enough to take a full set of Hook 'Em fixed-head gaffs, from snapper and kingfish-sized through to tuna and marlin, along with the hook remover and tag poles.

Anchoring is a simple affair, with the ground tackle raised or lowered at the flick of a switch. The Stabicraft is fitted with a StressFree drum-style anchoring system, which contains 100 metres of warp plus around 10 metres of 6mm chain attached to a Rocna #4 anchor. While there is no 'level-wind' device attached, the warp lays itself quite nicely from side to side on the drum without any help from the crew, which no doubt suits most Stabicraft boat owners.

As you might imagine, the crew fishing on the Stabicraft are spoilt for choice when it comes to tackle, so our boats always need plenty of rod holders. There are sets of three Talon holders either side of the centre console,

FREE life-rings available at all authorised Stabicraft dealers



Find us on Facebook®

stabicraft.com 0800 4 STABI - (0800 4 78224)

STABICRAFT
ADVENTURE WITH CONFIDENCE

four at the back of the bimini up high, a further three across the back of the bait-board, another single talon holder on the inside of the transom, 10 around the gunwales, plus two more either side of the forward casting platform – 25 in all. Admittedly, a number of these have dual purposes – two hold the Reel Rodz outrigger bases and another two are for the Scotty downrigger bases, with the latter mounted on removable plates so they can be transferred from boat to boat – while four are specifically angled for gamefishing. The top of the gunwales are covered in Decktread to protect the paintwork from bins, scallop dredges and general wear and tear.

Contained within the transom is a decent-sized live-bait tank, a glass insert enabling crews to see the state of the baits at a glance.

We will be fitting a set of removable tuna tubes to the transom, attached via a Talon dive-bottle rack holder. The plumbing and pump are already in place, and it is just a matter of hooking it all up. There is no doubt a live-baited tuna, koheru or kahawai will entice a billfish bite when lures might not.


The baitboard is a large one that

allows good, flat, knife access when filleting. It can be removed when not required, leaving an uncluttered transom.

Also at the stern is a washdown hose, bilge pump and duck-bill scuppers for quick clearing of any water in the unlikely event of taking a big wave over the side.

On the port stern quarter there is a cut-out space on the gunwale for the John Hewinson Canvas #4 sea anchor. When retrieved, the drogue has its own storage place to ensure the deck is clutter free.

A sturdy T-bar two-step dive ladder, which folds up nicely out of the way on the swim step, completes the transom setup.

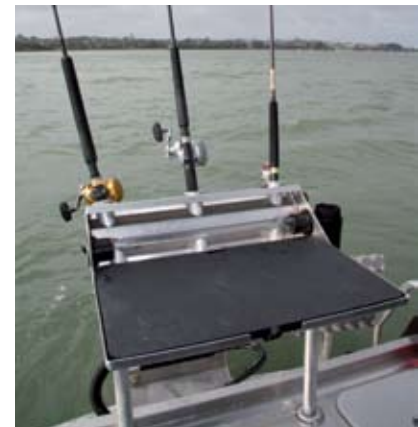
Power is provided via a 90hp Evinrude E-Tec outboard, mounted on a transom pod. The 100-litre underfloor tank gives the rig good range. While the motor has barely been run in and we are still experimenting with settings and props with the help of Kev and Ian's Marine Ltd, I have been impressed with its performance, including economy and clean burning, but more on that in a subsequent issue, where we will bring you some performance figures. 



Beneath the forward casting platform is space for the spare anchor and the battery for the MinnKota electric motor.



Twin batteries are tucked up amidships as part of the centre-console.



You can never have enough rod holders. There are potentially 25 on the NZFN project boat, three of which are located above the removable baitboard.

In next month's *Setting Up for Sportfishing* we will look in more detail at the set-up options and products that make up the NZ Fishing News Stabicraft MWS 1720 rig.

Specifications

Length:	5.25m	Tow Weight:	950kg
External Beam:	2.0m	Length on Trailer:	6m
Internal Beam:	1.40m	Height on Trailer:	2m
Deadrise:	17.5 degrees at transom	Max. Adults:	5 pax
Tube Thickness:	2.5mm	Fuel capacity:	100l
Hull Thickness:	4mm	Recommended HP:	75
Reserve Buoyancy:	1100l approx.	Maximum HP:	90.
Dry Hull Weight:	450kg approx.		