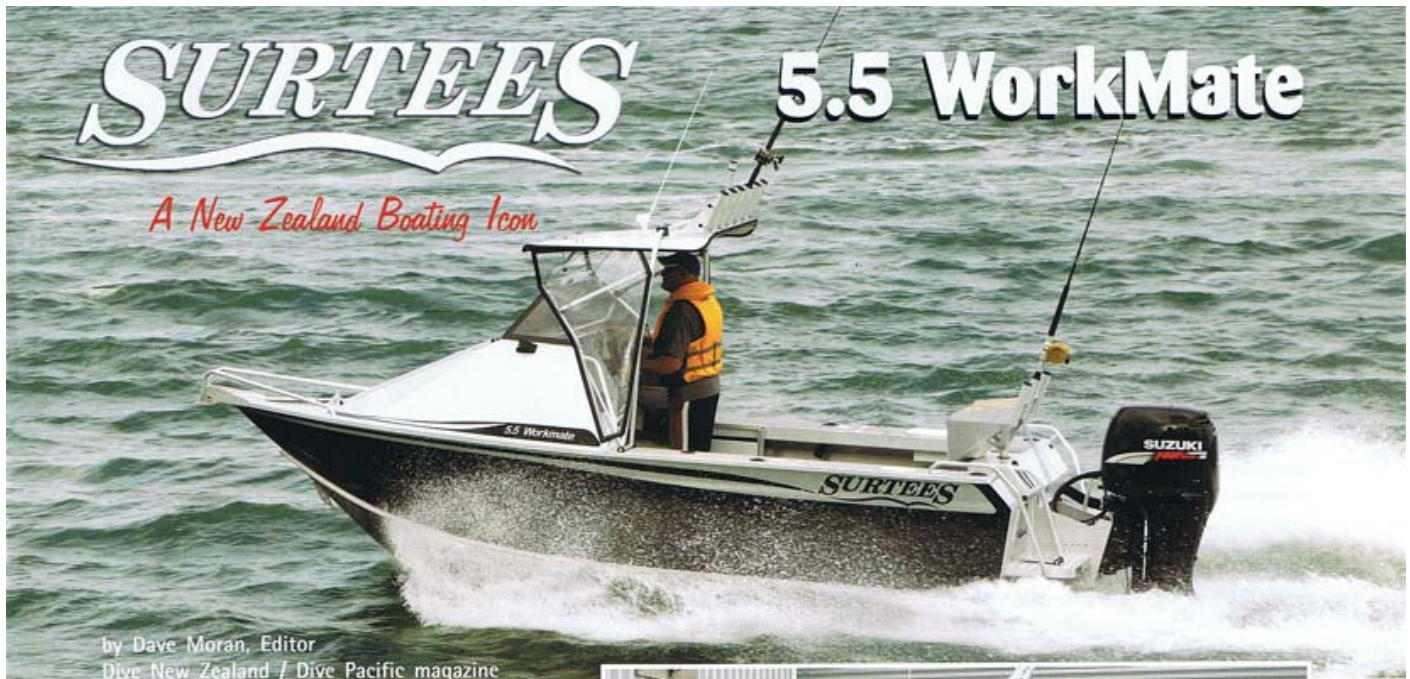


# SURTEES

## 5.5 WorkMate

*A New Zealand Boating Icon*



by Dave Moran, Editor  
Dive New Zealand / Dive Pacific magazine

**SURTEES 5.5 WorkMate** Grouse mate—just grouse! That's about all Neil Surtees could comment as he stood on the podium clutching another award for excellence in boat building! It must be a record or a near record that the same aluminium boat hull designed in 1996 has won five prestigious New Zealand Boat Show awards for Aluminium Fishing Boat of the Show under six metres: 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005. Now that is impressive!

Neil Surtees knew what he and his mates wanted in a boat so he built one. It was such a success that Surtees Boats 2005 Ltd now produce around 250 boats annually over the three standard hulls, 5.5m, 6.1m and 6.7m and from these hulls at last count, they can produce 72 different boats, when you consider all the different options a new owner has. To maintain their high quality standards everything is produced in their Whakatane factory even their vinyl covered seats. The only time the boat leaves the factory is to have it painted or Nyalic® treated by the spray painters just down the road.

**Out on the water:** It was a typical sunny Tauranga day, with a light northerly breeze blowing into the harbour and with the out-going tide hammering into the opposing wind a short choppy sea had built up outside the harbour entrance. Surtees boats are known primarily for their onboard innovations and the use of water ballast. (See comments below re water ballast.) The first thing I noticed when I grabbed the sporty racing car non slip wheel was the ease of steering. The hydraulic over cable system (half hydraulic, half cable) obediently feeds your commands to the outboard motor. With this system you are not always fighting the torque of the motor pushing to starboard. In fact in calm conditions you can take your hands off the wheel and the boat will keep tracking in a straight line, even at 30 mph! From an at rest position, with the ballast chamber full and three guys on board, the 90hp Suzuki four-stroke easily had us up to planing speed as the ballast water was quickly sucked out of the ballast chamber. The 17°V slammed into the short chop and it was a fairly noisy ride as you expect with aluminium boats. Lowering our speed to around 20mph and trimming the bow down reduced the crashing effect that this nasty chop had on a small boat of this size. With a larger boat you



**left: The skipper's corner:** Note: Depth sounder, GPS and radio bracket. These are on a hinged bracket that allows you to swing the complete unit to the back of the dash board when not in use. Having these items on such a bracket leaves the very wide dash board shelf completely free of such items which can tend to clutter your vision yet they are just a glance away and are not getting fried in the sun: Fuse and switch panel: Grab rail: Fire extinguisher: hinged wind screen



could have sat on top of the chop and given it heaps but in a 5.5m boat you had to button off so that the ride was more comfortable. With the ballast tank full and the stern flap closed she sat flatter in the water and lost her frisky 'lets go' attitude. Punching into the on-coming chop was still unpleasant if you pushed the throttle down. It was far better running with the ballast tank empty. (See further comments re the benefits of the ballast tank below.) So like most Surtees's boat owners we cruised around with the ballast tank empty. She just loved running with the sea up her bum and at 35mph you felt completely in control. There was no fear of her taking her head and skewing sideways—she ran straight and true—her deep V doing what it does best - slicing up the waves with ease. Manoeuvring the boat in and out of the chop with the hydraulic over cable system was a joy and you could virtually turn a circle of about three times her boat length without any effort on the wheel. Absolutely no sideways slip, the deep V keel enabling her to track clean and true. It soon became very clear that the WorkMate was a very capable sea boat for its size and when we finally gave her a break from dancing around the ocean on her deep V she was as stable as a catamaran due to the ballast chamber filling up. Surtees boats are well-known for their innovative onboard features that have been developed





**above: Twin storage bins:** The forward bin has access to the ballast water within the keel. This gives you the option to have this bin contain water for holding live bait. Once you remove the plug the bin will self drain when the boat is on the move. The rear bin is a dry bin. Any water that enters this bin can be pumped overboard by the stern bilge pump. The tubular flooring matting provides a non skid cushioned surface that also is a heap better walking around on in bare feet when the sun is frying the aluminium deck! Note: Stern fold down bench seat with fish gaff attached. When the seat is not in use it covers the large stern service tray which houses your motor's battery and isolating switch. A good dry space for keeping these essential electrical systems in top condition. When gearing up for a dive or getting into your fishing you need space to move and the ability to fold this seat up gives you just that - space.

over the years. As I started taking notes sales manager Phill Noblett explained how the various 'boatie friendly' fittings have been developed and refined. The key philosophy at Surtees is flexibility and listening to their customers and as you move around the boat you can quickly see the positive effects of such a philosophy. See pictures to view some of these innovations.

Because of the ability to only use the seating when required and that it is removable, you have an amazing amount of space to move around in. The deck space of 3.525 sq.m is heaps for four divers to gear up in. No wonder they call the 5.5 WorkMate the BIG little boat! I would not be surprised if it is awarded its sixth, Aluminium Fishing Boat under six



**above left: Self locking winch system:** Have you ever wished that you could drive your boat onto the trailer or winch it into position without worrying that unless you lock it off at the winch or put on the safety chain you might see your boat roll back into the water. Neil and his team invented a solution. Ask the Surtees team to show you this unique system. Note: the spray deflecting strip welded to the chine - helps to give you a drier ride and also makes it very difficult to bury her nose.

**above right: Remove the valuable toys:** Have you ever worried about arriving at your bach or at your boat's storage location to find all your electronics toys ripped out? Innovative Surtees has designed a removable electronic panel that can be quickly disconnected so that you can remove these valuable items and take them home.



**above: Diver access:** The drop down ladder and well positioned hand grabs makes it easy for a fully kitted diver to stroll back on board. Note: the walk through transom and the divers empty catch bag - bugger no crays!

metres at this years Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show.

**Construction:** The hull comes with a six year warranty. Now that length of time for a run-about hull to be guaranteed is impressive! Surtees are confident in giving this warranty because all their hulls are built to Marine Survey requirements and the construction methods and design plans have been registered with the Marine Safety Institute. This requires them to construct their boats from known quality materials and that the construction methods are proven and that stringent quality controls are in place to ensure that no short cuts are taken. Marine certified 5083 grade aluminium is used throughout. A CAD programme is used to laser cut the aluminium plate to precise measurements. This computer programme allows the factory to fit all sections of the hull and internal fittings with the minimum clearance for welding together. The welding is world class, these guys know their craft! Six stringers run the full length of the boat. These stringers are fully welded to the hull for their entire length - not just stitch welded here and there - but the entire length. These stringers are locked together by cross bracing gussets placed at 400mm intervals. This lattice work is also



**above: Wash down hose:** Is an excellent optional extra. Note the vinyl covered seat that is clipped onto the wide side shelves and the small round deck light.

**right: Seating:** Surtees' General Manager, Paul Wills enjoys relaxing on the unique seating system developed by Neil Surtees. This seat folds to the side when not required providing extra valuable space. No pedestal seat to walk around all day! The back rest is easily moved from the back (normal position) to the front allowing you to sit back with a rod or drink in your hand, or both! Note the footrest, this is usually a seat, easily switched to a foot rest when required. Both seats can be moved and clipped into any section on the port or starboard side of the boat— it's such a convenient, flexible system.



**above: Anchor winch:** They call it lateral thinking! Why mount an anchor winch dead centre just back from the bow? - er - that's where it always goes - right? - wrong! Why break your back when you can stand and easily feed the anchor warp off the winch into the anchor well - if you fix the winch in a more user friendly position - Surtees's team always thinking - don't you just love it!





**I-r Cuddy cabin:** storage bins can be customized to your own personal requirements. Chemical toilet is an optional extra. Note: the marine carpeted cabin top, which eliminates condensation and cuts down water and general background noise; side shelves and the large 1m x 1/2m forward hatch.

**Removable Bait Station:** This must be the ultimate dream convenience for fishermen! Note the pull-out drawers to hold hooks, sinkers, tools, even band aids! No more buggerizing around looking for a hook in a loose tackle box that you and your mates are for ever tripping over. Note: spare trace (black dots) on either side of the pull-out draws. If you lose your trace it is simple and easy to just cut off a new section of line to remake a trace. The back wall of the station has slots to hold a range of knives, it also supports three rod holders.

strengthened by the placement of two under floor bins and a 80lts fuel tank. This package is capped with 3mm tread plate which is fully welded and glued to the hull's circumference. This type of construction ensures a very stiff hull – no flexing in this baby! This watertight hull space below is also divided into two separate fore and aft watertight sections, each having an area of around 750 litres which makes the reserve buoyancy about 1.5 times the weight of the boat. Each space is pressure tested to ensure they are 100% watertight. This gives you the confidence of the overall buoyancy security of the hull should you ever have the misfortune of running into a reef puncturing a section of the hull. One of these watertight sections will keep the hull afloat! Also remember you have a keel that is virtually part of the ocean. (See section on Water Ballast below.) The keel, in most cases, will hit the reef first so you have to smash through that to punch a hole into the main hull – now that would take some doing!

**Water Ballast:** I guess Neil Surtees looked at ocean going ships and thought if it's good enough for them and their insurers such as Lloyds of London, it's good enough for a boat builder in Whakatane! Or maybe he was looking at a can of beer and noticed it stayed upright when it was partly full rather than full or empty – however the thought process it was a defining point in his overall design concept of his hulls when he incorporated a water ballast chamber into the keel of his boats. The deep V of the WorkMate contains a chamber that runs the full length of the keel, venting air up through the anchor well. It also allows the anchor well to drain into the ballast chamber—very clever. When this chamber is full of water

(approx 320 litres) an extra 300kg is added to the weight of the boat, effectively lowering its central point of stability. At the stern is a sealing flap that is controlled by simply pulling a draw cord. You can either have the chamber empty or full of water. To simply add that amount of weight to your boat whenever you choose is a fantastic option. You have a deep V boat (17°V) that has the ability to fly because of its power to weight ratio and when you reach your destination, you can add the extra ballast weight to the lowest point of the boat, allowing you and your mates to move around the boat

**left: Motor pod:** why not use it as a live bait holder? This continually flushing open pod well works a treat! Note: the burley muncher above the built in burley bucket on the starboard side.

**80 kg davit:** Will save your back! Ideal for lifting cray pots, scallop dredge or sunken treasure! Takes less than a minute to erect! The maximum lift of 80 kg is safeguarded by an overload circuit breaker cutting power to the electric winch motor. **Scuba tank holder:** This bracket is designed so that it can fit easily into any section of the port and starboard side shelves. It allows for a BC to be fitted to the cylinder.

**Hardtop:** There are not many boats of this size on the market that give you the option of having a semi hardtop. This hardtop gives you the flexibility to either have it pulled down so it is flush with the top of the windscreen when in moderate sea conditions or have it open to let the air flow through your hair—assuming you have some! Another great concept by the Surtees team.

without feeling you are dancing with the stars! Also in a heavy following sea when the going is slow it is a reassuring feeling having the bottom of your boat firmly stuck to the sea – much less chance of tipping your crew overboard! Boaties often have the chamber sealed from water entering when launching and retrieving their boats in shallow water locations. You can launch and retrieve in 400mm of water! Naturally with the chamber full of air the boat is more buoyant

Most boaties tend to leave the flap open when on the water, so that the chamber self drains as soon as the boat starts to move forward and automatically fills when the boat stops – ensuring a very stable deck to fish and dive off.

**Protection from corrosion:** The ingredients that make up the Nyalic<sup>®</sup> protective coating were developed by NASA to protect the astronauts landing capsule after it splashed down during the Apollo missions. Nyalic<sup>®</sup> extends the life of your boat's aluminium surfaces. It reduces or eliminates the effects of UV, salt water corrosion, stray electrical currents, protects dissimilar metals and makes hosing down the blood and guts of the day's fishing a breeze!

**Electrics:** All boats come pre-wired with an extensive wiring harness which allows you to add extra items such as GPS, depth sounders, VHF, wash down hose etc so when you add such items (if not already installed) you do not have to muck around running wires back to the switch board. Surtees policy is: they know owners are going to eventually add these items so why not allow for them in the original wiring harness – good thinking Batman! See picture of Surtees's Sales Manager, Phill Noblett holding removable electronics panel. This concept allows you to sleep easy when away from your boat. Surtees can also supply any brands of electronic aids and install them when building your boat.

#### Standard Specifications

Overall length: 5.5 metres Hull plate thickness: Below the waterline: 4mm. Above the waterline: 3mm. Freeboard: 710mm Beam: 2,150mm Deadrise: 17° Recommended HP: 70-115hp Shaft length: 25 inches Fuel under floor tank: 80 lts Water Ballast (approx): 320 lts Ballast drain time: 5 seconds Weight of basic hull: 412kg On a trailer with a 90hp two stroke motor: 740-750kg. Easily towed with a two litre car. All 5083 certified Marine Grade aluminium. Hull has a six year warranty. Boat has a one year warranty. Price for a standard boat with 90hp two stroke fitted, under floor fuel tank, anchor chain and warp: \$29,000.00 inc gst.

**Suzuki 90hp four stroke performance:** Fuel efficiency: 8lts per hour cruising at 25 knots at 4,000 rpm; 30 mph—4,200 rpm; 35 mph—5,000 rpm.

Surtees Boats: [www.surtees.co.nz](http://www.surtees.co.nz)