

Consistent Achiever

Another year and another big award for the Surtees 5.5 Workmate. But again it is very well deserved.

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SURTEES HAVE WELL and truly carved out a section of New Zealand's marine industry and all but made it their own. You only need to take a look at the amount of awards that the Whakatane-based boat builders have accumulated, 19 so far, to know that they are an extremely popular choice for Kiwi boaties.

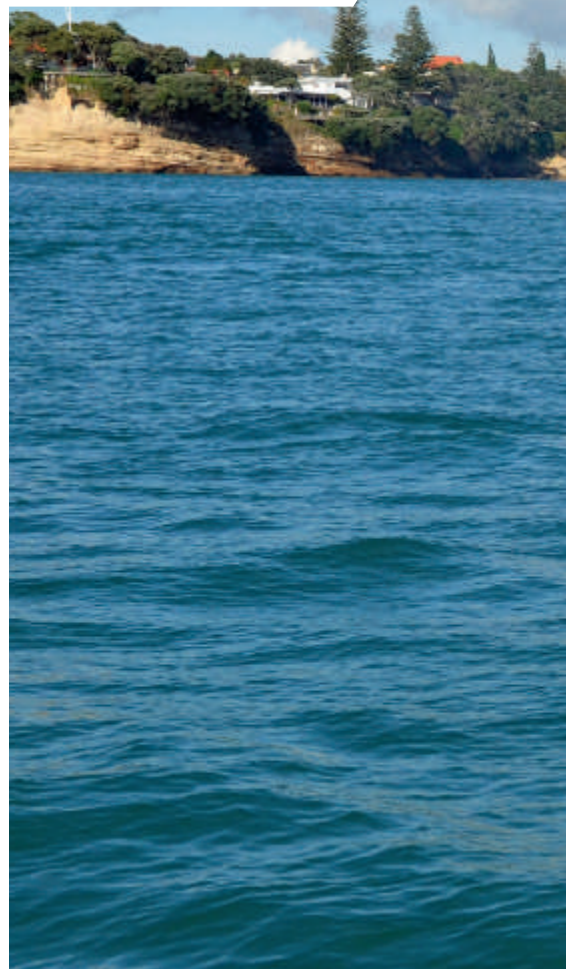
One of the most consistently popular boats in the Surtees range is the 5.5m Workmate and the revamped 2011 version is the direct result of taking something good and making it even better. These are perhaps the most fisher-friendly boats in the under-6m range and really make you feel as if you are angling out of a much larger craft. The fact that they have won the prize for best aluminium boat under 6m at the Huchwilco Boat Show five times in the last 10 years is testament to this. It was no different at the 2011 show, where the Workmate once again took the gong.

While there are all the great features that have made this boast such a popular choice in the past, there have been a few modifications to the 2011 model that have helped make this boat even more of a fishing weapon. The two most significant changes would have to be the bigger unfloor fuel tank and the stronger, redesigned transom.

NEW FEATURES

The new model now features a 100 litre underfloor fuel tank that really opens up a whole new realm of possibilities. With the performance and efficiency of modern day outboards, either 2-stroke or 4-stroke, 100 litres will last a long time in a boat of this size. The increased fuel amount obviously means an increase in range and to me this means game fishing. The days of only fishing for marlin out of big launches are gone, and this little boat would have little difficulty getting out there and having a crack for billfish. It is boats like these and the new outboards that have been designed for them that

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THE ROD HOLDERS AND SINKER CUPS/DRINK HOLDERS ARE WELL PLACED ON THE WIDE GUNWALES.



THE CABIN ISN'T HUGE BUT IS WELL THOUGHT OUT AND COMFORTABLE.



A LARGE HATCH MAKES THINGS A LOT EASIER.

have put game fishing within the grasp of the average fisho. And with the rise of petrol prices, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that game fishing out of trailer-boats will become bigger and bigger as time goes on.

The new transom has been designed to be stronger, no doubt to increase its horsepower range and to deal with the larger, more efficient 4-strokes that really are the way of the future. The transom still has a distinctive Surtees feel to it though and fits on the new Workmate well.

I was recently taken out on one of these new boats with Andrew Carlson from Fishing Boats NZ on the North Shore on a beautiful summer's morning in Takapuna. As soon as I boarded the vessel I felt like I was on something bigger. Surtees really do live by their motto of "Built to Fish" and they haven't missed a beat with this model. While the cabin is comfortable with enough space for kids to lie or a couple of adults to curl up, the very fishable cockpit consumes most of the space. And this suits me perfectly.

In the cabin there are bungy cords lining one side to hold life jackets. This is a small but clever innovation and is a safer option than having them stored underneath swabs or seats. The cushioning in the cabin is thick and would provide perfect refuge for those wanting to get out of the elements for a bit. The hatch inside is really big, another classic Surtees feature that caters for the bigger fishermen amongst us. Even for small guys though, a bigger hatch allows much more movement when hanging out of it. This makes retrieving an anchor a whole lot easier and is an extra spot for someone to cast a lure from. I have found that this area can be a safe haven when there are three or four sets of hooks being launched into the sea from all directions in the cockpit.

INNOVATION AND PRACTICALITY

The helm is compact and does the trick. The two seats fold away to the side which allows fishing space right through. The boat I was testing didn't have any type of fish finder or GPS installed but there was room to have one installed above the dash. There is an alloy hardtop above the helm and it's here that more of the ingenious Surtees design is once again realised. The hardtop is held up by pneumatic stays that can be pulled down until it reaches the windscreen, completely sealing out any unwanted wind or rain. This would force most men to have to crouch to see



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through the windscreen if standing. There is an option of installing clears though so the hardtop could stay fully up. Another innovative feature here, and one that is great for those wanting to garage their boat, is that the entire windscreen and hardtop can fold right down inside the helm, reducing it's on-trailer height considerably.

The cockpit screams of fishability, particularly the wide gunwales that have always been a favourite Surtees feature of mine. These not only make the boat feel very solid but allow you to fully put your feet underneath and increase your stability while pulling those big specimens up from the depths. The gunwales are also very comfortable to sit on and I think this is key in a boat of this size where space is at a premium. It

means the entire cockpit is literally lined with bench seats on either side, reducing the need for any seats on the inside.

Within the gunwales are four rod holders and built-in cups that were originally designed to store sinkers, but just happen to be the perfect size to hold a can or bottle. What a coincidence.

Underneath the gunwales on this boat was another clip-on rod holder attachment that held four rods vertically. This is perfect when moving around, either on the water or trailer, as it keeps them dry and out of the way of trees, garage ceilings and other low-hanging obstacles. These can be removed and replaced with other Surtees features such as the dive bottle holders or extra seats. Great thinking once again Surtees.



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This boat had a walk-through transom but no live bait tank. These can be installed as an extra however. There is plenty of room for a diver to pull himself clear out of the water onto the landing platform, where there is the classic Surtees berley dispenser ready to go.

PLENTY TO LIKE

This boat was powered by the impressive Evinrude E-TEC fuel-injected 2-stroke outboard. These are a great fit for this boat and fall right inside the 70-115HP rating. The whole package handled well and felt solid as we headed out from Takapuna. While the acceleration wasn’t mind-blowing, it was a nice comfortable ride and was very responsive to each change in the throttle or steering.

We settled down near one of the markers to flick some soft baits out. This is when the ballast tank self-flooded, adding to the already impressive stability of the boat. With both Andrew and myself leaning heavily to one side, we couldn’t really make the boat pitch at all. It is another winner in my books as I have had some very forgettable days on unstable boats with people constantly moving from one side to the other.

It’s an impressive package and a lot of boat for such a small unit. A lot of thought and innovation have gone into the design of this model and it isn’t too hard to see why it has become such a Kiwi favourite and a consistent award-winner. ☘

SPECIFICATIONS:

MAKE AND MODEL: Surtees Workmate

LENGTH (OVERALL): 5.5m

BEAM: 2.15m

HULL WEIGHT: 412kg

FUEL CAPACITY: 100L

ENGINE POWER RANGE: 70-115HP

ENGINE:

MAKE: Evinrude E-TEC

POWER: 90HP

TYPE: 2-Stroke

WEIGHT: 145kg

PRICE AS TESTED: \$49,500

PACKAGE PRICE FROM: \$37,500

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The Boating Safety CODE

Before you go boating on our seas, lakes and rivers, get familiar with New Zealand’s Boating Safety Code, no matter what kind of boat you use.

5 simple rules to help you stay safe

- ① **Life jackets** *Take them - Wear them.*
Boats, especially ones under 6m in length, can sink very quickly. Wearing a life jacket increases your survival time in the water.
- ② **Skipper responsibility**
The skipper is responsible for the safety of everyone on board and for the safe operation of the boat. Stay within the limits of your vessel and your experience.
- ③ **Communications**
Take two separate waterproof ways of communicating so we can help you if you get into difficulties.
- ④ **Marine weather**
New Zealand’s weather can be highly unpredictable. Check the local marine weather forecast before you go and expect both weather and sea state changes.
- ⑤ **Avoid alcohol**
Safe boating and alcohol do not mix. Things can change quickly on the water. You need to stay alert and aware.

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