

# trailer boat trials

BY SAM MOSSMAN

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New Zealand  
**fishing** News



## Surtees 6.7m Sportfisher Hardtop

I first met Neil Surtees in January 1995 when I tested one of his early 6.1m hulls. He was a one-man-band at that time, turning out about a dozen hulls a year from a large shed on his country block on SH 30, near Whakatane in the Bay of Plenty.

He has come a long way since then. With Neil's innovative and robust designs, and the addition of his wife Jan to the team, business has boomed. New workshops have blossomed all over the property, and a strong team of welders and engineers are on track to turn out about 200 hulls this year, with 80 exported to Australia where they have received rave reviews under the name 'Barcrusher'.

I had arranged to trial Surtees' new 6.7m Sportfisher Hardtop at Whakatane soon after the Auckland Boat Show, something I looked forward to even more when this hull took home the 'Aluminium Fishing Boat of the

Show' and 'Overall Best Boat of the Show' awards.

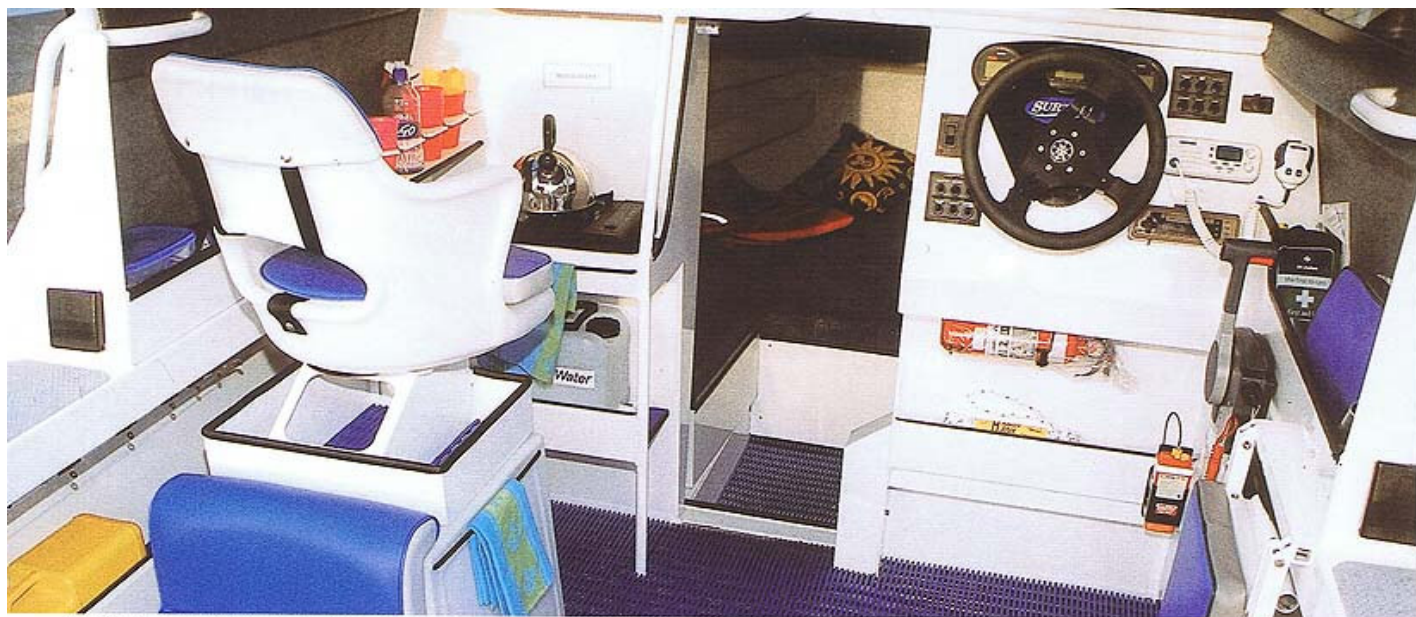
### Construction

Bottoms are 5mm, with 4mm sides and 3mm topsides. There are small reversed chines and no strakes. Six fully welded stringers run up the full length of the hull and additional longitudinal support is given by the plate that forms the top of the ballast tank (which we will come to in a moment). Laterally there are gussets that tie the stringers together at 400 centres, in addition to the bulkheads. Everything under the floor is fully seam-welded, making the hull very

strong. Two sealed underfloor chambers provide buoyancy, but buoyancy figures were not available at the time of writing.

Normally boat manufacturers try to walk the fine line between a hull design with a deep enough 'V' to cut easily through the sea, but not so deep that the boat is overly tender at rest. The Surtees design allows the best of both worlds, with a fine-entry design, variable to 18° at the stern, but adding a self-flooding ballast tank along the keel line to make the hull stable when not under way.

This is done by welding a plate across the hull above the keel, forming a triangular tank that is open at the stern and vents forward up through the anchor well. As soon as the boat settles off plane, the tank floods, then drains instantaneously as the hull rises back onto the plane. The capacity is about 350 litres, equating to the same number of kilograms



The fold-away helm seat gives the person on the wheel plenty of room.

(isn't the metric system wonderful?).

Neil Surtees had added a sealing swing flap to the rear opening on the test boat, enabling the ballast water to be retained while under way, effectively adding about 350kg of ballast to the lowest point of the hull.

### Power and performance

This solidly constructed hull weighs about 1000kg, and was powered by a Yamaha

200hp two-stroke outboard with high-pressure direct injection. The prop was a standard 17-inch model and fuel was supplied from a 200-litre underfloor tank.

With the long stretch of bad weather we have had, I guess we were lucky it was not pouring down on test day, and at least the 25- to 35-knot winds were quartering off the shore, allowing us to cross the Whakatane bar without undue problems. We did not have to go far offshore, however, to strike a tight,

capping sea of about a metre, more or less right on the beam as we headed out to Whale Island.

This is about as nasty as you would want to be out in, and we were grateful for the shelter of the hardtop design. *The Surtees just ate it up and spat it out, riding and landing softly in some pretty gnarly conditions at over 20 knots.* Our acute line of travel to the sea would have been asking for trouble in some hulls, but the Surtees showed not the slightest sign of wanting to broach or bury the nose.

And then it got even better. We stopped, filled the ballast tank, and shut the holding flap, trapping the water. The extra weight improved the ride even further, making for pretty comfortable travelling in what were rather nasty conditions.

Although sea conditions were too poor to trial the boat's top end speed, Neil told me it will run to about 45 mph.

The performance of this hull is one of the best I have experienced, and gives you a lot of confidence when the going gets tough.

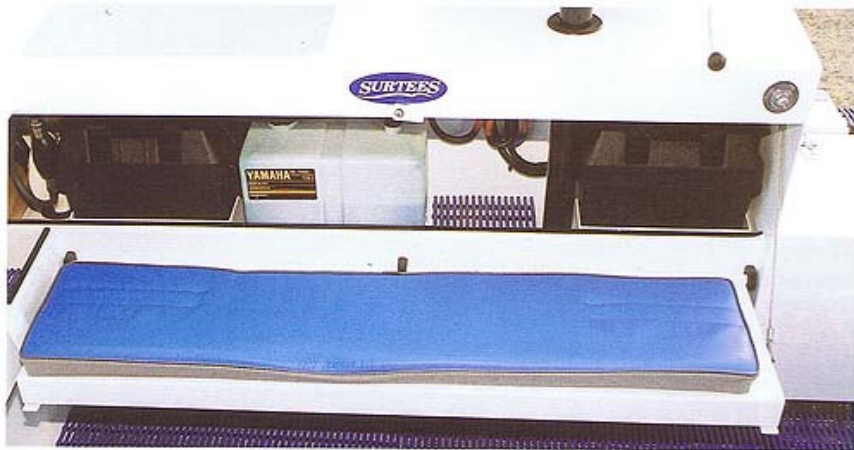
### Anchoring

It is possible to get to the bow around the sides, although not easy with the outriggers fitted on the test boat. The best option is to go through the large hatch in the cabin roof. A fair-sized (but unhatched) anchor well is up in the bow, and split bow rails help contain the warp in the fairlead.

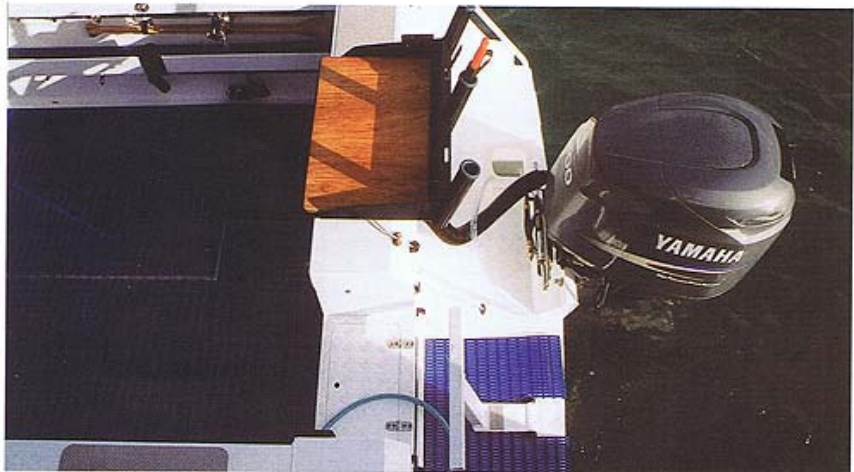
An anchor winch is fitted, but in typical style, Neil has not used a standard approach. The capstan is situated on the side of the cabin roof, and the bowman sits sideways in the hatchway and pulls the warp back towards the bow and into the well, controlling the winch with a knee switch. This sounds unorthodox but seems to work well in practice.

### Layout

The cabin entry is a little snug, but the cabin is fully lined, with a lockable sliding door. A marine toilet is fitted under the central berth. The berths would sleep two adults comfortably and maybe three at a



Above: A fold-down transom gate provides battery access and extra seating. Below: Transom cut-out and boarding ladder make life easy for divers and swimmers



pinch with the squab infill added. Stowage is in side pockets and under the berths. Access to the back of the console is via a hatch.

At the helm position is a large dash, dark marine carpet lined (reducing internal glare on the 'screen, and stopping things sliding around) with a back lip. This offers plenty of instrument mounting room, and a Lowrance LC X-15CT sounder/GPS was set up there, along with a compass. The VHF and a sound system were recessed into the dash and a Roca wiper mounted on the 'screen (although this was largely made redundant by an application of 'Rainex').

The forward 'screen was three flat panes of tinted 4mm toughened glass, with sliding 6mm side windows of the same material. Visibility was good both standing and seated.

Set in front of the passenger seat is what Surtees call a "mini galley" — a two-tier unit that takes a small gas stove, water tank and the makings for a brew-up, or to cook a simple meal at sea. Grab rails and side pockets are fitted on both sides of the hardtop.

There are a range of seating options available. The test boat had a clever fold-down bench seat with removable backrest for the helmsman. This was ideal as it could be got right out of the way when travelling standing up. The passenger side was a king and queen unit — a swivelling rotationally moulded bucket seat on the front with a bench seat on the rear. The internal dry stowage was added to by an exposed tray unit under the seat. A further bench seat is created by folding down a gate in the transom face, also exposing oil reservoir, twin batteries and isolation switch.

Big side pockets extend the full length of the cockpit up under the hardtop, a length of about three metres. A further storage nook, and quite a handy one, was a small well set into each side halfway along the gunwales, with a top opening hatch.

The fully sealed chequerplate deck was covered by tube mat and drains to a well under the transom, cleared by a 1500gph bilge pump. An underfloor hold/kill tank is set centrally near the transom and a wash-down hose was fitted.

The hard top offers good shelter to the crew, and we were certainly pleased to have it on the test day. This is added to by a removable canvas cover which extends further aft over the cockpit.

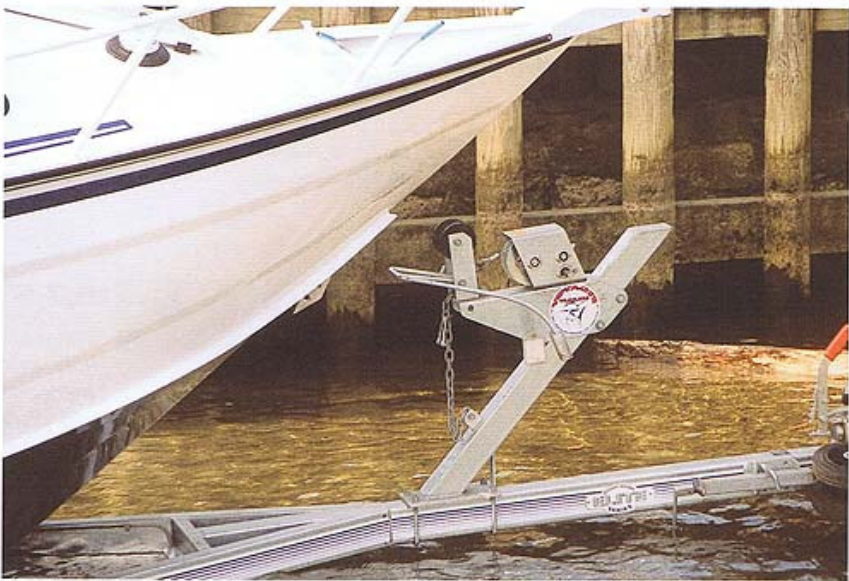
The transom has a cut-out step to aid boarding. No doubt a drop door can be fitted if required. The stern is Portafino-style with a chequerplate boarding platform and fold-down 'T' boarding ladder.

Over all, good practical use of space with many innovative design ideas incorporated.

## Fishability

The self-flooding ballast tank gives good stability at rest, and the chequerplate/tube matting deck provides secure footing. All-round toe recess and flat gunwale and transom faces give good mid-thigh support. There is plenty of unimpeded cockpit space to work in — all the basics are there.

Four through-gunwale rodholders are fitted, and it was nice to see the gimbal pins correctly aligned. A further three rodholders



The drive-on, drive-off boat catch makes for dry-footed boating.

are added in a transom mounted-bait station. On the hardtop is a six-position rocket launcher, although the central positions are not easy to reach when the canvas Bimini is up. Further rod stowage is under the gunwales and in clever rod-come-can holders, which can be hooked on the side pockets at any point desired. A berley pot is fitted through the boarding platform.

Neil had designed and built a clever set of outrigger bases which are quick and simple to use, and set up the 'riggers (in this case a set of telescopic models) at any desired angle. He has been granted a patent number for this design.

A recessed base in the fold-down transom gate takes gaff and boat-hook in clips. Also built in is a livebait tank under the cut-out

section of the transom. During a brief fishing stop in the lee of Whale Island, this tank was put to good use while following the sabiki-to-jack mackerel-to-john dory progression.

Divers are well catered for with a good boarding ladder, grab rails, platform, transom cut-out, and heaps of tank stowage space in side pockets, underfloor hold, and seating unit.

All the makings are here for an excellent hard-core fish and dive boat. Definitely blue water capable.

## Trailer

Although Neil's dad, Alan, continues to produce trailers for smaller Surtees models, the 6.7m hulls are carried on Voyager trailers, from Phil South Engineering in Hamilton.



1: Stowage wells in the gunwales are useful. 2: The closing gate on the 350-litre ballast tank allowed extra weight to be retained while travelling.

These are a cradle A-frame design with bow entry recess, keel entry roller and seven pairs of wobble rollers per side. It has dual axles, zinc-treated leaf springs, hydraulic trailer brakes, wind-down jockey wheels and submersible lights.

The bow post has been modified to take another clever Surtees design — a self releasing and securing stay for the bow, which can be hooked up and unhooked just by driving the boat forward. Ideal for dry-footed operation on a chilly winter's day!

All-up tow weight, fully fuelled and loaded, was 1940kg.

### All-in-all...

The judges at the Auckland Boat Show who picked this craft as the best over-all boat (the first time an aluminium craft has won the award that I can recall) could only judge it by its dry-land appearance. Add to this an excellent rough water performance, a fish and dive friendly layout, and as long as the buoyancy figures work out favourably, this is a boat that demands the serious consideration of any potential boat owner.

### Specifications

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| L.O.A .....       | 6.7m      |
| Beam .....        | 2.35m     |
| Bottoms .....     | 5mm       |
| Sides .....       | 4mm       |
| Topsides .....    | 3mm       |
| Hull weight ..... | 1000kg    |
| Rec. HP .....     | 140-200hp |



### 6.7 STANDARD FEATURES

Water ballasted - gives maximum stability at rest • Six fully welded stringers for superior strength • Fully welded tread plate floor • 200ltr underfloor fuel tank, • Underfloor bouyancy • Underfloor storage bins • Large dashboard area • Toughened glass screens • Large forward hatch • Portafino stern • Boarding ladder • Large shelves side, aft & front – ideal dive bottle storage • Separate anchor locker • Four rod holders • Rocket launcher on all Hardtop models • Bow roller & bollard • Side graphics • Bow, side & stern rails • Ample hand/grab rails • Spray deflection chines • Provision for toilet • Tru transom burley pot • Smooth non pounding hull design • Roomy, practical and user friendly layout • All Marine Grade Aluminium.



# SURTEES

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"...soft riding deep V hull...ballast tank...makes a huge difference to stability...underfloor chambers provide buoyancy. Clever design features...good workmanship...excellent sea performance. Simple, robust, and cost efficient. A top boat for fishing and diving"  
Sam Mossman

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