

Built for SERIOUS FISHERMEN

Challenger 720SD Diesel Hardtop

The latest addition to the Challenger Boat range is the big boy of the family and is a serious blue water machine with loads of space, comfort and power.

Story Mathew Hewetson. Photography by Alex Wallace.

Recently I was asked, if we were doing a boat test and if the boat wasn't up to scratch would we make a comment on this? And have we ever had a boat that didn't make the pass mark?

Well, I can honestly say that from all the boat tests I have been involved with over the past six years, they have all been seaworthy vessels. This is a tribute to our Kiwi boat builders.

So we are a nation of boat lovers and of keen fishing types, and we are fortunate to have so many fine trailer boat makers across our country.

Our testing boating conditions demand this, as we have the seventh-largest Exclusive Economic Zone in the world, covering over four million square kilometres, more than 15 times our land area, with the mighty Pacific, Tasman and Southern Oceans providing their challenges. So we are a nation of boat lovers and of keen fishing types, and we are fortunate to have so many fine trailer boat makers across our country.

Challenger Boats are one such boat manufacturer. Originally based in Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty for the past 15 years, they have recently moved 25 minutes drive into Mt Maunganui. New partner Tony Hawker believes the new premises allow for greater drive-by traffic and better access to the local Tauranga boat ramps for testing. Challenger Boats produce the 550, 595, 650 and 720 models. We have been fortunate to have had the 595 and 650 models as previous magazine boats. Both were very capable and well liked by our staff. So we eagerly awaited the launch of the new 720 SD Diesel Hardtop.

LIFESTYLE

In early October we arrived at 142 Newton Street at 7:30am to find Tony moving boats with the forklift. A new 595 was our second boat to assist with the photography and our photographer, Alex Wallace, commented on its smart looks. Tony introduced us to Lee Stringer of Fishing 4 Less, who was going to skipper the 595. Challenger Boats are also sharing their new premises with fishing tackle distributor Fishing 4 Less. They will have a new retail store at the front so customers can purchase tackle direct and then admire the range of Challenger Boats. Tony and Lee both moved to New Zealand from England for new

SORENTO  TOWS UP TO 2,500 KG.

NOW HERE!



KIA KIA MOTORS



The 210hp Cummins Diesel stern drive pushed the big boat to 40mph.

opportunities and they found Tauranga and the Bay offer a great lifestyle.

When Tony and his wife met Challenger founder Alan McNearney they decided to work with him and help grow the business. Tony brought out the 720 SD from the back of the warehouse and it immediately impressed with its size and clean lines. Challenger Boats' design philosophy is a long entry monohedron hull shape of moderate dead rise. This gives the soft ride everybody loves and with the dead rise and efficient chine rail no planing strakes are needed and the hull is still easily powered and dry.

The 720 SD Diesel Hardtop is a serious blue water trailer boat.

The 720 SD Diesel Hardtop is a serious blue water trailer boat, weighing 2600kg on the trailer and powered by a 210hp Cummins Diesel stern drive. With a 215-litre tank, this boat is ideally suited for chasing game fish or going wide in search of hapuku. We went in convey to the Sulphur Point boat ramp, only 10 minutes down the road, and I was looking forward to heading out in the big boat.

There we were joined by Ash Douch, who is Lee's business partner. Ash is also English so along with Alex our cameraman hailing from Guernsey Island, I was the only Kiwi with four Brits! We launched the boats and Tony

fired up the 720's engine, the hum of the Cummins diesel sounded great. It sounded like a fishing boat ready for business. We eased out past the five-knot marker and Tony opened her up. The boat quickly accelerated onto the plane and Tony pushed her some more as we shot across the harbour.

The boat was responsive as we shot around and did a few laps of the 595 for photos. Tony was clearly having fun now as he hit 40mph at 4000rpm. The big diesel produced a lot of torque needed to push the heavy boat. After more photos, we moved closer in to Matakana Island to get a new background. I took over the helm and instantly felt the torque produced by the engine through the throttle. It was my turn for some fun now and although a big boat, I was impressed by its handling abilities. Once the photos were taken, we decided to return the 595 to the boat ramp and take the 720 out fishing.

TSUNAMI ALERT

Lee had a spot near Motiti Island that had produced good snapper this year. The sea was flat calm out wide and we raced over and found the reef using the GPS and there were large schools of trevally on the surface and plenty of birds. The reef also had large bait fish schools on the sounder so it looked good.

We all deployed flasher rigs of various kinds baited with jack mackerel to 45 metres. We all experienced bites as soon

as we hit the bottom; a lot of small fish though. The huge cockpit allowed for the five of us to fish quite comfortably. We started to catch a number of different species – blue cod, golden snapper, tarakihi and a large red cod. The snapper weren't biting today but the other species were all welcomed for the table.

I took over the helm and instantly felt the torque produced by the engine through the throttle.

Ash received a phone call from a friend to say an earthquake had just hit Vanuatu. This was soon confirmed by Coastguard who advised boaties to be on alert. Several minutes later they put out a general warning of a possible tsunami and to avoid coastal areas. The 20-knot forecasted wind also arrived, so we took this as sensible notice to pull anchor and head in early. The calm sea of the morning was now replaced by a small messy chop with white caps but the big 720 laughed off this with ease, the diesel punching through the sea and the hardtop keeping us dry and comfortable. It took us longer to get back in but we made it safely. Just as we docked at the ramp, the Coastguard downgraded the tsunami threat. Oh well, better to be safe than sorry!



The large windshields provide excellent vision for skipper Tony Hawker.



The large cockpit gives ample room for 4-5 people to fish comfortably.

THE TECH STUFF

SPECIFICATIONS

Make:	Challenger
Model:	720 SD Diesel Hardtop
Price as tested:	\$127,975
Type/Construction:	Fibreglass
LOA:	7.20m
Beam:	2.45m
Deadrise:	18.5 deg
Trailerable Weight:	2600kg
Fuel Capacity:	215 litres
Engine:	210hp Cummins Diesel

STANDARD FITTINGS ON TEST BOAT

- 4 s/steel deck cleats
- 4 s/steel hand rails
- 4 s/steel rod holders
- 4 internal rod holders
- Hydraulic steering
- S/steel Navigation lights
- Anchor light
- 2 Bilge pumps
- Boarding ladder
- 215L under floor fuel tank
- Freedom winch with warp, anchor and chain
- Rocket launcher/handrail
- Port/starboard side sliding window in cabin
- Curved front windscreen
- Recess for flush toilet
- Coloured hulls offered
- Large bait station/ski pole combination
- Cockpit downlights (LED)
- Cabin light (LED)
- Cockpit lights (LED)
- 2 pedestal swivel Softrider seats (1 fully adjustable swivel seat)
- 2 rear seats
- Upholstered trim panels on trays and cockpit
- Squabs and infill to front cabins (colour choice)
- Weaver front hatch
- Separate anchor locker
- Bow rail
- s/steel Bow roller
- Reef Tornado carpet on floor (colour choice)
- 2 door battery locker
- Under floor storage
- Fleck 2 carpet in cabin & on cockpit walls
- Fleck 2 carpet to cockpit roof
- Double batteries and switch
- 12 volt power socket to cabin/cockpit
- Trim tabs (auto return)
- Full dashboard instrumentation (trip computer)
- Teak trim
- Cockpit cover

TRAILER

Braked tandem axle multi-roller with wind-up jockey wheel and spare wheel.

BOAT SUPPLIED BY

Challenger Boats, 142 Newton Street, Mount Maunganui, 07 575 0497 www.challengerboats.co.nz