

Up for the Challenge

Challenger Boats, based in Mt Maunganui on the Bay of Plenty, has been building top quality fibreglass boats since 1994. The latest evolution of a proven design, the 595SE, adds a new level of luxury to this established model. **Norman Holtzhausen** reviews this upgrade to a well accepted hull...



**Weather
conditions**

Average windspeed	5-10 knots
Sea state	Less than 0.5m swell

The 5.5m to 6m range is one of the “sweet spots” in the trailer boat market – big enough to accommodate a whole family or serious fishing party, but small enough to fit in a garage and be towed by a family sized car. The Challenger 595 was launched several years ago and has achieved good acceptance in this segment of the market.

The existing models have been set up as serious sports machines, suited to fishermen or watersports enthusiasts. However there was demand for a model with a higher level of finish, hence the 595SE was born. This model features premium padded seating for four

occupants, upholstered bunks, and stainless fittings and bow rail.

Distinctive ride

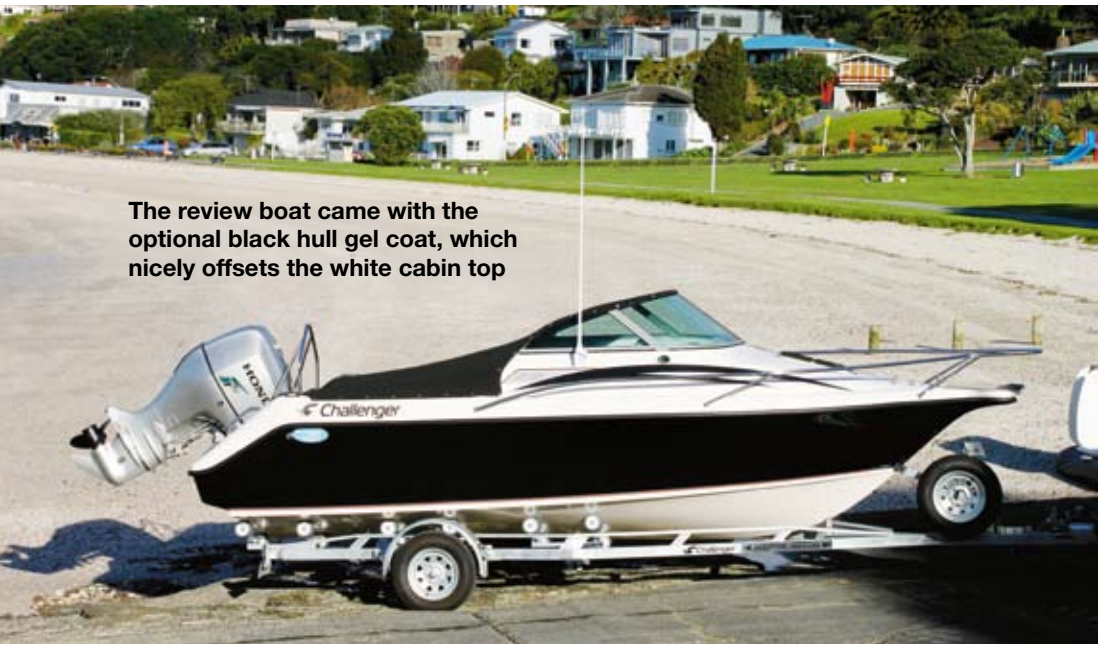
The real mark of a Challenger, however, is the ride, and all Challenger boats feature a unique strakeless hull. This design, by Tauranga naval architect Terry Reid, has proven its worth over the years. The lack of strakes and a relatively steep deadrise of 18.5 degrees mean that the hull slices through the water effortlessly and lands softly if it becomes airborne. Laid up in solid fibreglass, the hull provides a smooth, quiet and comfortable ride.

We were interested in seeing how the new model

performed, especially as it has been teamed up with the brand-new Honda BF115 four-stroke engine. The review boat is one of the first in the country to have this fitted, and managing director of Brokerage Marine, Gary Stephenson, was keen to get our impressions.

Although it looked far too smart to take out fishing, we decided to risk getting the boat a bit dirty and headed off for an afternoon chasing some Hauraki Gulf snapper. There is no better way to get the feel of a boat than to use it, so we twisted Gary's arm by promising not to scratch it (though I think the promise of bringing him a snapper clinched the deal...)

Thus on a late weekday afternoon we slipped away from the office and collected the boat



The review boat came with the optional black hull gel coat, which nicely offsets the white cabin top

from Brokerage Marine in Westpark Marina.

The Challenger has an extremely elegant outline, with smooth rounded lines to the cabin top and no corners or hard angles. The review boat came with the optional black hull gel coat, which nicely offsets the white cabin top. It features an open cabin, although a bimini top and cleats can be fitted as an option. Luckily we had chosen our weather carefully and the sky was clear and almost windless.

The boat is supplied on a single-axle galvanised Prescott trailer fitted with wobble rollers and hydraulic brakes. The towing weight is reported to be around 1350kg, so the brakes were not strictly needed. In order to test the towing ability we took boat and trailer through the winding hills of Whitford to launch at Maraetai.

The low cabin roof means there is little wind drag on this combo, and a stylish black road cover keeps the cockpit of the boat covered and secure. This means that gear for the day can be pre-loaded into the boat without having to worry about it blowing out or being lifted by a casual passer-by. The braked trailer performed flawlessly and at times it was easy to forget the load behind the car.

Although there is a wide boat ramp at Maraetai, the tide was out when we arrived so we launched off the beach. This was achieved without any fuss, despite the relatively soft shingle, and the boat slipped easily off the trailer. This hull has a draft of just under 40cm so after parking the car and trailer it was possible to get back aboard without getting wet beyond the knees.

Honda delivers

As expected the Honda fired up easily and quietly. Stephenson had set this boat up with two standard tote tanks for fuel, although there is a large under-floor area that

can be used for gear storage or fuel. Thanks to the economy of the four-stroke the two tote tanks are good for almost 50 nautical miles, certainly enough for our afternoon's fishing. However owners wanting a larger range should look at specifying the under-floor tank.

Soon we were heading out for the bottom end of Waiheke with the boat scooting along at 34 knots. Stephenson has been experimenting with a large-pitch three-blade prop on the motor, and it certainly gave astonishing acceleration. Opening the throttle wide from rest caused the boat to bolt forward, throwing any unwary passengers back into their seats.

Every propeller is a compromise between acceleration and top speed, and this configuration sacrificed the latter in the interests of hole-shot speed and pulling power. It would be ideal for towing skiers or water toys, giving good low-speed power and excellent acceleration. This is aided by the BLAST technology (Boosted Low-Speed Torque) fitted to the new Honda engine, which enables the bigger prop to rapidly get to its optimum speed.

The boat tracked extremely well under the calm conditions, holding a dead-straight line even with hands off the wheel. We were pushed for time to get the photos done before the sun set, and enjoyed the rare ability to travel at 30-plus knots in a boat this size.

We liked...

- The ride
- The comfortable seating arrangement

We didn't...

- Tote tanks on this size boat
- No place to fit an anchor winch

Doing the business

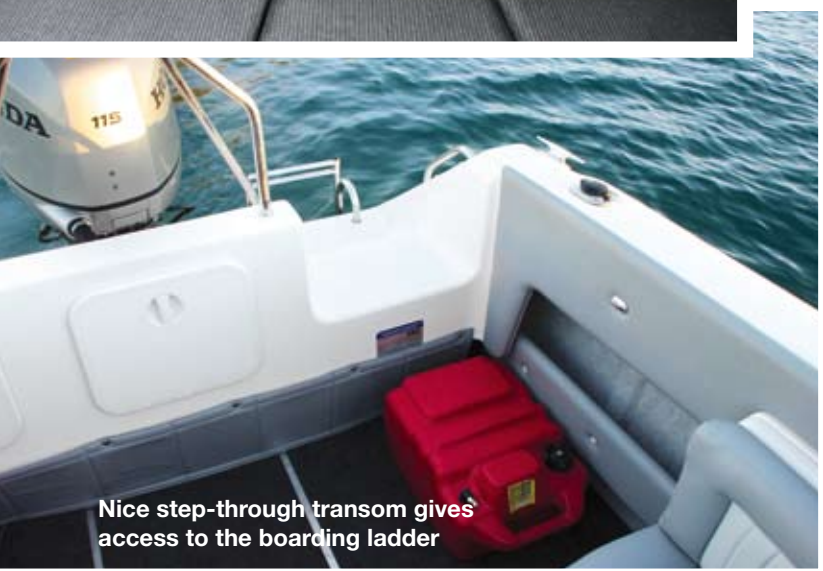
Very soon we reached our destination, and after taking the necessary photos we settled down to the serious business of catching fish. Deploying the anchor manually was easy thanks to the large polycarbonate hatch in the cabin roof, although it is also possible to walk around the sides of the cabin. The anchor well has a split hatch, allowing the anchor to be deployed and the cover to be closed up again over the rode.

Inside the cabin

We did not get a chance to try out the bunks in the cabin, but these are full length and well padded. An infill makes the full width of the cabin usable for sleeping, and a padded shelf runs along both sides. The sides and roof of the cabin are carpet-lined, and the hatch has adjustable stays to allow it to be fastened at an angle to direct a breeze into the cabin.



An infill makes the full width of the cabin usable for sleeping



Nice step-through transom gives access to the boarding ladder

The Challenger has an extremely elegant outline, with smooth, rounded lines to the cabin top and no corners or hard angles



The queen seats are hinged and lift up to reveal storage areas

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Look for more Challenger boats on Tradeabout.co.nz. Browse the listings and see more independent reviews. Take your time – it will be worth the effort.

Specifications

Challenger 595SE

Length	5.96m
Beam	2.30m
Draft	0.38m
Deadrise	18.5 degrees
Motor	Honda BF115 four-stroke
Fuel capacity	Tote tanks
Trailer	Prescott single-axle galvanised braked
Towing weight	1350kg
Price as tested	\$68,984

Price as reviewed \$68,984

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Boat Test Challenger 595SE

One problem with the smooth sides of the cabin and the location of the anchor well is that there is no space for fitting an automatic anchor winch. However a capstan can be fitted behind the split hatch, and there is enough space inside the anchor well to fit a drum winch.

The king-and-queen seating arrangement worked extremely well, with the rear-facing seats also allowing the occupants to sit sideways. In practice this meant that we could sit in style while fishing, although the action soon heated up and seats were not required. The queen seats are hinged and lift up to reveal a huge storage area under each side, suitable for large gear bags or even a couple of dive tanks.

Since this is not intended as a serious fish-killing machine, there were only four rod holders fitted. A stainless steel ski pole (actually a reinforced frame)

is fitted for towing water toys or skiers, and a bait station option is available that fits neatly onto this.

The Portofino-style stern is perfect for swimming or diving off, with a transom step-through on the port side. There is no way to close the step-though, although it is high enough above the waterline for there to be little danger of waves splashing through, even in rough conditions. A stainless boarding ladder is in place, and grab handles on each side of the boarding platform make it easy to climb back aboard.

Fitted in the transom are two hatches; one occupied by the battery and master cut-out switch, and the other available for stowing loose items. Padded and lined shelves run the whole length of the boat, and a marine carpet is fitted. Under a hatch in the floor is another huge storage area, although if an under-floor fuel tank is fitted then this space will be reduced.

After catching some very nice snapper, including the one agreed as the dues for Stephenson, we pulled the pick and headed home. The boat has all the required navigation lights, as well as good LED cockpit and cabin lights. As it

Predictable handling – great in confined places



BOAT REVIEW



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was almost dark the Raymarine A50 chartplotter/fishfinder combo came into play, enabling us to thread our way back through the islands at speed. This unit has integrated NMEA input, facilitating the monitoring of fuel usage, remaining range and other engine data on the same display. Although the screen on this unit is only five inches, it has VGA-quality resolution (640 by 480 pixels) and the image was crisp and clear.

We did wonder how warm we would be without an enclosed cabin, but actually the windscreen did an excellent job of directing the chilly night air away from us. The padded helm and passenger seats provided a very comfortable and warm position from which to pilot our way home. Thanks to the smooth and solid hull, we were not troubled by swells (which we could not see in the dark) and simply powered our way through without any surprises.

Although the skipper's seat is not adjustable, the helm position is extremely comfortable and the boat rides well. I generally prefer driving while standing up, but on this boat it is equally comfortable to relax into the padded seat. The

Multi-purpose capable



boat tracks well through an angled swell and the lack of strakes makes little or no difference to the handling. However it certainly does make for a smoother ride and the lined hull was quiet and solid when we jumped a couple of wakes. Very soon we were winning the boat back up onto the trailer and back on the road in a matter of a few minutes.

In summary, this model is set up for watersports, although it proved to be a fish-magnet as well and could easily be set up for dual purpose. The boat is, of course, built to CPC standards and unsinkable. ⚓

For more information contact Brokerage Marine, ph 0800 FUNAFLOAT or visit www.brokeragemarine.co.nz.

Other boats in this class



Sea Nymph 580 Regal

Summing up this boat is easy: It's a well-built and solid performer. Some minor configuration changes show the dedication to ongoing improvement, and it is well priced for its size.

Specifications	
LOA	5.80m
Beam	2.38m
Towing weight	1350kg
Engine	Suzuki DF100 four-stroke



Bonito 550 Sting

If family boating fun and value for money are at the top of your wish list then the Bonito 550 is certainly worthy. It is a smart all-round package.

Specifications	
LOA	5.7m
Beam	2.24m
Weight on trailer	1300kg
Rec hp	90-150hp



Zenith Aggressor 5.9m

A handsome package – speedy and agile with a quality finish. The key to superior performance is a hull that has style and neatly balances hydrodynamics with strength.

Specifications	
LOA	5.90m
Beam	2.48m
Weight	1500kg
Engine	150hp Evinrude E-TEC

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