

Challenger never ceases to impress

Here at Waterline, we've test-driven a lot of Challenger boats over the years and never cease to be impressed with their style, smoothness and performance.

Our latest outing in the Challenger 550 is no exception.



In fact we trusted the Challenger to perform for a most discerning passenger – we picked up Santa from Pilot Bay and took him wakeboarding for his Christmas cover shot in The Weekend Sun.

Challenger Boats are unique in the market for a number of reasons.

The legendary strakeless hulls are, well, legendary. Smooth, silent running with the design philosophy that the hull shape should do the lifting, not added ribs.

This means no chattering water noise from below; simply clean running.

Another feature of the Challenger marque is the purely local design and manufacturing. Based in Mount Maunganui, Challenger have been the darlings of the local marine sector for 15 years.

Many owners are on their second or third boats. Such is the following of the brand, they've almost reached a sort of cult status in the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Coromandel. That's not to say Challengers are purely a Bay phenomenon – in fact they're all over New Zealand.

But for local boaties there's nothing like the surety of backup, knowing your boat is not only top quality, but made right here in the Bay.

Our outing in the new-look 550 started out at a busy Sulphur Point ramp on a blisteringly sunny December Wednesday. Why aren't all these people at work? They were probably asking the same about us. Hey, this is work!

Damn fine work, but work nevertheless!

Tony Hawker and son Jack from Challenger ran us through the highlights of the 550 and the new 720 Diesel powered hardtop, which will feature in the next edition of Waterline.

We loaded up the lads and the wakeboard on the 550 and headed out for a play on the harbour.

After firing up the gleaming new black Suzuki four stroke, we had to check that it was actually running. Because at idle, these things are dead quiet.

Cruising around the harbour, we've really nothing new to report about the handling of the Challenger. Just sublime, as usual. Quiet, and did I mention smooth again?

Combined with the whisper from the four stroke, it was easy to carry out a sensible conversation even while blating along at 35mph at around 4000 rpm.

The brand new cable steering was still a bit tight at first, but lightened as the day went on and definitely improved as we learnt how the Suzuki liked to be trimmed. Cable steering is probably on the limit for this size boat and if you want finger tip control, the extra \$1600 for hydraulics is always an option.

We zipped into Pilot Bay, to pick up Santa, (aka Ted) and his helper, Jimmy.

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- Standards of Training Certification & Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW95 Basic)

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(Memo to Jimmy: Didn't we say bring a sled, not a Ted?)

Santa was resplendent in his red outfit.

(Memo to Jimmy: Didn't we say bring a wet suit, not a red suit?)

Undaunted by the coolish December water temperature, Santa showed why he is the quintessential professional and a star the world over.

I guess when you can brave the ice of the North Pole, a dip in the 16 degree waters of Tauranga is a piece of cake.

Not only that, but Santa slipped into the bindings and launched from a dry start off the beach, one-handed with his sack over his shoulder, and put on a stunning display of

rip and slash on the wake without so much as getting his knees wet.

The Challenger 550 performed with equal aplomb, easily pulling the chubby cheery chap and his burgeoning sack of goodies, displaying its suitability as a great family all-rounder, whether skiing or fishing.

At the end of the run and the photo session, the red-suited dude executed a perfect beach landing, hopped back aboard with his festive gear virtually dry from the knees up.

The 550 is the ideal family runabout, with a tow weight of just over a tonne, a single axle trailer for easy manoeuvring. The schedule of standard gear features a lot of items that many others list as extras. **By Brian Rogers**



Buy factory direct!



"I can confirm the Challenger is one of, if not the smoothest riding fibreglass hull produced in New Zealand."

Kevin Power - Bay Fisher

The best pleasure boat hull in New Zealand?

People have asked "Why do **Challenger Boats** go the way they do". The designers reply is this. The concept is for a good all round safe family boat, for use on inland waterways and coastal adventures.

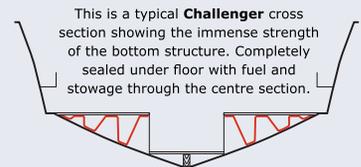
The hull form is what we call a long entry monohedron hull shape of moderate dead rise, this gives the soft ride everybody loves and due to the deadrise and efficient chine rail no planning strakes are needed and the hull is still easily Powered and dry.

The hull volume distribution also makes the boat very

forgiving to a cabin full of family trappings on a day out with the kids, as the boat will quite happily take a fair amount of weight up front without any sign of bow steering.

We get a lot of comment on how quiet these boats are. This is due to solid construction as the cross section shows, no strakes and hull shape.

The hull basic laminate is engineered to run at 50 knots, then with the extra girder structure and bonding its strength far exceeds this capability.



This is a typical **Challenger** cross section showing the immense strength of the bottom structure. Completely sealed under floor with fuel and stowage through the centre section.

The picture below gives a graphic indication of the meaning of a long entry. As can be seen the chine runs in an easy line to the stern. This gives a soft mid section which is kind to the occupants, allowing the higher comfortable speed and vice free ride in rough water they are renowned for.



The best riding hull in New Zealand? The Critics think so, but we invite you to find out for yourself. Contact us today for a free test glide.

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