

TRAILERBOAT TRIALS

By Sam Mossman

Surtees 6.7m Game Fisher

Surtees Boats has been around for about 18 years now – long enough to be considered amongst the senior ranks of aluminium boat builders.

I first tested one, a 6.1m hull, back in January 1995. Company founder Neil Surtees was a one-man band in those days, knocking out a hull per month on his own to pay the mortgage and keep himself in beer money. We did the test, went on the turps in Whakatane, and I slept the night on the floor of what is now the company office, but then was Neil's

lounge in the rural Bay of Plenty near Whakatane.

But that was 17 years ago. The company is now owned by a group of shareholders and managed by one of them, genial Phil Sheaff. The Surtees facility is still in the same place, out on 'the farm' at Te Teko, but is now a full-on production plant with around 30 staff turning out about 300 hulls each year, many of which are exported to Australia.

One of the old hands at the firm is Paul 'Frosty' Frost, who has been associated with Surtees since its ear-



Crossing the Whakatane Bar; the Surtees' fine entry makes for a soft ride.



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liest days. Frosty recently upgraded his personal boat from the original 5.5m Workmate to an outboard-powered 6.7m Game Fisher, a hull configuration I had not tested before, so in late December I went down to Whakatane to check it out.

Design and construction

Neil Surtees had a stroke of genius with the concept of creating a triangular self-flooding ballast chamber formed by welding a flat plate across the V of the keel. Off plane, this chamber fills through the open end at the transom and the air vents out of the anchor-well at the bow. When the boat accelerates onto the plane the chamber empties instantaneously.

This system allows for a relatively fine entry, variable deep-V hull (the 6.7m has a deadrise of 20° at the transom) that cuts through the water like an axe-head when under way, but doesn't slop around at rest – a good example that it is possible to have your cake and eat it too.

The 6.7m hull carries 380 litres of water, putting about 380kg of ballast where it is most effective – right on the keel line. A further development of the system is the addition of a gate on the keel that, when closed, allows the water ballast to be retained when underway if desired.

The 6.7m Game Fisher is built on the proven 6.7m hull with 5mm bottoms, 4mm sides and 3mm topsides. It features narrow reversed chines and no strakes. Six fully-welded stringers support the hull lengthways in addition to the keel assembly. Laterally, there are three full bulkheads plus the transom assembly, and 18 gussets support the 4mm chequerplate deck – a very solid construction system.

Underfloor is a 240-litre fuel tank plus two, large, pressure-tested buoyancy chambers rated for a load of 850kg or six people. Surtees hulls are built to CE (European Union) safety standards that are recognised by over 75 countries, and are covered by a six-year worldwide hull warranty.

Power and performance

The 6.7 Game Fisher is rated for 140-250hp, and Frosty's boat *Frostbite II* (with its cool 'frostfish' logo) was pushed by a Yamaha



Above: the big, open cockpit provides plenty of work space.



A Stress Free drum winch is recessed into the bow.



Divers are well catered for with easy boarding via the platform, fitted with ladder, grab rails and step-through.

200hp Four Stroke outboard spinning a 19"–pitch prop. He told me he had deliberately gone for the old (2010) model Yamaha, as it was slightly heavier than the newly-released model, and he wanted to help counter the weight alteration made by shifting the cabin forward about 200mm to allow a little more cockpit space.

When we crossed the Whakatane Bar, the sea was dropping after a big blow the day before. We still had 10-15 knots of westerly blowing along the coast in a wind-quartering-against-tide situation, lifting a sloop of up to a metre. We headed out to the Raurima Islands, then back to Whale, with a bit of fishing thrown in.

I had forgotten how well the Surtees design copes with a sea; *Frostbite II* just sliced through without a bang or a crash. A remarkably soft rider with no handling vices at all, it's no wonder they're such a popular hull and that they hold their value so well.

The sloppy seas would not allow a full-speed test run; we cruised along at 32kph (17 knots) at 4200rpm in comfort. Frosty told me that he had 73kph (about 40 knots) at 5300rpm as a top-end speed – in fresh water. Given the added buoyancy of salt



Frostbite II is a hard-working fishing boat with a bit of cabin space sacrificed to provide more cockpit room.



Frosty with a fat Whakatane snapper: victim of the 'fishability' assessment.



The VHF and sound system are mounted overhead.

water, this rig may be slightly faster on a calm sea. Overall, I rate the Surtees as one of the best-riding aluminium hull designs available.

Anchoring

As mentioned, the cabin had been moved forward a little on this particular hull, reducing the walk-around

space on the sides. But a feature of Surtees hulls is a large hatchway in the bow, which is the best option for getting up there, should you need to.

Substantial bow rails and a crucifix bollard make up the rest of the bow furniture.

Frosty had a Stress Free drum winch recessed into the bow, with a helm switch controlling a permanently-mounted Sarca anchor on the short bowsprit. The winch has a freefall facility, allowing pinpoint anchoring – something that came in handy when we were positioning the boat over a school of tarakihi in 40m at Whale Island. As most tarakihi fishermen know, you usually have to be spot-on with your boat positioning to get into the action. The Stress Free winch worked fine, although Frosty reckoned he had over-cooked it a bit with the amount of warp he had loaded, so needed to remove about 20m to get it running faultlessly.

Layout

The cabin is fully lined, with a toilet under the centre squab and privacy screen fitted. There are side shelves and under-berth space for stowage, while bungee straps along the front of the shelves keep life-jackets out of the way, but quickly to hand if you need them. LED cabin lights are fitted, and an inspection hatch gives access into the back of the console. A cup/bottle/can rack is another addition.

The cabin entry is not big, but the owner intends *Frostbite II* mostly for use as a day fishing boat, and was happy to sacrifice a bit of cabin space to get a bigger cockpit. However, the cabin would sleep a couple of adults if they curled up a little, and it's fine for the kids/grandkids to have a nap.

Frostbite II is configured as an open-backed hard top, but fully-enclosed versions are available. The wheel-

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house features a deep dash with marine carpet lining and grab rails. A tried and trusted Furuno FCV 585 sounder (with 1000W transducer) and Lowrance Elite-5m GPS plotter are mounted here. Other electronics include a Raymarine Ray49E VHF and Fusion IP600 sound system mounted overhead. Flush mounted on the console are controls for the Lectrotab trim tabs and Yamaha LCD gauges for tach, fuel and speed. Lighting is provided by LED cockpit flood lights and overhead LED cabin lights, which have a white/red option to avoid ruining your night vision.

All-round visibility is good through toughened-glass plate 'screens and side sliders, while steering is hydraulic, making this a pleasant rig to helm.

There is plentiful stowage space provided by side shelves and two levels of trays in front of the passenger, one of which is designed to take a gas burner. Cup racks are also built in, along with two levels of storage inside the seat pedestals (tackle drawers take up the top level of the helm seat), along with bungee straps that can hold a number of items. The



The transom wall hatch folds down to create a rear bench seat.



This stowage area in front of the passenger seat is made large enough to take a gas burner if required.



Wide gunwales and a removable sun screen help make the cockpit comfortable to fish from.

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seats themselves are upholstered plastic bucket types with swivel-slide mounts. A removable canvas shade screen is fitted to the rear of the hard top.

The cockpit boasts full-length side pockets that extend right up into the wheel house – about 3.5m long. Additional side seats can be clipped onto them, as can other fittings like dive-tank racks and internal rod holders. Wide, flat gunwale tops are finished in Deck Tread panels, and make a useful perch when fishing.

The sealed chequerplate deck drains to a sump under the transom, from where water is removed by bilge pump. Centrally at the stern is an under-deck hold with a clever hinged and sliding hatch, which is large enough to take dive tanks.

House and start batteries are housed up in the locker in the transom wall and fitted with an isolation/link switch. This locker is accessed through a fold-down front hatch, which forms a rear bench seat when open. On the port side, a transom step-through with drop door opens onto the large chequerplate boarding platform, fitted with fold-down "T" boarding ladder and grab rails. Mooring cleats are welded to the stern.

A good, practical fish-and-dive layout with plenty of work space.

Fishability

One of the important design aspects, the self-flooding ballast tank, comes to the fore here, giving excellent stability at rest. This, added to the good footing provided by the chequerplate deck, flat gunwale faces giving good top-of-the-thigh support, plenty of toe room, and a big roomy cockpit, made fishing

easy, even in the sloppy conditions experienced.

There are three through-gunwale rod holders along each side, each with an adjacent cup holder that is useful to drop a sinker or jig into when the outfit is wound up.

An eight-position rocket launcher is set on the hard top, and an additional four rod holders are positioned along the back of the bait-station. Further removable rod holders can be clipped onto the side pockets. These are not for fishing from – the rod angles do not suit this purpose – but for carrying rods when underway at sea (keeps the reels out of the spray) or when towing the boat on its trailer (keeps the tips below the hard top and inside the line of the sides).

The bait-station itself is a pretty substantial unit, occupying a fair amount of the transom top. It is drained overboard and also fitted with knife and towel racks. You could fillet a reasonable sort of kingfish on it, but if you don't fillet at sea, a smaller unit might be easier to fish around.

Other fishing fittings include: a live-bait tank under the transom step-through with viewing window; a gaff clipped onto the inside transom face; the tackle locker in the seat pedestal (as already mentioned); and a berley pot built through the boarding platform.

Catch stowage is taken care of with an aftermarket 105-litre Icey-Tek bin with padded seat top, which is kept in place by a central cockpit mount. A couple of thumb screws allow this unit to be easily removed and a game chair fitted.

Divers are well catered for, with tank stowage options and easy boarding via the platform, ladder, grab rails

and step-through.

It was the middle of a hot, bright, windy day by the time we got to the Rau's. With a fast drift in bright light and shallow water, the odds were against success, but we were keen for a feed of fish, so I threw a soft-bait around without result, while we let Frosty's insurance policy, a longline, soak for a little. This later produced two snapper, with the sharks beating us to a third fish, along with a couple of blue cod.

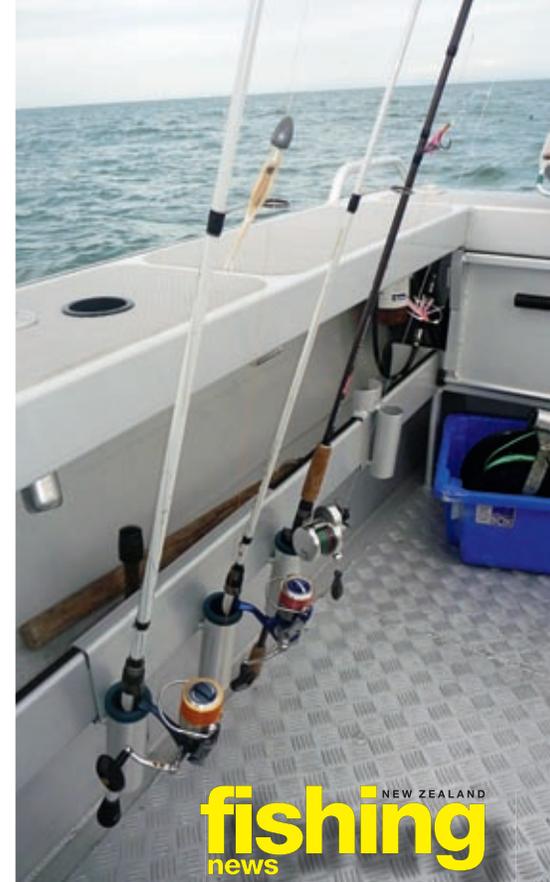
Figuring deeper water might be a better bet, we went back to Whale Island with the hope that there might still be a few tarakihi holding at The Bubbles. This proved to be the case, and we put about ten of them and a few gurnard on ice, so finished with a reasonable mixed bag of prime table fish.

Trailer

Surtees Trailers supply the trailer for Surtees boats. The 6.7m Game Fisher is carried on a cradle A-frame, tandem-axle model with zinc-protected leaf-spring suspension. The trailer has: six pairs of wobble-rollers on each side; hydraulic braking; a dual-ratio manual winch; dual coupling; a wind-down dual jockey wheel; and submersible LED trailer lights. The drive-on, drive-off ability of the rig is aided by another clever Surtees design idea: the self release-self engage trailer catch. Tow weight of the rig is approximately 1760kg, dry.

All in all

With lots of innovative design ideas, this well-laid-out hull travels extremely well, looks good, and is a pleasure to fish from. What more could anyone ask for? 



Removable rod holders clip on the side shelves and keep rods and reels out of the spray when travelling, also protecting rigs while on the road.

Specifications

Material:	aluminium
Configuration:	open back hardtop
LOA:	6.84m
Beam:	2.39m
Bottom:	5mm
Sides:	4mm
Topsides:	3mm
Deck:	4mm chequerplate
Deadrise:	20°
Recommended HP:	140-250hp
Test engine:	Yamaha 200hp Four Stroke
Prop:	19" pitch
Fuel:	240 litres
Trailer:	Surtees Trailers tandem
Tow weight:	1760kg
Basic key-turn:	\$75,260 (150hp Yamaha V6 Salt Water)
Price as tested:	\$106,000
Test boat courtesy of Paul 'Frosty' Frost.	

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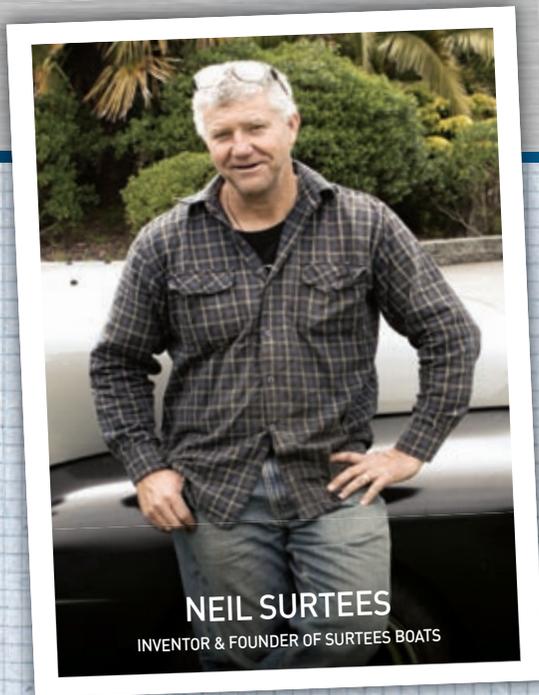
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IF NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION, THIS MUST BE ITS DAD.

Back in the early 1990's, Neil Surtees wanted a boat tough enough for fishing off of New Zealand's Whakatane Coast. The trouble was, he couldn't find anything quite up to the task.

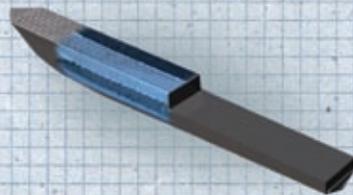
Not to be deterred, Neil set about designing and building his very own boat. His thinking was pretty simple really. To create a boat that outperformed anything else on the market. And that meant coming up with a few clever design features that had never been used before.



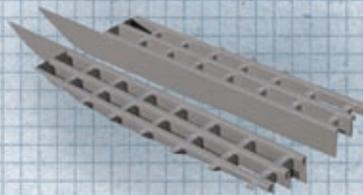
To start with, he wanted a boat that would cut through rough water without the usual pounding you get in an aluminium hull. To achieve this, Neil's boat had a **deeper V hull** than other boats. The resulting ride

through even the choppiest seas was super smooth and comfortable.

The next challenge was to make this non-pounding hull stable when the boat was at rest (typically they can be a little rocky). Luckily Neil had another clever design up his sleeve. He created what he called **Stabilising Ballast Technology**. As the boat comes to rest, a ballast tank along the keel fills up and makes the boat incredibly steady. Then when you move off, the tank automatically empties in less than five seconds. Genius.



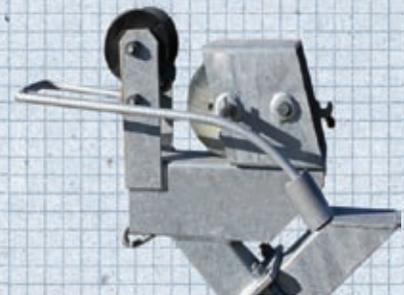
This clever idea also works brilliantly in rough conditions. The shut off gate can be sealed to keep water in the ballast tank, making the boat heavier to give you a much smoother non-pounding ride with extra stability.



Because Neil wanted an ultra tough hull for his boats, he used only the highest marine grade alloy. His design featured six welded under floor stringers and a fully

welded deck that ran the length of the hull, creating what is now called the **Strengthened Deck System**. It's one of the toughest hull designs in the world, renowned for its superior strength and durability.

While he was at it, he designed two large air chambers to provide extra floatation. The air chambers run the length of the hull and are pressure tested to make certain they are 100% airtight for maximum safety.



With everything sorted for on the water, Neil thought there must be an easier way to launch and retrieve his boat. So he set about designing a device that would save him having to fiddle about with winches – or get his feet wet. The solution was the **Surtees Trailer Catch**, a unique idea that lets you drive your boat on or off the trailer.

Almost 20 years on, that original boat of Neil's has led to an impressive range of Surtees fishing machines - from the 4.85 Workmate, right up to the 7.3 Sportfisher. Now, over 400 boats a year are built for the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific waters. And every boat comes with Neil's inventive design features that, as you can see, were born out of necessity.

