

Precious metal

Finding the right balance between form and function has long been a challenge for boat designers and builders. At first glance the XP776 appeared to have nailed it. A thorough examination was in order...



Words and images by Steve Raea

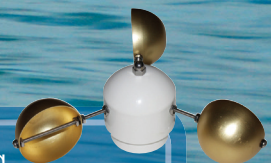




Weather conditions

Average windspeed 15 knots SW

Sea state Moderate



Cast back 10 or 15 years and it was enough that aluminium trailer boats were robust and seaworthy. They were, after all, an entry level proposition. But fast-forward to today's aluminium offerings, and they present a very different proposition. Modern design, stylish aesthetics and a lengthy tick-box selection of accessories and features are now commonplace.

If there was ever an example of a boat that blurred the line between GRP and alloy construction, it would have to be the Gen II range of aluminium trailer boats from Dunedin-based Southern Boats.

Sophisticated design, aggressive styling and robust engineering are hallmarks of the Gen II range and these qualities come together in spades with the new Southern Boats XP776 Hard Top.

If looks could kill the new XP776 should be locked away. From its sculptured foredeck to its curvaceous stern, the XP776 is precious metal through and through.

Essentially a stretched Gen II XP746, the modest increase in waterline and length

overall has had a significant impact on the look of the new XP776, delivering a sleeker and more aggressive hull form that oozes design sophistication.

Design pedigree

The product of 10 years of design innovation, the Gen II series of Southern Boats are based on the original SouthernSportz hull designed by Duffle, Watts, and King, and manufactured in the 1990s under the SouthernSportz brand.

While lacking perhaps in terms of aesthetics, SouthernSportz was nonetheless an innovative manufacturer and the Dunedin builder developed a range of capable trailer boats.

A marine engineer by trade, Southern Boats founder and owner Steve Lange worked closely with SouthernSportz in the mid-1990s during construction of his own 8.5m SouthernSportz. Convinced of the brand's design quality, Lange purchased the company in 2007 and set about revitalising it, drawing on both his experience as a marine engineer and his eye for detail, sharpened during a 15-year career working on superyachts.

The shot from the bow does a nice job of highlighting this boat's unique lines



The padded and spacious cockpit will please most serious fishoes

TRADEABOAT

Lange says the changes that led to the development of the Gen II series of Southern Boats were incremental, considered and proven in some of the toughest coastal testing grounds a manufacturer could hope for.

Design-wise, the Gen II hull introduced a considerably wider reverse chine rail at the waterline to aid tracking ability in a stiff cross-wind and to improve stability at rest. Hull entry has also been tweaked, with a slightly reduced forefoot to counter what Lange says was a tendency

to steer by the bow in a steep following sea.

"These changes are subtle and they weren't made lightly. Collectively, they've resulted in measurable improvement to the boat's predictability and handling in difficult conditions. There are other factors that come into play too – most notably the boat's lowered centre of gravity."

This, says Lange, has been achieved ostensibly by introducing a vacuum-bagged

**Video review
online**

**See the
Southern
Sports in action
on tradeboat.
co.nz**



With products like the Yamaha fly-by-wire controls and the Garmin touchscreen, it was hard to fault the console

“If looks could kill the new XP776 should be locked away...”

Trade A Boat says...

fibreglass hardtop roof weighing less than 40kg and placing the boat's house and start batteries at cockpit sole level.

"Weight distribution is critical for sharp, crisp handling and lowering the centre of gravity has had a marked improvement. Introducing the fibreglass hardtop has also allowed more curvature in the hardtop roof, which is aesthetically pleasing and a better match for the curved glass windscreen."

Construction

The new XP776 is conventionally built on a jig and fabricated from hand-cut marine-grade 5083 aluminium plate. The hull is built from 5mm plate and the topsides, cabin top and cockpit sole utilise 4mm plate. A 4mm sacrificial keel strip is seam welded to the hull for additional hull beaching protection.

A feature of Southern Boats' build quality is the near-perfect finish achieved on the topsides and hardtop superstructure, negating any requirement for filler prior to painting.

The head is standard – as it should always be



Lange says the fairness is partially achieved by tack welding aluminium strips to the exterior hull plate during construction to prevent plate distortion during the weld process.

The hull-to-deck join is first seam welded internally then externally, and then the external weld is ground back.

The hull's internal under-floor structure is fabricated from box frame alloy in a lattice of fully welded transverse stringers and frames providing five independent under-floor buoyancy chambers. The boat's 300-litre fuel tank is again separately fabricated and welded into place.

Drive time

Supplied with a new-generation Offshore Series 4.2-litre V6 Yamaha 250 fitted by Auckland's Family Boats and finished in a stunning two-tone grey PPG coating, the XP776 was a cut above what we'd been expecting as it glided towards us.

Not even a dull Auckland day could mask the boat's flawless finish and styling punctuated by a curvaceous windscreen and close-fitting fibreglass hardtop. The rounded Portofino-style transom brings another dimension to the XP776's jaw-dropping design.

The second Gen II XP776 off the rank, the

boat features the enclosed hardtop option, which is likely to curry favour over the open hardtop option because of the additional protection and security it provides given its offshore potential.

As the first of the design, our demonstrator was dressed to kill with fully lined cockpit parcel shelves and exterior marine carpet laid over the aluminium checker plate cockpit sole.

Reflecting a design aspiration to provide overnight functionality, the XP776 is equipped with a cockpit sink with hot and cold water and a small gas hob, each unit recessed into aft-facing jump seats positioned port and starboard under the cockpit overhang

The all-important "fish test"



but separate to the enclosed hardtop. This has the obvious advantage of providing additional cockpit seating and storage without impacting on crew space within the enclosed hardtop. Southern boats have relatively high combings and the XP776 is no different. However, the addition of vinyl padding on the inside combing edge will be welcomed by anglers.

Toe kick, too, is generous and the double cockpit parcel shelves are tucked far enough into the cockpit sides so as not to create a nuisance. Adhesive rubber on the combing tops provides a sure footing for going forward but there is not a dedicated step-up.

Going forward, however, creates no difficulty, with the overhead aluminium rocket launcher providing an integrated, secure handrail.

Walk-through transom access is via the port side, which provides a reasonable dive platform equipped with fold-down T-bar boarding ladder and supporting transom hand rail. Lange says a twin step-through on both sides of the outboard pod and twin boarding ladders will be a future option.

In standard trim, the XP776 is equipped with two enclosed transom lockers and a central lower battery compartment set just above cockpit sole level. This is part of Lange's efforts to keep ancillary weight low. A forward

under-floor locker provides stowage options for a removable fish bin or dive bottles.

The interior

Moving indoors, the cabin is light, airy and simply laid out. The driver's side features a single swivel seat on a split-level aluminium box plinth, with side access hatch for dry stowage.

There is a matching unit opposite providing a double athwartship seat, again fitted with a side-entry hatch for stowage. This, according to Family Boat's managing director Peter Carlson, is designed to accommodate a small 12-volt fridge.





TRADEABOAT

The athwartship nature of the passenger seat is a little unusual as there is no back to it and, as yet, no foot brace or hand supports. Carlson says these will be fitted to suit the particular height and layout choices of the buyer.

Fully lined in grey frontrunner with matching two-tone marine carpet, life under the hardtop is both comfortable and airy, with side-opening safety glass windows and ample standing headroom.

The one-piece GRP helm console provides numerous options for big-screen electronics like the magic 12" Garmin touchscreen combination plotter/sounder and three-gang Yamaha instrument cluster fitted to the demonstrator.

A real feature of the set-up here is Yamaha's silky fly-by-wire electronic engine controls featuring its new shift dampening technology. If you thought graunching was a fact of outboard life then think again. This really is the bee's knees.

The forward cabin is surprisingly spacious and features a toilet as standard. The finish is good throughout, with an upholstered parcel shelf, cabin side windows and plush suede squabs. An in-fill creates a generous double and there's ample light and ventilation with a centrally mounted overhead deck hatch.

Power to burn

A model-match for the XP776, the new-generation 4.2-litre Yamaha is the strong, silent type, thrusting the Southern out of the hole without hesitation.

Trimmed out, the hull slices through the chop cleanly and with confidence; the wide reverse chine delivering a stable, sure-footed ride and without a hint of spray finding its way rearwards and into the cockpit.

A driver's boat, the XP776 is predictable in

every facet and I reckon you'd have to work hard to get yourself into a compromising situation. With a top speed of 40 knots you're limited only by your sense of adventure...and your fuel budget.

Most notable is the near total absence of any internal vibration or keel slap, even when the boat is pushed at speed into a short chop. If silence is golden then this is the boat for you. The low growl of the big Yamaha is barely discernable with the hardtop doors open. Close the doors and you're in an inner sanctum.

The verdict

The new XP776 is something special. It further blurs the line between alloy and GRP construction and imparts a real sense of manufacturing pride. Smart, stylish and practical, the 776 is a serious boat for serious application and, for my money, proof that innovation is alive and well in the trailer boat market. ⚓

For more information please contact Family Boats East Tamaki, 247 Ti Rakau Drive, Pakuranga, ph 09 274 0511, email sales@familyboats.co.nz or visit www.familyboats.co.nz.



- Quality of finish
- Styling and performance
- Perfect combo with the fly-by-wire 250Hp Yamaha V6



- Passenger seating arrangement

SPECIFICATIONS

SOUTHERN BOATS XP776 GEN II ENCLOSED HARDTOP

Manufacturer	Southern Boats, Mosgiel
LOA	7.75m
Beam	2.50m
Weight (dry)	2150kg
Transom deadrise	20.5°
Outboard	Yamaha F250 4.2L V6
Trailer	Southern tandem axle multi-roller with override brakes on both axles
Accessories	Maxwell RC6 capstan, Garmin 5012 3D touch screen plotter/sounder, Garmin VHF



Price as reviewed **NZ\$175,000**

TO OWN THIS BOAT:

EXAMPLE BASED ON

Purchase Price of	NZ\$175,000
Deposit	\$87,500
Final Balloon Payment	\$35,000
Term 60 months	
MONTHLY PAYMENT	\$1525*

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