

New Direction



The Southern is available with outboard or sterndrive power.

The XP776 is described as the ultimate long range fish and dive machine capable of taking all the creature comforts to make you time on the water that much more enjoyable. I probably can't argue with that.

It's a boat that serves a dual role, both as a serious bluewater fishing boat and a weekender. But probably its looks are just as important. And it looks great, with soft curves and a finish that while not only being extremely functional, will appease the 'other' half of the buying equation.

Hardtops as we know can sometimes look ugly when added as an afterthought to a boat that in its open form may have been a very respectable looking vessel. However, not so with Southern as all its hardtop models have been purpose designed right from the initial concept and hence are visually balanced from every angle.

The XP776 is not a new model, and in fact there are probably more than ??? on the water. It has proven to be one of Southern Lazer's most successful boats ever. But the latest models do have a few changes, both to the topsides and to the underwater sections.

Changing Times

The names of Southern and Lazercraft have been synonymous with aluminium trailer boats for many years, with both being built in the Dunedin area. In 2009 Southern purchased the Lazer brand and the two combined into one company, Southern Lazer. In July this year, Southern Lazer's biggest dealer, Peter Carlson (Family Boats) and business partner Noel Davies bought Southern Lazer and for now are marketing the boats strictly under the Southern brand.

There has also been some increase in the model range from four production boats to eight and by the end of the year it will be extended to ten. These range from the 6.45m, XP646, through to the 9.00m XP896 and all are hardtop models.

BOAT TEST: SOUTHERN HTO XP 776

"It's like the Remington advert I suppose", says Peter. "I liked the brand so much I bought the company".

While the boats will still be built from the same factory in Mosgiel, Dunedin, the dealer network will be consolidated to just four. Production has been geared for about 30 boats a year, with four on the factory floor at any one time and most of those are expected to be in the larger end of the Southern range.

Construction is 6mm alloy on the hull bottom and 4mm on the topsides, with a GRP hardtop. The presentation of the XP 776 is exceptional and you'd be hard pressed to find an alloy boat with a better finish. Most of the boats are fully painted and I was impressed to learn that there is no 'bog' in the hulls.

Ride is Right

When you go for a run in a boat this size on a choppy Auckland harbour it's hard to be critical about the ride and handling. It's an easy boat to drive either seated or standing and with the protection of the hardtop you feel very secure and safe. One thing I noticed immediately I stepped aboard was the

stability of the boat at rest, thanks to wide outer chines. With two people standing on one side the boat doesn't heel much.

However, being a hardtop it's going to still lean into the wind so trim tabs are essential.

The outer strakes have now been changed from square and flat to a concave shape, which is designed to retain the stability but also provide better lift. The inner strakes have also been shortened to reduce aft lift at speed. The fine entry bow and high sides tend to keep the spray off the deck and although we did experience a few wakes we never took a drop over the gunnels.

Our test by was powered by a Yamaha 250 outboard which returned a top speed of 47mph @ 5700 rpm. On the day I found around 36mph an easy cruise speed and the boat felt really comfortable in the 20 knot winds and short sharp harbour chop. At trolling speeds the 250hp Yamaha runs around 2.4L/h @ 600 rpm. It's a boat that would be very comfortable with 200hp although I would like to see at least a 225hp outboard for a boat of its size and weight. At the other end of the range, a 300hp would not be an overkill and the boat would handle



King queen seats are standard with great storage beneath.



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it easily.

The XP 776 is rated for outboards or sterndrives from 200hp - 300hp and while the majority have all been powered by a

single outboard, there are a few now with the MerCruiser TDI diesel. "This engine is really popular with anyone wanting to take the boat seriously gamefishing and runs on 'nothing'



The cockpit provides a huge working space for fishers with plenty of storage and rod holders.



An infill makes the cabin a massive double berth and there's also a fully plumbed toilet under a squab.



The dashboard is another area where a GRP moulding has been used and it's plenty big enough.



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when trolling", says Peter.

Maximum speed of a previous XP776 tested with a TDI 265hp V6 was 44.0 mph @ 4000 rpm. Comfortable cruise was about 25.5 mph at which the engine used around 20L/h. At trolling speeds around 7-8 mph the fuel usage dropped to a miserly 8L/h!

If you do opt for the sterndrive package there are some external changes with the installation, with the engine box protruding into the cockpit by 600mm, but the bonus is it serves a dual role as a double aft seat.

Multi-tasking

For the guy who wants a 'tinnie', but his wife wants a 'fibreglass' boat, the XP776 is going to fill that slot nicely. It's got all the best attributes of both, from the generous cabin with head and full-length berths to the huge cockpit with rod racks, live bait tank and rocket launcher.

The cabin is fully lockable, fabric lined so there is not even a sign or hint of aluminium anywhere and well ventilated via an overhead Maxwell hatch. A hatch in the forward

bulkhead provides access to the deep anchor locker should you need to get to your anchor tackle.

Move out into the cockpit and it's obvious to see that Southern has made sure that there is a place for everything. Rod holders are plentiful as are double tier side shelves that have been made to handle long rods. A massive underfloor wet locker forward of the fuel tank is big enough for four dive bottles and dive gear or as a secondary space to stow the catch of the day.



The transom area incorporates a live bait tank as well as rear deck access.



There is loads of storage in side shelves and under the sole.

The side decks are wide and flat and a great spot to sit while fishing. There's even a strengthening support bar under the lower shelves so you can use them as a step and high coamings make the cockpit safe for small children.

Standard seating is a pair of fully adjustable king/queen back-to-backs on GRP moulded bases with huge storage under. However, you can have just about any seating style you like, including a bin seat aft.

The dashboard is another area where a GRP moulding has been used and it's plenty big enough. Our boat had a Lowrance HD10 MFD, VHF, Fusion stereo, plus all the necessary switches and dials.

While our test boat was what Southern

refers to as the open version (no rear bulkhead), you can have a fully closed-in wheelhouse with rear doors and a totally reconfigured seating arrangement that even includes a small galley – everything you need for overnighting.

When you're fishing you often don't want carpet, so Southern has split the removable carpet into two sections, which means the area under the hardtop can still have the warmth and comfort of the carpet while the rest of the cockpit is chequerplate alloy.

The transom area on the outboard version features a live bait tank to port with a Manta bait board in the centre above split storage spaces – the lower one for the batteries and the spaces above for

your fishing tackle. A walkthrough on the starboard side leads onto large boarding platforms built into the portofino stern, with an alloy drop-down ladder also standard.

Overall, the Southern HTO XP776 is a very upmarket alloy boat that is perfectly pitched to take on both the alloy and fibre-glass boat markets. It is exceptionally well built and finished and as a weekender or a day boat, the XP776 provides all you need in a boat this size. If you want the same but slightly smaller, the Southern 746 is available and for those who want something bigger then the Southern 816 is the same as the 776 but with a 300mm longer cockpit. **•AB**

SPECIFICATIONS & PERFORMANCE		
Boat	Model:	Southern HTO XP776
	Priced from:	\$NZ130,000
	Price as tested:	\$NZ169,000
	Type:	Hardtop
	Construction:	Aluminium
	LOA:	7.80m
	Beam:	2.50m
	Deadrise:	20 degrees
	Trailer:	Southern (Alloy)
	Height on trailer:	3.10m
Engine	Trailerable weight:	2200kg
	Engine capacity:	200-300hp
	Engine:	Yamaha 250
	Propeller:	19" 3Bl'd SS
	Power options:	Outboard or sterndrive
Trailer	Fuel capacity:	250L

Notable features:
Carpet throughout, live bait tank, keel wear strip, painted finish, stainless deck hardware, LED lights.

Notable Options on Test Boat
Lowrance HD10 MFD, Lenco Tabs, Maxwell RC6 winch, Fusion Ipod Stereo, Jabsco Toilet, Manta bait board, VHF, 6-year warranty.

Performance & Fuel		
rpm	MPH	L/h
600	3.7	2.4
1000	6.0	4.7
1500	7.4	7.9
2000	10.5	12.8
2500	16.0	18.3
3000	23.6	24.6
3500	28.5	33.0
4000	32.5	44.6
4500	37.0	57.7
5000	41.5	72.7
5500	45.5	90.0
5700	47.0	94.2

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This boat could be protected against the effects of corrosion, oxidation and discolouration

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1500	5
2000	9
2500	11
3000	15
3500	18
4000	21
4500	25
5000	28
5500	32