

Blurred **LINES**

Words by **John Eichelsheim** Photos by **Bryce Taylor**



Since coming under the same umbrella as Southern Boats, Lazercraft has enjoyed a burst of development with several new models in recent years. The new GT 650 HT is an excellent example.



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Leading up the joint Southern-Lazercraft production facility in Mosgiel, Shane Child, son of Lazercraft founder Gavin Child, is passionate about the Lazercraft brand. The aluminium boats became known for their soft ride, sporty lines and solid build.

Lazercraft pioneered hybrid boats that combined aluminium hulls with fibreglass tops. But compared to early model Lazercrafts, the first GT 650 HT (hardtop) to leave the factory really blurs the line between aluminium and fibreglass boats.

STYLISH LOOKS

The GT 650 HT has benefitted from its association with Southern Boats. The stylish new fibreglass hardtop – the 650 HT is fibreglass from the gunwales up – is very Southern-like. That's because, we were told, it was modified from an existing Southern Boats hardtop.

Nonetheless, the cost of 3D computer-aided design (CAD),

followed by five-axis milling and all the associated tooling for a new hardtop was considerable. But it was worth it: the Lazercraft GT 650 HT is a great looker.

The trailer's a great looker too. A dual-axle model in aluminium for light weight, the Southern trailer is manufactured in the same factory as the boats and specifically designed to support alloy hulls.

Instead of multiple wobble rollers, the Southern trailer features keel rollers to support the hull along its keel and custom rollers specifically tailored to this model. The trailer's over-ride brakes act on one axle and the aluminium walkway down the centre makes it easier to hook up the boat to the manual winch.

The 650 HT's hull has been modified for the hardtop model, particularly its entry. It's not as fine as an equivalent Southern's, but finer than the soft top GT 640 (*Boating NZ*, October 2015) for better handling down-swell.

The hull is painted to match the hardtop, which is an

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attractive off-white that owners of older Lazercraft boats will recognise, and the polished alloy capping used to hide the seam between aluminium and fibreglass not only looks good, it also protects the junction from damage.

Protecting the 5mm-thick aluminium hull is a substantial keel strip, which provides peace of mind when pulling up onto a beach or nosing up to a boat ramp. Effectively doubling the thickness of the hull at the keel, the strip runs the full length of the boat.

PLUSH INTERIOR

The new Lazercraft continues the quality theme inside. The painted cockpit and open-backed hardtop are nicely finished with an attention to detail more commonly seen in production GRP trailer boats. There are no sharp edges anywhere, the moulded seat bases, moulded GRP helm console and fibreglass hardtop liner soften the boat's interior, as does the removable marine carpet.

The cockpit is a decent size with plenty of freeboard for offshore operation. The step-through and dive ladder are on the starboard side and there's a smallish live bait tank built into the transom on the port side. It's venturi-fed when the boat's underway, or with a pump when the boat's stationary.

For fishers, there's a removeable bait table with rod storage on the transom, three through-coaming rod holders either side of the cockpit and a black powder-coated aluminium six-



From the gunwales up, the Lazercraft GT 650 HT is fibreglass and it shows: there are no sharp edges, hard corners or visible welds. The boat's interior is nicely finished, clean and modern, including the forward cabin with its macrosuede upholstery. The battery is protected behind an aluminium door.





position rocket launcher. Handrails either side of the hardtop roof are also black powder-coated aluminium tubing.

There's quite a bit of space under the transom on either side for chilly bins and the like, the battery and switches are mounted in a battery box on the floor of a spacious transom locker, protected by an aluminium transom door, and two more transom lockers with plastic hatch covers provide additional dry storage. Side pockets are wide enough for dive bottles. There's a 150-litre underfloor storage locker and I like the aluminium tie-down rails either side that can be used to secure objects in the cockpit.

The cabin continues the plush feel of the boat's interior. Grey Fronrunner is complemented by macro-suede upholstery on the v-berths, also grey. An infill squab creates a decent double berth and there's provision for a toilet between the berths.



Lazercraft 650 Sport HT

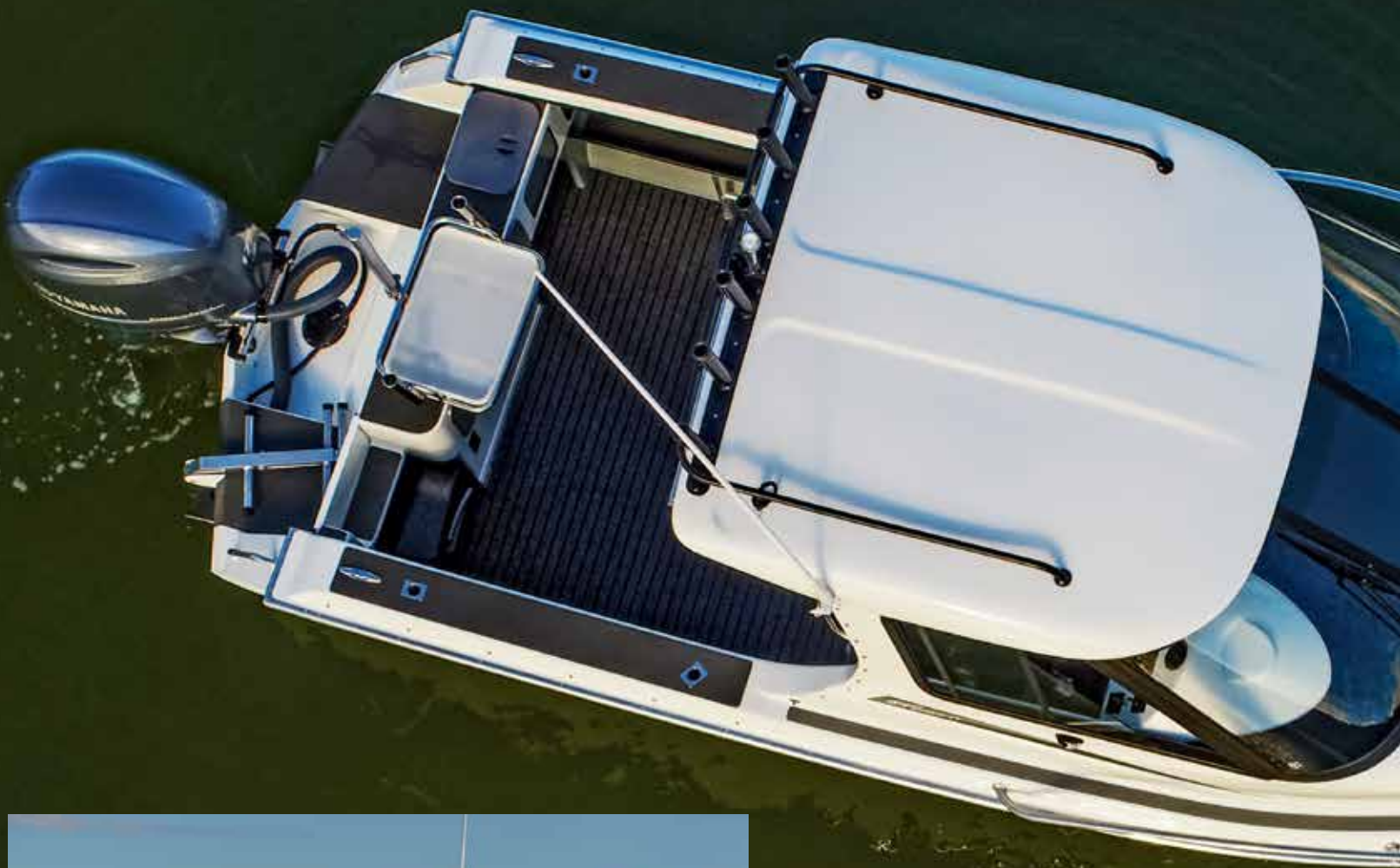
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“The Lazercraft GT 650 HT is well-spec’ed, but still comes in at less than \$100,000 on a trailer with a full complement of electronics...”



The Lazercraft has a good-sized cockpit with plenty of freeboard, a standard bait table, dry storage across the transom and a reasonably sized plumbed live bait tank. The carpet can be removed for fishing. The transom step-through and boarding ladder are both on the starboard side within easy view of the helm.



An off-the-shelf Maxwell acrylic hatch lets out onto the foredeck where a Maxwell rope-chain capstan and Rocna 6 anchor takes care of anchor duties, controlled from the helm. Access to the anchor locker is through a moulded hatch on the foredeck. The foredeck is moulded to accept an electric capstan and a stainless-steel fairlead. A metal plate protects the fibreglass from chain damage.

WELL-PRICED

The Lazercraft GT 650 HT is well-spec'd, but still comes in at less than \$100,000 on a trailer with a full complement of electronics, LED cockpit and cabin lights, electric capstan, windscreen wiper – pretty much everything on the review boat, but with a 150hp Yamaha rather than a 175hp.

The Yamaha F175 is a good match for this hull. It sips fuel from the 200-litre underfloor fuel tank at around 26 litres per hour at



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4,500rpm, which gives a comfortable cruising speed of around 25 knots. Acceleration is snappy and the hull responds crisply to the helm, turns on a dime and climbs onto the plane with minimal bow lift. Steering is light and the mechanical throttle and shift is very positive, though it needed tensioning: as reviewed it would back off if you took your hand off the throttle.

The moulded GRP dash has quite a bit of real estate – it could accept a considerably larger MFD than the 9-inch Garmin unit fitted to this boat. The console also accommodates Yamaha Command Link gauges, various switches, plus the GME VHF radio.

Lenco trim tabs keep the 19° deadrise hull level in a cross wind and are also handy when traversing a quartering sea, while a single windscreen wiper keeps the driver's screen clear.

The helm position works nicely. Helmsman and front seat passenger both get comfortable upholstered buckets, adjustable

fore and aft, with bulkhead footrests; the third seat is an aft-facing queen style seat on the passenger side.

This is an open-backed hardtop design, so engine noise is unavoidable, but it's not particularly intrusive and the hull is a quiet runner as well, probably helped by the carpets and cabin lining. The moulded GRP seat bases offer additional storage.

GOOD IMPRESSIONS

During the afternoon, we regularly transferred various bodies between boats, which meant quite a few people got to experience the Lazercraft. All of them commented on the GT 650 HT's soft ride and there's no denying it goes very nicely indeed. It is a pleasure to drive.

They also commented on the nicely finished interior, which benefits from a fibreglass superstructure that affords smooth, nicely curved surfaces and rounded corners with no sharp edges. From inside, there's no sense that different materials were used in the boat's construction, while on the outside, the boat's painted aluminium sides are straight and fair, which helps smooth the transition between fibreglass and metal. **B**

Lazercraft GT 650 HT

- **loa** 6.5m
- **beam** 2.39m
- **draft** approx 0.3m
- **weight** approx 1,800kg on trailer
- **construction** aluminium, 5mm bottom, 4mm sides, hardtop and decks: moulded GRP
- **deadrise** 19° at transom
- **engines** 175hp Yamaha F175XA, four-stroke
- **fuel** 200 litres
- **cruising speed** 25-30 knots
- **max speed** 42 knots
- **priced as reviewed** \$102,995.00
- **packages from** \$89,995.00
- **manufactured by** Southern Alloy Boats Ltd, Mosgiel, www.southernboats.co.nz
- **boat supplied by** Family Boats Ltd, 09 274 0511, peter@familyboats.co.nz, www.familyboats.co.nz

