

SILVER **BULLET**

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

“...the big Southern looks sleek and well balanced with a good compromise between cockpit and hardtop.”



Bigger isn't always better, but the biggest Southern so far is the most accomplished and best finished yet from this South Island aluminium boat builder.

At 9m overall, the gunmetal grey Southern XP896 is a big trailer boat. On its aluminium trailer it weighs close to 3500kg in road trim, full of fuel and gear. Its considerable bulk is controlled by a Sensa-brake system on all four wheels of the Southern Alloy dual-axle trailer. Like other models in the Southern Alloy Boats range, the XP896 rests on cradles and keel supports rather than rollers for improved towing performance, with each trailer built specifically for the boat it carries.

COMFORT AND UTILITY

Southern Alloy Boats has sought to combine a large, fishable cockpit with generous accommodation inside the enclosed hardtop and cabin. There's

comfortable sleeping accommodation for up to four in a combination of v-berths, with infill, a pipe berth or optional fixed bunk in the cabin and another good-sized berth in the hardtop. Dropping the dinette table and adding a purpose-designed squab converts the facing seats into a wide berth.

The galley features a single-burner cooktop and basin with drawers underneath; there's a fridge under the helm seat and ample under-seat storage for dry goods inside the hardtop. The hardtop's double doors open to the cockpit where there is a second basin above the gas bottle locker on the hardtop bulkhead and a califont built into a gunwale locker. An enclosed head completes the boat's stay-away credentials.

Built as a stock boat for Auckland dealer Family





“Raw teak for the sole in the cabin, cockpit and cockpit coamings, finished in two-pot polyurethane to maintain its looks, gives a classy warm welcome to the boat.”



The dashboard displays Raymarine's latest E127 Hybrid-Touch 12-inch screen, trim tab controls and remote for the Maxwell RC8-6 capstan. The compact galley makes good use of space for overnighting.



Boats, this is the longest Southern in the range and, with a beam of 2.8m, it's also the widest. The extra beam has added welcome interior volume and helps balance the hull's length. In every respect, the boat handles like its smaller siblings, but the extra length enhances its ride, which is smooth and quiet. The 6mm hull plate helps in this regard – Southern's under 7.8m long use 5mm plate unless heavier material is specified.

On the water, the big Southern looks sleek and well balanced with a good compromise between cockpit and hardtop/cabin. The metallic paint, polished aluminium tube beltings, polished bow rails and subtle decals nicely match the colours of the Yamaha F200XB outboards bolted to the transom. These engines are Yamaha's latest in-line, four-cylinder models with digital throttle and shift and shift dampening. They're as light as Yamaha's 150hp models and narrower than Yamaha's 200hp V6 models, so they can be mounted closer together. These attributes make them ideal for multiple engine installations. The engines on this boat are running 18-inch Reliance stainless steel propellers.

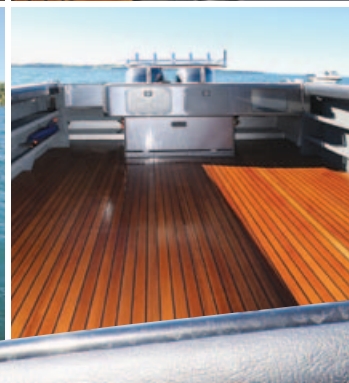
WELL SPEC'ED

This XP896 is well equipped for a stock boat, as you'd expect with a sticker price of almost \$300,000. Whoever buys it may decide to add radar or fit a few extras to suit their requirements, but there's little to add since it was prepared for the Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show in May.



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A full complement of Raymarine electronics and communications gear graces the helm console, which is roomy enough to accept Raymarine's latest E127 Hybrid-Touch 12-inch display. A Raymarine VHF radio is flush-mounted on the console within easy reach, as is the Fusion stereo system. The dashboard also houses trim tab controls, remote controls for the Maxwell RC8-6 capstan and the Marinco pan-and-tilt spotlight mounted on the hardtop roof.

Jono Bakker, sales manager at Southern Alloy Boats says quality was paramount throughout the boat's fit-out. "At Southern we've gone with quality products from suppliers we can trust who are willing to support their gear if there are any warranty issues," he says.

You'd expect quality products in a boat in this price range, just as you'd expect a high quality fit and finish. The XP896 doesn't disappoint, offering perhaps the most consistent fit-out I've seen in a Southern.

Raw teak for the sole in the cabin, cockpit and cockpit coamings, finished in two-pot polyurethane to maintain its looks, gives a classy warm welcome to the boat. The teak is complemented by a fully lined and painted cockpit. Frontrunner lines the hardtop and cabin; there's black vinyl lining on the ceiling, and a mix of grey and black macrosuede and vinyl upholstery on the seats and bunks. LED lighting is used to good effect inside the boat and in the cockpit.

The XP's resin-infused hardtop merges seamlessly with the aluminium hull. Southern has used fibreglass for the hardtop to form nicely rounded shapes, and because it's lighter than aluminium. The resin-infusion technology achieves a light weight, but the hardtop is still strong enough to stand on and there's provision to store an inflatable tender on the roof.

The boat's paint finish is excellent and extends to the cockpit and transom area. Welds are nicely executed. Side and foredecks feature neoprene non-slip with handholds on the hardtop for safe access



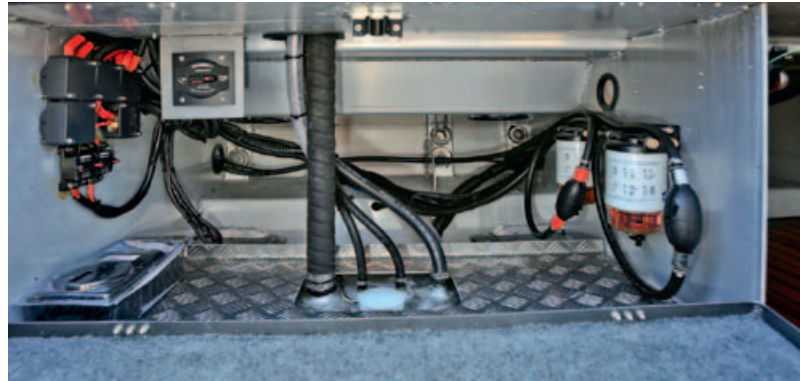
PERFORMANCE		
Southern XP986		
2 x Yamaha F200F four-stroke outboards		
Engine speed	Boat speed	Fuel burn
rpm	knots	L/h
1000	3.3	5.3
1500	5.2	9.2
2000	8.0	14.0
2500	11.3	24.0
3000	16.5	29.0
3500	22.0	37.5
4000	27.0	48.5
4500	32.2	65.5
5000	36.0	84.2
5500	40.0	123.7
6000	44.3	154.0





to the foredeck. The forward cabin hatch offers easy access to the fairlead, which mounts a Rocna anchor attached to 30m of 7mm chain and 100m of warp. Access to the anchor locker is through a hatch in the collision bulkhead in the cabin.

The XP896's spacious cockpit features high gunwales and two-tier Frontrunner-lined side shelves, a teak sole and Southern's trademark transom arrangement, which is stylish and practical. A walkthrough on the starboard side gives access to the swim step and boarding ladder while a large live bait tank occupies the equivalent space on the port side. The oversize transom island houses three batteries off the floor. The fuel filters, anchor rest and reasonable storage are behind an aluminium door at floor



The Southern XP896's cockpit features high gunwales and two-tier Frontrunner-lined side shelves, a teak sole and a walkthrough to starboard to access the swim step and boarding ladder; a large live bait tank is to port. The oversize transom island houses three batteries off the floor. The fuel filters, anchor rest and reasonable storage are behind an aluminium door at floor level.

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“Constant on-water testing and experimenting with propellers... translates to constant small improvements in the boats.”



Southern XP896

- **loa** 9.43m
- **beam** 2.8m
- **draft** approx 0.4m
- **weight** approx 3200kg on trailer (light)
- **construction** aluminium with fibreglass hardtop
- **engine** 2 x Yamaha F200F four-stroke outboards
- **deadrise** 20° at transom
- **fuel** 400 litres
- **water** 100 litres
- **cruising speed** 25-30 knots
- **max speed** 44 knots
- **price as tested** \$299,995
- **packages from** \$225,000 896XF with Yamaha F300, no trailer
- **manufactured by** Southern Alloy Boats Ltd, Mosgiel, www.southernboats.co.nz
- **boat supplied by** Family Boats Ltd, www.familyboats.co.nz
email peter@familyboats.co.nz
phone 09 274 0511

level, plus a removable bait station with six rod holders – a set-up familiar from other Southern models. The cockpit is drained by a, automatic bilge pump in the sump aft and the boat is supplied with a pair of free-standing Icey-Tek 70-litre insulated bins with upholstered lids.

of professional feedback, which translates to constant small improvements in the boats,” says Singe, who has raced offshore power boats.

Although equally powerful, with their smaller 2.8-litre capacity blocks, Yamaha’s F200XB four-cylinder engines are slightly less torquey than the 3.35-litre V6 engines, but they’re lighter and matched with 18-inch Reliance stainless steel propellers. They certainly get the XP896 up out of the hole in quick time. Acceleration is strong, as is mid-range response, and the engines revved out to their upper limit of 6000rpm with 51mph showing on the GPS.

Fuel economy is good, with both engines together burning around 35 litres per hour at 25 knots and 50 litres per hour at 30 knots.

CONCLUSION

Smart looking, nicely finished and boasting great performance and handling, the top of the range twin-outboard XP896 is another step forward for its builders, meeting customer demand for a larger boat in the Southern range and easily justifying its premium price. ■

BIG BOAT PERFORMANCE

The biggest Southern is built using full length longitudinal bearers, transverse frames and bulkheads, and seam-welded panels. Sealed compartments provide the hull with reserve buoyancy and there is 400 litres of fuel tankage underfloor, plus 100 litres of freshwater, expandable to 500 litres and 150 litres respectively.

The XP896 feels like a big boat in all the right ways, easily taming the Hauraki Gulf short chop and loping along at 26 knots with barely a bump or bang. On the other hand, the hull responds to the wheel like a much smaller boat, inspiring confidence at the helm. Like other Southern boats I’ve reviewed, the XP896 adopts a nicely level planing attitude with little bow lift when accelerating from a standing start. Consequently, vision over the bows is excellent. Trim tabs are fitted and they easily compensated for a bit of wind and sea on the beam quarter.

Like most deep-vee hulls, the XP896 heels over in a sharp turn, but the Reliance propellers offer excellent purchase and refused to break out or cavitate. Engine set-up was obviously spot-on, something Family Boat’s Tony Singe says they take their time about to ensure optimum performance and handling.

“Constant on-water testing and experimenting with propellers enables us [Family Boats] to give the guys at Southern plenty



The twin Yamaha F200XB four-cylinder engines are matched with 18-inch Reliance stainless steel propellers and get the boat out of the hole smartly.