

Summer Sizzler

BUCCANEER 565 ESPRITE

The sporty new Buccaneer 565 Esprite bowrider ticks all the boxes for a summer of family fun on the water
Says John Eichelsheim.

It's hard to pin down exactly what makes the new Buccaneer Esprite 565 Bowrider such a good looker. It might be the boat's sweet profile, it's curved, raked windscreen, or the way the glossy black sides contrast with the cream of the hull and coamings. Or maybe it's the combination of black boat and the snappy-looking, ultra-compact, all-white Evinrude E-Tec 130hp, a new model for BRP and the first example of the engine in New Zealand. Certainly the boat won over our band of sleek young volunteers, along for a day of summer fun, playing with the bunch of water toys featured in *Boating* last month. The bowrider configuration really came into its own on our water toys day, the Buccaneer proving an ideal fun boat, with plenty of accommodation for the boys and girls, and a good, practical layout for tow sports. All it's missing is a rear-view mirror and a tower, both available as options.

Modifications

The 565's hull began life as the soft-riding Buccaneer 500 Classic (cabin) and bowrider models. At first glance, there don't appear to be too many changes to the new model, released earlier this year at the New Zealand Boat Show in Auckland, but there have been more than 30 subtle modifications according to Buccaneer Boats' Wade Gerrand.

The biggest difference is the new model's full fibreglass liner and advanced composite stringer technology (A.C.S.T), bringing the boat into line with the rest of Buccaneer's model range. It's stiffer and also quieter, thanks to foam injected between the hull and liner to ensure the 565 floats if swamped. Less wood in the construction means longer life.

The new 565 Esprite is around 40kg heavier than the old 550 Esprite – more still for the bowrider version.

Buccaneer have also re-designed the wrap-around bow seats, making them easier to manufacture and more comfortable to sit in. It's easy to see why bowriders are popular with families. The ability to seat people forward is useful, especially on a warm, sunny day, and kids (of all ages) love sitting up front.

The bow also gives excellent access to the anchor locker, fairlead and front bollard.

The 565's covered anchor locker is deep enough for a decent amount of fall, so fitting an automatic electric capstan should pose no problems.

The layout's useful for fishing too, especially drift-fishing which has become popular since the advent of soft plastics.

But best of all, bowriders maximize interior volume, spreading out the boat's occupants and making the boat feel more spacious. You end up with a lot more useable boat space for a given length of hull.

The review boat was nicely finished with marine carpet throughout, piped, colour-coded upholstery, padded coamings, a powerful Clarion marine stereo and black bow and road covers.

This Buccaneer 565 Esprite bowrider utilises a PVC door between the bow area and cockpit, which can be closed to prevent wind whistling through the cockpit. Opening the door and the centre panel of the windscreen gives access to seating in the bow, moulded into the liner, with good stowage under vinyl-covered squabs. Handrails wrap all the way around so forward passengers have something to grip onto.

The 565 is well served with handrails/ handholds, including a pair aft in the cockpit and one on the dash for the front seat passenger. The smooth, polished alloy windscreen frame is also easy to hold onto.

Back-to-back seating is used in the cockpit, with removable seats fitted into the corners either side of the outboard well, for a total of six. A dome-on vinyl cover, colour-coded to match the tans and cream of the boat's upholstery, protects the battery box and oil reservoir, tucked away underneath the outboard well on the floor. The bilge pump is in the sump, protected from fouling by a cage. A removable ski-pole is standard equipment, as are two through-transom rod holders and twin cleats aft, while a bait board that fits onto the ski-pole is optional.

Plenty of stowage

Buccaneer has shifted the under-floor fuel tank forward slightly, altering the boat's balance so that it holds the plane at lower speeds, making it a better prospect for wakeboarding.

However, the remaining under-floor locker spaces are now too short to accommodate waterskis, though the front one is long enough for wakeboards and the rear one ideal for stowing wet gear. Skis can be stowed either in the sidepockets, which also feature rod racks, or up front in the bows. In addition, there's a mass of stowage under the seat bases.

The seats hinge forward, revealing a cavernous space, slightly set into the cockpit sole.

We found the boat's seats very comfortable – well padded and supportive – which they need to be, since this boat isn't designed to be driven standing up. Even perching on the seat back to drive, as is common in boats with back-to-back seats, is a bit awkward, leaving you too far away from the controls. But sitting down in the seat, with feet braced against the moulded footrest, is comfortable and secure, with all the controls falling to hand and the gauges easy to read. The seated driving position is totally in keeping with the boat's sleek lines.

Powered by Evinrude

Like most modern engines, the new Evinrude E-Tec 130hp comes with clever gauges, capable of displaying a huge range of information. BRP's 'I-Command' gauges interface with a GPS receiver – included in the package – to provide accurate speed and distance information. The GPS aerial is mounted on the dash. Dual I-Command multi-functional displays can be configured in numerous ways, including speed and engine revolutions, which proved useful during our review.

The Buccaneer 565-Evinrude E-Tec 130hp combination is a pleasure to drive. My initial misgivings about the engine size were totally unfounded, two-stroke grunt more than making up for any perceived shortfall in horsepower. The engine's lightness may also have contributed to the boat's excellent balance. Hydraulic steering takes any effort out of conning the Buccaneer, which goes exactly where it's pointed. Although bright and sunny, the day of the review was windy enough to provide a decent chop in open water. The 565 ate it up, riding smoothly and tracking well. It's also dry, appreciated by passengers in the bow. Obviously, a boat behaves differently with a couple of people sitting at the sharp end, requiring more engine trim for a dry ride; in rough conditions, passengers should move back into the cockpit to maximise the boat's excellent handling. I was particularly impressed by the quietness of the ride. There was no cracking or creaking from the hull, indicating that it is good and stiff, and the engine is quiet too – certainly no more noisy than an equivalent four-stroke. The E-Tec is at its best under acceleration, where its snappy response and strong torque really shine. A change to a 19-inch propeller had blunted its acceleration off the mark according to Gerrand, but brought the maximum revs into line with the manufacturer's guidelines. Nonetheless, I felt the engine's response back from anywhere in the rev range. I also noticed that the engine holds its revs no matter how sharply the boat is thrown into a turn. Sometimes outboards 'bog down' in these situations, but not the E-Tec 130hp. Strong torque also endeared it to our water toy enthusiasts. The rig is an ideal tow vehicle, easily pulling up skiers and wake-boarders and dealing with the largest toys we could throw at it, regardless of the number of riders.

Two-up, Gerrand and I achieved a top speed of 44mph (71kph approx) with the engine revving at 5600rpm. At that speed and trimmed well out, there was no suggestion of instability and no tendency to walk on its chines. The boat feels very safe and predictable.

The Buccaneer 565 bowrider is supplied on a dual-axle Voyager, multi-roller trailer, with over-ride brakes. The trailer is hot-dip galvanised and has galvanised leaf spring suspension. All up towing weight is approximately 1600kg.

As we went to press, Buccaneer Pleasure Craft Ltd had yet to work out the package price as reviewed, but pricing is likely to be very competitive.

Boating's verdict

Both models in the Buccaneer 565 Esprite range benefit from a well-proven hull, modern construction methods and quality building. The bowrider version has the edge in versatility and sociability, as well as being a great looker. With a layout designed for sharing with family and friends, it's equally happy cruising, sightseeing, fishing, diving or towing stuff – a great all-rounder.

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Performance

All figures were recorded on the day, with two adults aboard and half a tank of fuel. Readings were taken from onboard I-Command gauges.

RPM	Fuel burn (litres per hour)	Speed (miles per hour)
2000	6.9	7.8
3000	15.0	12.0
3500	18.5	22.0
4000	25.0	28.6
4500	28.0	33.0
5000	30.0	38.0
5500	42.0	41.0
5600 (WOT)	45.0	44.0

Buccaneer Esprite 565

bowrider

Designer	Gerry Gerrand
Built by	Buccaneer Pleasure Craft Ltd
Construction	GRP
LOA including bowsprit	5.190m
Hull Length	5.670m
Beam	2.290m
Deadrise at transom	23-degrees
HP range	115-150hp
Engine type	outboard
Fuel capacity (approx)	165l
Hull weight	760kg approx
Total road weight	1580kg approx