

We follow the newest Buccaneer from lay-up to launch
in our most extensive boat test yet.

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Photos **Will Calver**



Classy

This is Buccaneer's response to customer feedback, a boat you can use without worrying about sullyng the sumptuous upholstery and finishes. The Sportsman is geared to the boatie who relishes the company's trademark quality but who wants a little more versatility, and I think the Hamilton-based manufacturer has struck an excellent compromise.

At first blush there's not much difference between the Sportsman and the Exess. They use an identical hull and livery and both carry magnificent curved windows in the hardtop. However, the hardtop has been re-styled and now sports more

elegant, curvy lines, and for my money it presents a much more uniform, integrated package.


The beauty is more than skin-deep, although it's not immediately obvious. Where the Exess used a liner in the front half of its hull, the Sportsman is fitted with a full-length liner, eliminating timber from the construction and presenting a nicer finish in the lockers so the vessel is much easier to keep clean.


No doubt the full liner also contributes to noise dissipation. The 735 has never been a noisy hull thanks to its cavities, which are foam-filled for buoyancy and also absorb noise, so the liner simply enhances the sense of effortless cruising.

Crossover




While the Sportsman is optimised for fishing, it doesn't lack for luxury touches

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The helm station with its remodelled dash is ergonomically superb



But it's the fishing makeover that stands out. While the Exess is unashamedly a high-end family cruiser which fishers treat nervously (you do NOT want fish guts on that upholstery), the Sportsman is sympathetic to the angler.

Instead of the traditional teak or carpet, the cockpit floor is non-skid matting, and

where the Exess use padded upholstery against the gunwales, the new boat is unadorned fibreglass (though it still carries teak coamings). There's now a built-in livebait tank in the transom, with a wash-down hose tucked under the port gunwale and a large baitboard.

For me, the biggest tick goes to the snazzy

rod holders mounted on either side of the hardtop's rear supports. It's a much nicer piece of design than the standard rocket launcher bolted on top that would spoil the hardtop's graceful lines, and if you use them to fish from as well, I much prefer fishing lines running off the side of the vessel rather than over the action in the cockpit.

She's a large-volume vessel with tonnes of kingie-fighting space in the cockpit. Side shelves are pre-fitted with rod holders, and the large underfloor wet locker in the centre of the cockpit will accommodate the limit for four buddies with space to spare. Given the 735 hull's sea-keeping pedigree, the Sportsman is a



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The Sportsman 735 retains plenty of family comforts, including an electric toilet in its own cubicle, removable cabin table and a small fridge

serious proposition for bluewater fishing with a healthy dollop of ease thrown into the equation.

FAMILY CRUISING

Even with its shift to fishing, the Sportsman hasn't lost the traditional Buccaneer DNA. It remains a stylishly-appointed cruiser with sufficient trappings of comfort to keep the family smiling.

Chief among these is the electric toilet that nestles in its dedicated cubicle

(with a door) inside the cabin, and if you want even more privacy, a sliding door separates the cabin from the cockpit. Don't forget to open the large foredeck hatch before your visit.

There's a large, spacious cabin with good headroom and a removable table between the bunks. Fill-in squabs convert the bench seats into a massive bed, and because the toilet lives in its own cubicle, there's no need to pack up the bed every time someone needs to use the loo.

Exess 735s are fitted with a small galley inside the cabin (to port) but the Sportsman loses this, replacing it with a corner locker for additional storage. A small (40-litre) fridge remains though – tucked under the passenger seat – so a chilled drink or fresh sandwich is still on the cards.

Seating within the cockpit comprises impeccably-finished, well-padded and ultra-comfortable king and queen seats either side, and a loose, padded bench seat that does double duty as the ice-box.

Between them they provide more than enough room for an average family or a group of friends. Helm and passenger seats are full swivel models.

HELM STATION

Expansive, comfortable, superb views, accessories and controls within easy reach – it's a pleasure to drive this vessel.

Visibility through the large, curved windows is exceptional – you hardly notice the slimline aluminium side pillars – there

“When you're sitting at the helm it's easy to forget that this is a 7.35m, 2.5-tonne vessel.”





WHAT LIES BENEATH?

Assessing the quality of a boat's construction is difficult when most of its structure is permanently hidden from view. But if you were able to witness the entire build – from start to the finish – well, wouldn't that give you a better idea?

So we elected to do just that (as much for our own as for our readers' curiosity), with the latest creation from Hamilton' Buccaneer Boats – the new Sportsman 735 – proving the ideal candidate.

Buccaneers have a reputation for solid construction, quality fittings and superior handling, and visiting the factory at regular intervals to document the 735's genesis reinforced those views. From hull lay-up to fixing the rod holders in their place, we recorded the evidence on video.

Putting a Buccaneer together is a fastidious, time-consuming, not-to-be-rushed process, but the end result speaks for itself. Owning a good-looking vessel is one thing: knowing it won't come apart at the seams when the weather turns curly is quite another.

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“She’s a large-volume vessel with tonnes of kingie-fighting space in the cockpit.”

are sliding side windows to aid ventilation, and it’s all topped off by a racing-style steering wheel. When you’re sitting at the helm it’s easy to forget that this is a 7.35m, 2.5-tonne vessel.

Anglers will particularly relish the remodelled dash. It has been extended to accommodate a bigger chartplotter – this boat is fitted with a 12-inch Raymarine unit – so dividing the screen into multiple functions still offers great detail and definition. It’s flanked by trim tab and anchor controls, with two panels of BEP switches below them. Further down are the VHF and Fusion stereo.

The Sportsman has retained Buccaneer’s trademark walnut burr fascia above the dash which houses a trio of Yamaha gauges. The boat is powered with a new-generation Yamaha 225hp four-stroke and it comes with fly-by-wire electronic controls, appropriate technology for a boat of this stature.

PERFORMANCE

Our test run was literally the first time the boat had touched the water and she performed admirably on the debut run.

She’s not exactly a lightweight at 2460kg, but she’s surprisingly agile. A steep stem, 22.5° deadrise and knife-like planing strakes all combine for a plush, smooth ride. We did experience some cavitation pushing her into hard turns at high speed, but it’s unlikely anyone other than ham-fisted journos would subject the vessel to that kind of treatment.

The Yamaha is fitted with a 17-inch three-bladed stainless steel prop and rockets the Sportsman to a top speed of just over 43 knots. At a more sedate 26 knots (cruise speed) it was using 28 litres an hour. These new-generation Yamahas are reportedly around 10 per cent more fuel-efficient than their predecessors and quite a bit lighter, and the 285-litre fuel tank will offer plenty of range to those chasing prey over the horizon.

It’s difficult to fault the Sportsman. The only concern I have is the location of the batteries which are tucked behind a large, lift-up panel in the transom at floor level. Any water in the cockpit feeds into the sump with its bilge pump, but if the vessel is pooped those batteries may come in for a bit more exposure to the sea than I’d like.

Buccaneer 735 Sportsman

technical

- ▶ **loa x beam** 7.71m x 2.48m
- ▶ **deadrise** 22.5°
- ▶ **fuel capacity** 285 litres
- ▶ **weight** 2460kg
- ▶ **engine** 225hp Yamaha
- ▶ **price as reviewed** approx \$155,000
- ▶ **boat supplied by** Auckland’s Family Boats 09 274 0511

BOATING’S VERDICT

The Sportsman is a versatile all-rounder that achieves an easy balance between comfortable cruising and functional fishing, and is more than able to meet the demands of extended, overnight trips.

There is excellent attention to detail, quality fittings and great craftsmanship – a boat you’d be proud to tow to the local ramp.

PROS

- Separate toilet so everyone gets some privacy
- Helm station has visibility forever
- A happy marriage of luxury and pragmatism

CONS

- Battery location is vulnerable to marauding waves

