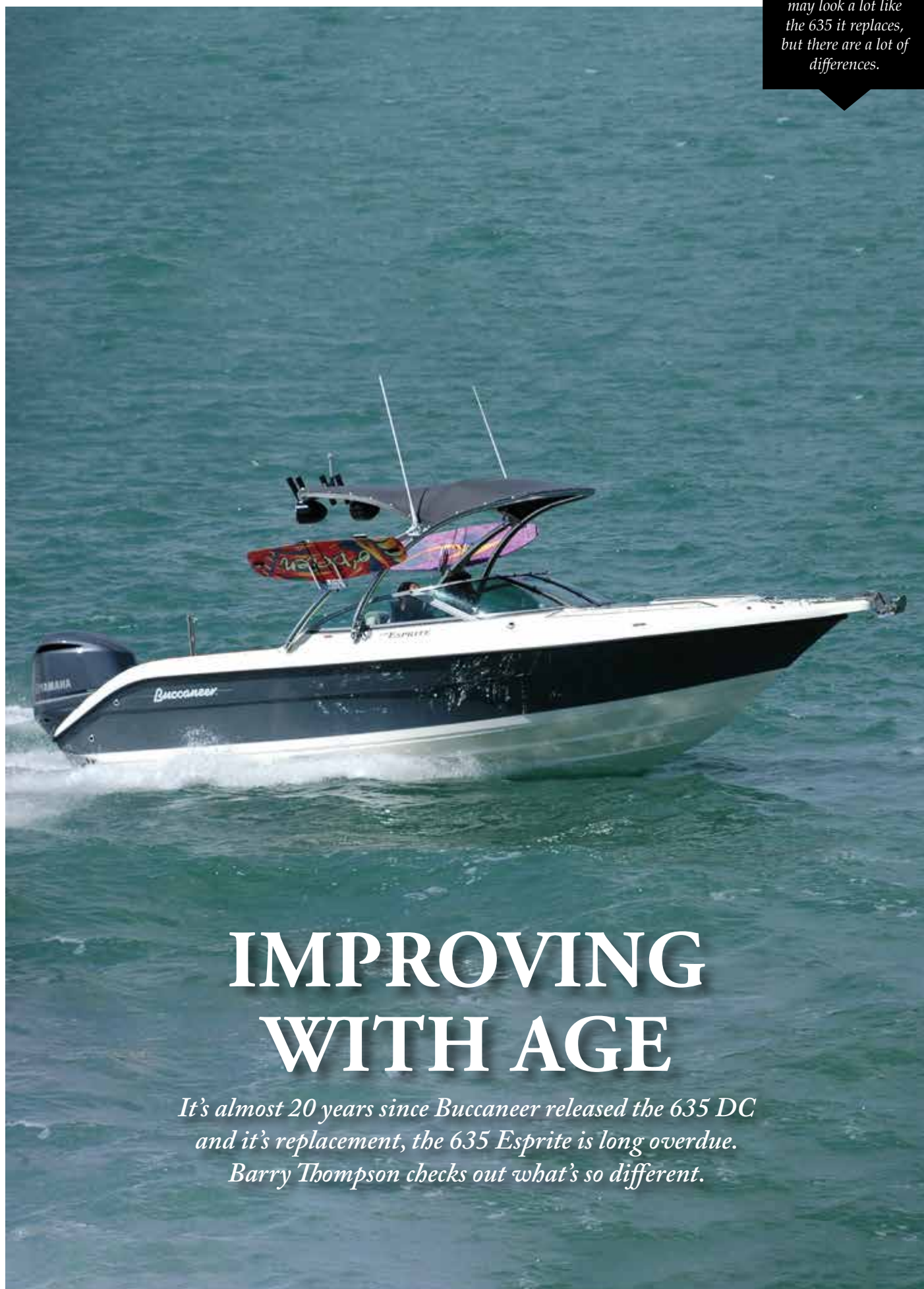


The new 650 Esprite may look a lot like the 635 it replaces, but there are a lot of differences.



IMPROVING WITH AGE

It's almost 20 years since Buccaneer released the 635 DC and it's replacement, the 635 Esprite is long overdue. Barry Thompson checks out what's so different.

The seating layout is better and the double seat bigger.



IN late 1996 Buccaneer released the 635 DC, which while I always saw it as a bowrider, designer/builder Gerry Gerrand always called it a DC – Dual Console boat. Whatever way you want to describe it, I loved it from the start, so much so that in 1998 we had one for the magazine boat.

Over the next 12 years, I drove that boat with a variety of engines, in many different sea conditions, at a whole lot of different speed and for so many reasons, I could never remember them all. However, if there is one thing I can remember is that I was extremely sad to see the boat go when I sold it.

Bringing up a family of three boys, who like their father had a bent for anything on the water (as long as it had a motor), we spend hours, days, months and years, fishing, diving, family cruising, running poker runs and towing water toys and wakeboards.

So I can quite honestly say I know a hell of a lot about the Buccaneer 635 and so I was very keen to try out the new redesigned 650 Esprite.

According to Wade Gerrand, Assistant Supervisor at Buccaneer Boats, the main reason for changing the very popular 635 Esprite DC was not only because after nearly 20 years it need to be modernised, but also that there seemed to be a lot more interest in big bowriders.

“We knew we had a great boat, but we were also conscious that it was time for a change and we needed to make some significant improvements, not only to the layout but also to the way we built the boat”.

Wade points out that building the 635

was time-consuming and labour intensive due to the lack of an inner liner and the fact there was a lot of timber used in the construction.

“What we have done is basically left the hull as it was, eliminated almost all the timber, added a complete gunnel to gunnel, bow to stern, one-piece inner liner, which adds to the structural integrity of the hull. There is also a new grp stringer/girder system and a totally redesigned deck”, said Wade.

He admits they did form the new deck by using the old plug as the basis for the new retooling. The result is a whole lot different from the 635. Most noticeable is the softer appearance of the deck, with new swage lines that take away the previous harsh square look. The windscreen has also been altered with longer side panels that flow more harmoniously with the boat’s profile. As the twin consoles and accordingly the windscreen is about 50mm further forward, so there’s a little more space in the cockpit. Not that it needed it.

The bow section remains very much unchanged and is the same size as the previous 635, but is forward by 50mm. I now comes complete with a pair of moulded drink holders and courtesy lights, plus twin SoPac hatches to replace the GRP covers for access to the now smooth gel coated surface under squab lockers. Just a little more upmarket and also more serviceable.

Another big change in the bow area is to the short foredeck, which sees the inclusion of a more modern and hands free Maxwell RC6 winch and a deep anchor locker. This was not an easy option in the previous 635

and like mine, the most common system was a capstan that meant you had to hand feed the warp into the locker. Worked fine, but the auto system is so much better.

Anyone who owns a bowrider will understand me when I talk about the cold draft that comes into the cockpit from the open bow when underway or even at anchor when fishing. In the previous 635 your choice was leave it open or as I did, add a clip-on curtain. It worked fine but was a bit of a nuisance every time I wanted to go forward. In the new 650 Esprite there is a dedicated rebate either side of the walkway, which allows for two solid swing doors, which can be easily folded back out of the way. Much better than the old curtain.

The storage space inside the twin console’s are about the same size as in the previous 635, but the base is now flat, so you’re not chasing bits of gear into the recessed corners. There’s easy access also to the back of the dash, although in the 650 this is now not so critical.

When I had my 635, I ran about eight different engines over 12 years and accordingly the dash looked like a honeycomb. The different instruments and gauges never fitted into the same holes and in the end I had a new carbon fibre dash made so I could start again.

In the 650 this is not a problem, as the dash is a separate moulding and while glued and screwed in, is easily removed if needed. In boat #1, the dash was well equipped with a Lowrance HDS12 MFD, (you could squeeze a 14” MFD in its place), triple Yamaha digital gauges, Fusion MSUD 750

Take a look



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1. The dash is spacious and is now a separate moulding. 2. The bow section is much the same but comes with a few extras. The full grip inner liner means a little more space in the cockpit. 3. Check out the Fusion sounds on the wake tower. 4. The Maxwell RC6 is standard. 5. Nice tow vehicle.



stereo, plus the controls for the tabs and winch. Overall a big dash for all you extras.

NEW SEATING

Another big change from the 635 to the 650 is the seating. While there is still a single swivelling bucket seat for the driver and king/queen on the passenger side, they are now quite different. The sliding and swivelling drivers seat comes with a fold up base that forms a bolster seat. This makes it very versatile, allowing you to stand, sit or squat to drive.

The new passenger seat is much wider than the previous model, which will easily cater for two children or an adult and child. There is a lot more storage under, which is now accessible by removing the seat bases. The cockpit sole is now 100mm lower than the 635 and not self-draining anymore due to the full grp inner liner. All water taken aboard runs through to the sump where a big Rule 900 auto bilge pump quickly expels it over the side.

There is full-length rod storage either side and extra storage under the cockpit sole, aft of the 240-litre stainless fuel tank. Because of the new inner liner construction, the

side trays are now wider and the coaming height is deeper. Batteries and extra storage are behind a drop down panel in the transom, which is hidden from view behind the large bin seat. This three-person seat is also bigger than in the 635 and is also totally removable. There is a large under-floor locker between the consoles which is ideal for wet storage.

The transom houses a fresh water sink unit to starboard and a bait tank to port. The bait tank can be fully plumbed in if you require a live bait system or left as a bait storage. A multi-purpose single ski pole can also be used to mount a bait board, which again adds to the versatility of the new 650 Esprite.

Over the transom, Buccaneer has integrated a shoebox joint where the engine bolts on and also added a Starboard packer, so there's no problem running the heaviest outboards up to 250hp.

Because this boat is set up for wakeboarding, overhead is a custom made stainless steel wake tower from XAir. This comes with a pair of wakeboard racks, four-rod holders, a pair of Fusion pod speakers and a rear view

mirror, so the driver can keep an eye on the riders. The soft bimini has clip on front and side clears, which when all in place offers a lot of protection from the weather.

If wakeboarding isn't your thing, then you can get a basic bimini with rocket launcher and clear, which Buccaneer now build in 2" stainless tube, so it is very robust. Towing a wakeboarder from this would be fine.

PRACTICALLY PERFECT

With the GRP liner and full length fibreglass top hat stringers and about 30 kgs more hull weight, the new 650 Esprite feels stiffer on the water than I can remember off the 635. The foam fill between the liner and the hull makes it a very quiet boat and there is no thumping resonating through the boat while underway in choppy seas.

For our test, Auckland's Upper Harbour was moderately rough, with a 25-knot breeze lifting the tops off the waves. We cruised across the chop at around 35 mph @ 4000 rpm and with just a hint of trim and a little tab to account for the wind, the new 650 Esprite ran beautifully. I did manage to give it full throttle in the following sea and at 55 mph, it is still felt predictable and is a pleasure to drive.

Our test power, a Yamaha 250 was well matched and provided a super quick holeshot and smooth transition right through to maximum 5700 rpm.

Now I have had 12 years driving experience with this hull, in all sea conditions. Some I would not care to be in again and others where I would have liked more speed. I feel this is the best hull Buccaneer has in their stable and I can understand why when it came to redesigning the 635 they didn't make any changes to the underwater lines. Why change something that's about as perfect as you can get it!

As for the changes, Buccaneer has done it right and simply made a great boat even better. ☺

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

BModel:	Buccaneer 650 Esprite
Priced from:	\$NZ115,000
Price as tested:	\$NZ134,500
Type:	Bowrider
Construction:	GRP
LOA:	6.76m
LOH:	6.35m
Beam:	2.42m
Deadrise:	21deg
Height on trailer:	2.02m
Trailerable weight:	2100 kgs (3/4 Fuel)
Test Power:	Yamaha 250
Propeller:	Yamaha Saltwater 18" x 15 1/4"
Power options:	Outboards 175hp-250hp
Fuel capacity:	240 litres
Trailer:	Enduro Trailers

PERFORMANCE DATA

<i>RPM</i>	<i>Knots</i>	<i>LPH</i>
1000	5.0	4.8
1500	7.0	8.4
2000	8.5	15.1
2500	11.5	19.0
3000	19.0	25.5
3500	26.5	35.3
4000	30.5	46.2
4500	34.5	57.4
5000	39.0	76.5
5500	44.5	90.3
6000	48.0	95.5

NOTABLES

Notable Standard Items on Test Boat

Trim Tabs, Maxwell RC6 winch, Hydraulic steering, Seadeck Flooring, Bolster seat with slider.

Notable Options on Test Boat

Lowrance 12" MFD, Fusion 750 stereo & speakers, XAir wakeboard tower, washdown pump & aerator.

Manufacturer:

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