



BILL FISHER

735

a modern classic

Setting up a fibreglass boat from scratch for sportfishing is a vastly different process than an alloy one, as Grant Dixon found out when putting together the magazine's latest project boat...

Setting up for Sportfishing



To make any drastic changes or additions to an alloy boat is as simple as jumping on the computer, designing the feature, then cutting, rolling and welding the change in place. With fibreglass boats, you have to rely on the manufacturer getting it right in the first place and including it in the original mould – any changes costing many thousands of dollars to create a new one.

NZ Fishing Media – NZ Fishing News and The Fishing Website – recently launched its Buccaneer Billfisher 735, its first ever GRP (Glass Reinforced Polyester) project boat.

The Billfisher, if my memory serves me right, was the first of its kind – a full walk-around centre cab – produced in New Zealand and they have become an

iconic boat. When they come up for sale second-hand, they are snapped up. Our 735 has undergone a facelift since those first models, but the proven bluewater hull, ride and fishing concept remains the same.

The 735 is the flagship of the Billfisher models – there are three options, and they come ready to fish out of the Hamilton manufacturing plant. It helps that manufacturer and designer Gerry Gerrand and son Wade are both keen anglers, so know what people are looking for when it comes to purpose-built sportfishers – built by anglers for anglers.

I first tested a Buccaneer Billfisher 735 in 2013 and gave it a glowing review. Nothing has changed in 2019!

As a fishing boat, it makes excellent use of cockpit space – a practical rig. We chose not to have the larger livebait tank

that sat in the centre rear of the cockpit, opting for the smaller one set into the transom, thinking it would give us more cockpit space. I hope I don't live to regret that call!

As well as the conventional pump, there is also an aerator to keep baits alive overnight. I estimate it will hold around 30 jack macs and when gamefishing there is always the option of adding removeable Hi-Tech Plastics tuna tubes for the larger livebaits such as koheru, kahawai and skipjack tuna.

The full walk-around is a big plus, especially today where for us, lure fishing and livebaiting on the drift is a popular way of targeting a variety of species. Ultralon U-Dek provides a hard-wearing, non-slip surface throughout the boat.

Recently I spent a few days away with friends at Bream Bay. We fished four out



From left: Braking on both axles is provided by the AL-KO IQ7 Extreme system; A solar panel ensures the Balex ABL system is kept topped up, The Hewinson Canvas #5 sea-anchor – never leave port without it!; The cabin is suitable for overnighting in comfort. The table comes out and is replaced by an in-fill to create a double bunk.



1) The large cockpit has a huge storage area under the floor, accessible via the hatch; 2) Rear hatches give access to the batteries, fuel filter and pumps; 3) Essentials such as the flare pack can be kept close at hand in the under-seat storage; 4) An Engel drawer fridge and RSE icemaker – luxury!; 5) The transom, dominated by the Mercury L6 Verado 300Hp outboard.

of the cockpit comfortably, even with an Icey-Tek 105 litre bin on board. We were mixing it up, a combination of bait and lures for snapper and kingfish, and it was not problem fishing that number without even using the bow space.

There is a heap of rod storage. As well as six rods in the rocket launcher – which even the height-disadvantaged writer can reach – there is space for four around the transom-mounted (and removeable) bait board, as well as four angled holders in the gunwales. There is storage for four more incorporated into the cockpit shelving (also suitable for tag poles and boat hooks), two on either side of the cabin – great for trout trolling and net storage – and two more running down the side of the third bunk in the cabin. We intend mounting a couple of Railblaza holders on the forward rails for those fishing off the bow.

Beneath the cockpit sole is a large 'wet storage' area, suitable for fenders, buckets, dive gear and berley pots. The large hatch is supported by two gas shocks. Moulded into the lid is a leaping marlin, hopefully a portent of things to come! A large, deep, drained gutter keeps the area beneath as dry as possible.

The cockpit is drained through four scuppers. As you step up under the hardtop to the helm station, all the mess can be contained in the cockpit where a saltwater washdown pump expedites the clean-up process. The padded gunwales are worth their weight in gold. With good 'toe space', it is easy for an angler to lean against the gunwale with their thighs when either playing a decent fish or when operating in rougher conditions. Plenty of handholds make moving around a safer proposition.

While on the subject of cleanliness,

1) A freshwater shower and sink is set into the transom; 2) The forward fishing space, along with the helm-operated Maxwell RC6 capstan; 3) A feature of the Buccaneer Billfisher 735 is the full walk-around, giving easy access to the forward casting platform; 4) The Hella SeaHawk provides the illumination forward; 5) For those overnighting trips, the sink with a supply of fresh water is very handy.

there is a sink and cold freshwater shower set into the starboard side of the transom, ideal for a quick rinse-off after a dive, keeping your hands clean or for washing rods and reels. The freshwater tank has an 80-litre capacity.

For gamefishing we have a set of Reel Rods drop-in 16ft retractable riggers, the halyards for which are operated from the cockpit, as is the centre rigger. A removeable Scotty downrigger is another option we have at our disposal and we can also use this to tow a light dredge. Shimano Talica 50's, top-shotted with the line weights of our choice give us plenty of big-game firepower.

The helm station offers great all-round vision, aided by a windscreen wiper. There are two king-and-queen seats, the two rear-facing ones providing a well-padded and comfortable spot for watching the lure spread when trolling.

The helm station itself is well set out. At its heart is a 16-inch Furuno TZ Touch screen chartplotter/sounder which is interfaced with the Furuno auto-pilot. It also has the multi-beam option (DFF3D) which reaches depths of 250m-plus, with coverage of up to 200m each side of the boat. It covers all the bases, leaving fish nowhere to hide. The Fusion stereo will be added into that mix – you can't go fishing without decent sounds!

To keep tabs on the engine is Mercury's VesselView system, a rode counter and control for the Maxwell RC6 capstan, along with the VHF, ElectraTab controls and a double switch panel.

Having the ability to lock the cabin is a big plus, especially when travelling to tournaments. There is excellent cabin space that incorporates a double bunk when the in-fill is added, an electric toilet – a must-have with the ladies on board –





The Billfisher is now powered with a Mercury V8 250HP four stroke which is proving quite economical.



Launching and retrieving is a push button affair thanks to the Balex Auto Boat Loader system.

and a small sink with a freshwater pump. Shelving above the bunks on either side provide enough space for the likes of a full set of Hutchwilco PDF's, first aid kit, binoculars and the like. There is a third bunk for either a child or a small adult under the helm station. It also makes for a great rod storage area and there are two rod holders incorporated alongside it.

A small drawer-refrigerator keeps essential food and drink items cool and we have been experimenting with an RSE 12-volt icemaker on board – luxury! There is a removeable pedestal table for the cabin.

While there are no cooking facilities on board, a portable gas cooker and a Kiwi Sizzler barbecue will be carried when overnighting. The latter will be stored under

the cockpit floor and sat on the baitboard when in use.

Lighting throughout has been provided by Hella and includes strip and other internal lighting, two LED floods over the cockpit and a SeaHawk 470 LED spotlight bar facing forward. There are small courtesy lights facing in-board around the walkaround and in the cockpit.

Currently we have a Mercury L6 300HP Verado bolted to the transom while we await delivery of the latest Mercury Verado V8. This gives the fully fuelled, watered and iced up boat with four people on board a top speed of 46mph, cruising at a comfortable 23mph at 3950rpm and doing .69 of a nautical mile for every litre burnt. With 280 litres under floor, that is plenty of range. The burn at trolling speed (8kt) is a tad over a litre a nautical mile.

The rig is towed on an Enduro trailer, manufactured in Hamilton by Andrew Fink and his team at ALM Group. It is fitted with an AL-KO iQ7 Extreme brake system that operates on both axles. All the trailer fittings are Trojan and a Balex Auto Boat Loading unit makes launching and retrieving stress-free and effortless.

A feature of the Enduro is the internal washdown. There is a hose-fitting at the head of the trailer and two bungs at the back of the frame. As part of the boat washdown procedure, the hose is clipped to the trailer and the frame filled with fresh water. Ever third or fourth wash a solution of Salt-Away is added for good measure. Salt-Away features in our regular washdown process, not only on the hull and trailer, but the fishing tackle as well.

Storage is always an issue. We keep the Buccaneer at the Outboard Boating Club on a hard stand. The club has brilliant

facilities. There is not only the parking, but great ramp, washdown and fish filleting facilities. At the end of a day, you drive away with boat and fish cleaned and anglers refreshed after a visit to the clubrooms! The fact that the OBC offers excellent security is a big plus when it comes to sorting insurance. The boat is in the tender care of Club Marine.

We chose not to wrap this boat given the two-tone finish on the hull out of the factory. Brave Design was responsible for the signwriting which is a little more subtle than on previous boats.

The rig is comfortably towed (and stopped!) by a Ford Ranger Wildtrak which has trailer sway mitigation, not to mention four-wheel-drive for those slippery ramps and soft-sand beach conditions. Its 3.2 litre turbo diesel engine offers plenty of best-in-class grunt for pulling this big rig safely around the country.

We have had the boat out in some rough conditions and have been pleased with its performance. It has the weight (2600kg dry) and a 22.5 degree deadrise to punch through the nastiest chop with the minimum of fuss. While we have only had the boat operational for a couple of months, we are looking forward to many adventures this summer. If you see us at the ramp, feel free to come and check out our modern classic fishing machine...



From left: The hard-top layout. There is storage under the two rear seats; The helm station is a busy affair. The space on the bottom left hand corner is reserved for the Fusion head unit; A lock-up cabin provides security for fishing tackle.



"WE FISHED FOUR OUT OF THE COCKPIT COMFORTABLY..."

Looking to fish out wide...



Look no further than the...

BILLFISHER 735

Features include: full walk-around deck + proven blue water performance + XL 280l fuel capacity + lock up cabin + two livebait tank options + removeable baitboard + electric toilet + 80l freshwater tank + many sportfishing and overnighting options. Available in three models – Billfisher 565 | 650 | 735

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