
review

**Buccaneer
605 Exess XL**

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A FINE VINTAGE





Does a good boat, like a fine wine, just get better with age?

That seems to be the case with Buccaneer's 605 Exess, a boat I reviewed for the first time in 2003. I had the opportunity to review the latest version of this evergreen model in Cromwell recently, a 605 Exess XL owned by Greg Fenwick, who'd also owned the boat I reviewed 20 years ago. That's brand loyalty for you!

Before his retirement a few years ago, Greg headed up the outboard motor division of Yamaha Motors in New Zealand, so he knows a thing or two about trailer boats. He's always been a fan of Buccaneer boats, especially this model, which, says Greg, "is a superb hull for its waterline length" – during his time with Yamaha he enjoyed many powerboat rallies in versions of the same hull. So, when he was looking for a boat for the Cromwell holiday home he shares with wife Margaret, another 605 Exess was the obvious choice.

I reviewed Greg's first Buccaneer 605 Exess with him on Lake Tarawera on a cold winter's day. Twenty-some years later, I got to review Greg's second Buccaneer 605 Exess, an XL model – essentially the same boat, but with 20 years' worth of evolutionary upgrades – also on a cold winter's day, but this

time on Lake Dunstan, a dammed section of Central Otago's mighty Clutha River.

Greg keeps the boat in Cromwell, where he has a family history dating back to the 1860s – his great-great-grandfather even served as Cromwell's mayor. Cromwell is a gorgeous town at any time of year, but on a clear day with fresh snow on the surrounding ranges glowing in the winter sunlight, it was especially striking.

The Buccaneer, carried on a premium, dual-axle Enduro trailer, is housed in an extra-large garage. The trailer, low enough to allow garaging without folding the Bimini top, is fitted with a Balex Automatic Boat Loader system for effortless, push-button launching and retrieval, whether boating alone or as a couple. There's also a bay with washdown facilities next to the garage, plus a motorised trailer dolly to move the boat around. "It's about making boating as easy as possible," says Greg.



The local boat ramp is just a few hundred metres from the Fenwick's front gate, providing access to Lake Dunstan's many water sports opportunities, great scenery, and superb trout fishing. And when the boat needs servicing, or the Fenwicks desire a change of scenery, the boat is easy to tow, especially behind Greg's Jeep Rubicon 4WD.

Greg specified this boat with deep blue gelcoat, the latest inline four-cylinder 200hp Yamaha four-stroke with integrated electric steering, Raymarine Axiom electronics, Lectrotab trim tabs, U-Dek on the floor, a Maxwell rope-chain capstan, a stainless-steel anchor and chain, and a canvas bimini top with rocket launcher and clears. Always a pretty, well-proportioned boat, it looks great in this colour.

The 605 Exess XL comes with a burl elm dash panel and teak





LEFT The wind can funnel up the gorge, whipping up the waves.

BELOW Easy to tow and easy to launch from its Enduro trailer using the Balex Automatic Boat Loading system, the 605 Exess provides the Fenwicks with stress-free boating.

capping on the coamings as standard. Indeed, the standard equipment list is comprehensive and includes stainless-steel rod holders, grab rails, boarding ladder, bow rail and ski pole; toughened glass windscreen; a compass and more.

The hull features 22.5° of deadrise at the transom, a raked bow with a relatively fine entry, two full-length moulded strakes, a narrow chine and no aft planing plank. It's fitted with a moulded fibreglass hull liner and the spaces between the hull and liner are filled with foam for safety and quiet running. The boat is built to New Zealand CPC standard.

Greg slipped the boat into the waters of Lake Dunstan with minimal help from us. Using the Balex remote control, he completed an effortless and controlled launch from inside the boat – all we did was park the trailer. With the crew aboard, we set off down the lake, heading under the bridge and past old Cromwell town, much of which was relocated onto the ridge beside what is now the lake when the Clyde River valley was flooded. Bridges, roads, the old railway, including the railway station, and much of the old village is now underwater.



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Dunstan is effectively divided into two sections: above and below the road bridge. The upper section is wider and quite shallow in the upper sections where it meets the river. That's where the best trout fishing is found. The lower section is deeper and much narrower, encompassing what was once a winding river gorge. The steep, rocky sides of the gorge crowd in on the lake and the sun in winter mostly leaves the hillsides in shadow. It's starkly beautiful though, and on our journey down the lake we catch sight of the occasional intrepid cyclist on the cycle trail that clings to the steep hillsides beside the lake, doubtless also enjoying the sights.

As the morning draws on, the wind begins to funnel up the lake through the narrower sections of the gorge, turning the water choppy. But the Buccaneer doesn't mind – the ride is exceptional for a boat of this size, and dry too. Even without the clears, the windscreen directs the slipstream over the heads of those in the front, so we're not too cold.

The helmsman enjoys a wrap-around swivelling bucket seat Greg specified himself, nicely upholstered and comfortable. It's adjustable up and down and fore and aft, and there's handy storage in the moulded pedestal base. The passenger seat on the port side is a back-to-back model, deeply padded and supportive with a massive storage bin in the moulded seat base.

The passenger consigned to the rear bench seat was comfortable enough but exposed to the full force of the slipstream. We took turns sitting there, but also steered the boat for patches of sunlit water whenever possible.

The rear bench seat is configured as a removable pod. It provides useful storage, but you can also leave it at home if you

BELOW There are a few sheltered arms on Lake Dunstan, but the water tends to be shallow, so care is necessary.

OPPOSITE There are several storage options, including the seat bases, and comfortable full-length v-berths in the forward cabin.



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want more fishing room in the cockpit. The battery, isolation switch and pumps are tucked away neatly, while the stainless-steel ski-pole is removable, there's a folding telescopic stainless-steel boarding ladder on the port side, and a factory moulded fibreglass bait table that slots-in in place of the ski pole.

The 605 features underfloor wet/dry storage too – great for water toys, fish bins and bulky objects. Deep, full length side pockets accommodate lines, fenders and long objects like boat hooks, skis and ski poles, plus there's dedicated rod storage for three rods per side in rod racks tucked under the gunwales. The hull liner, exposed in the cockpit, is finished in a dark grey, which looks really smart.

Despite its rugged nature and harsh winters, this part of the country has a long history of human exploitation. Māori used to travel up the Clutha River on their way inland from the coast, seeking pounamu and other resources from the harsh interior. In the early days of European settlement, Hartley and Riley discovered gold and hardy diggers flocked here to scrape out precarious livelihoods in an unforgiving landscape. Some of their tiny dwellings are still visible from the water and we stopped beside one, tucking into a pretty cove with crystal-clear water that Greg told us is a popular swimming hole in summer. Not today though!

Performance with the Yamaha 200hp is brisk. With 3700rpm on the Yamaha digital display, the Raymarine Axiom MFD was showing 26 knots on the GPS – 29 knots at 4300, which was a comfortable speed, except in the choppiest sections of the lake – and we topped out at 45 knots at 5700rpm, with the 605 Exess feeling composed. Integrated electric steering makes a big



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difference to the driving experience, as do the Lectrotab trim tabs, which allowed us to compensate for the effects of the wind.

The overwhelming impression I took away from our few hours on Lake Dunstan is how well this boat goes, even with four adults and a near-full tank of fuel onboard. It's quick, rides and handles sweetly and is rewarding to drive. The general-purpose layout also works well, offering something for everyone, including decent bunks and a chemical toilet option in the forward cabin. Greg's loyalty to the brand and this model are surely justified if our demonstration is anything to go by.

By the time we reached the dam end of the lake, the funnelling wind was positively howling, whipping up a considerable chop and peeling spume off the wave tops. In the name of comfort, we dialled the speed back a bit, but the Buccaneer 605 Exess handled the conditions with aplomb, whether tucked in and punching into short, steep wind waves, or running with them, the bow trimmed up to keep us dry. The ride was soft, and the hull travelled very quietly – a testament to a foam-filled hull liner perhaps?

Our return journey was rather less leisurely than our run down to the dam. With the wind continuing to build and time running short, we ran all the way back to the bridge without a break, only taking time out right at the end for a closer look at the old

BELOW The 605 Exess coped admirably with the wind-driven chop. It's a superb hull for its waterline length and good looking to boot.

town from the shallow lake arm that borders it. Many of the old building have been preserved and it was tempting to go ashore, but Greg warned that the water is shallow near the bank and strewn with hazards. Perhaps another time.

Retrieving the boat was no more drama than launching it had been earlier: Greg dropped us at the jetty, we backed the trailer down the boat ramp and Greg used the remote control to operate the Balex Automatic Boat Loader. All we had to do was secure the safety chain and pull the trailer from the water. Easy, which is exactly what Greg wants from his boating.

I reckon he's got it pretty much right with this package: the 605 Exess was always a great boat and it's kept up with the times. Indeed, with today's engines, updated interiors and the benefits of modern technology, this fine example of a Kiwi-built trailer boat shines brighter than ever. **BNZ**



Buccaneer 605 Exess XL

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HIGHLIGHTS

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SPECIFICATIONS

loa 6.46m
hull length 6.05m
beam 2.29m
weight on trailer 1670kg approx
length on trailer 7.5m
width on trailer 2.45m
height on trailer (std) 2.25m
deadrise 22.5° at transom
engine Yamaha F200 four-stroke
fuel 165 litres
cruise speed 28 knots
max speed 45 knots

WATCH IT

