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Going For Cover

12 months after Barry Thompson checked out the all-new Buccaneer 685 El Dorado centre cabin walkaround with a bimini top, he went back on the water with the company's first hardtop version.

WHEN the 685 El Dorado Centre Cabin was unveiled at the Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show in 2014, designer Gerry Gerrand told me that a hardtop version was already under development. It was to be in every way identical to the open version but with a lid on. Also, the first of the new model was to be Gerry's personal boat, so it was destined to be extremely well rigged for fishing. Really, that's what the hardtop version is all about. It's taken the 'open' El Dorado, which is unquestionably designed for the serious fishing market and moved to another level. There are aspects of the El Dorado that will not suit everyone

The new hardtop version of the 685 El Dorado brings the boat to a whole new level.



and while the hardtop model is not expected to be one of Buccaneers top sellers, it will (and already has with the open version) find a specialist niche of clientele. "What we wanted to achieve with the new 685 El Dorado was what we have done in the past with boats like our Billfisher range and our larger hardtop models, is a fishing machine that is capable of handling the sort of seas we get off our coast and be set up for any form of fishing", says Wade Gerrand from Buccaneer Boats. About the Billfisher, Wade describes them as a walk around boat, whereas

the El Dorado is a centre cabin. One big difference is the Billfisher had very high bulwarks and a higher cockpit sole due to the self-draining function. Whereas the El Dorado has very deep bulwarks and the cockpit sole is much lower, so the coaming heights are greater and there is a feeling of added safety, especially when walking forward to the bow area.

SIMILAR LAYOUT

The 685 El Dorado Hardtop has much the same layout as the open boat, but there are some changes over the boat I tested

over a year ago. Firstly the forward seating arrangement has changed from single pedestals to twin moulded bases, one fitted with a tackle draw and the other with an Engel fridge. The passenger seat has a reversible backrest and the helm seat a bolster. It's a three place driving option, so there is a position to suit most drivers. The helm is the same, it's just what you put on it that makes the difference. Gerry's boat was loaded, with everything from a Lowrance HDS12" MFD, about the biggest you can fit, to the Fusion entertainment system and GME VHF.

*A cockpit designed
for fishing.*



The cockpit has also had a tweak, with the vinyl side panels replaced with fibreglass panels with a soft vinyl pattern. They look just like the real thing but are more durable and long wearing. Another change in our hardtop model was the central live bait tank was missing and has been replaced with an extra large teak bait board. Both are options so you can have what you want. In Gerry's boat, he also changed the starboard side locker to incorporate a pair of tuna tubes, but still retained the live bait in the transom step-through. Underneath is hatch access to the batteries and cut-off switches, plus the plumbing for the tuna tubes. The cockpit sole is finished in Sea Dek, a hardwearing material that looks great and is easy to keep clean. Tube matting or carpet are also available. The foredeck remains unchanged and is a great space for fishing or simply relaxing. The kids will love to sit in the forward moulded seat when underway, or it's also a great spot to sit while waiting for the bite. There has been a subtle change in the forepeak with a dedicated tray for the painter line incorporated in the anchor well, alongside the Maxwell RC6 auto winch.

If you plan to overnight, then the cabin has twin berths with an infill and there is a toilet under the centre squab. While it is certainly a cosy overnigher, it is more probable the cabin will be used for day storage and somewhere to have an afternoon 'nana nap' while the fishing's not so hot.

SAME FOOTPRINT

The grp hardtop and supporting Sandbrook windscreens have been designed to fit on the same 'footprint' as the screen of the open 685 El Dorado. There is a slight mould change at the rear of the screen to accommodate the hardtop support. Sliding side windows offer some cross flow ventilation and the large central toughened glass screen features a wiper to fend off the rain and spray. What really impressed me were the rocket launcher and handrail combo. Built from 50mm stainless tube, it's a handrail that you can really hold onto and helps to stiffen the hardtop. If there was one particular thing I noticed when we were running hard in the choppy waters off Gulf Harbour, it was the solid and stiff feel of the boat. Nothing rattled, shook or

squeaked. This is a boat that I have full confidence in and would have no hesitation in taking out in some very rough water.

THE ENGINE

This is probably one of the first Buccaneer's I have done a review on with a late model Suzuki, an engine that was chosen especially by Gerry. With the boat destined to do a lot of trolling, especially for trout on the freshwater lakes like Arapuni and Taupo, the full electronic engine is the perfect answer. The Suzuki DF200A is a light, frugal and powerful four-cylinder engine. Based on the same block as the DF175, the 2.8 litre has the selective rotation that allows you to use the same engine and chose a clock- or anticlockwise rotation. Ideal for twin rigs. The DF200A weighs 30 kg less and is more compact than the V6 version. Great features include the Keyless Start System for stress-free starts, the immobiliser to prevent thefts and the Precision Control for an accurate and linear management of the power. Suzuki Precision Control is a computer-based throttle and shift system that

Take a look inside



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1. The cabin is suitable for overnighting or just somewhere to relax during the day. 2. The large teak bait board replaces the island live bait module. 3. Great place to sit when underway or waiting for the fish to bite. 4. With the rear curtain you can close in the hardtop. 5. Wide deep bulwarks make access forward safe and easy. 6. The new moulded seat bases come with a fridge and tackle box.

replaces mechanical control cables with a digital fly-by-wire system to eliminate friction and resistance in the controls. The system provides smooth and precise control along with crisp, immediate shifting that are particularly helpful during low rpm operation (such as trolling for trout) and when manoeuvring. The four cylinders of DF 200A displace a total of 2867 cc (175 cubic inches) with a perfectly square bore and stroke (97x97 mm or 3.82 in). The high compression ratio of 10,2:1 grants a good torque at low revs, therefore, fast acceleration. The aesthetic restyling also comes from the need of changing the intake air flow: the shape of the cowling lets fresh air in while the cooling system can work in the best conditions all the time. The exhaust line has been redesigned as well, for maximising efficiency and lower noise emissions. Needless to say, the engine features the Suzuki Lean Burn system completed with multi-point injection and variable valve timing (VVT) for the 16 valves on a double overhead camshaft (DOHC).

ON THE WATER

The water off Gulf Harbour for test day was mean and nasty. Twenty knots of NE wind with a short 1m swell rolling along the Whangaparaoa Peninsula. After some speed runs in the only patch of calm water off Gulf Harbour, we headed towards Tiri Tiri Island. The trip to the end of the Peninsula was straight into the swells and I was very impressed with the ride and handling. I had the speedo showing around 25 knots, the trim tabs down a few notches and the boat ran great. There was no spray on the deck or screen and as I said before, the boat felt stiff, tight and predictable. Plus the wrap around hardtop meant we were warm and wind free.



Turning and heading back with the swells, the 685 El Dorado HT was equally as impressive and even dipping the bow deep into the back of the occasional swell, did little to entice water on the screen. The flared bow works a treat and the deep vee hull form provides a soft ride. Okay, we did take a couple of hard knocks heading into the head sea, but that was probably because I got a bit aggressive with the throttle. If you set the boat up for the conditions, you can be guaranteed of a good ride. Interestingly, with a similar 200hp on the transom, the 685 El Dorado HT was only a little slower at the top end over the 685 El Dorado open version, obviously due to the extra windage and weight of the hardtop and screens. I got 38 knots @ 6000 rpm from the hardtop, with a maximum fuel burn of 81.3 lph. There was a huge difference when I dropped back to 5000 rpm, with

a fuel usage of 50 lph and at 4000 rpm that slumped to around 28 lph. Certainly economical cruising in the mid range.

ONE FOR THE FISHERMAN

The Buccaneer El Dorado Hardtop takes the Billfisher walk around effect just one step further. It also brings the open El Dorado up a level and I really see it being strong competition for the big alloy hardtop market. It is certainly a boat destined for the serious fisherman, be it saltwater or fresh, soft baiting, game fishing or bottom fishing. Plus it's a big day boat that is a compromise if you want to overnight, so it's got all bases covered. However, the Buccaneer 685 El Dorado is also a great family boat, especially if you have small children. It provides a very safe platform for youngsters and room to sleep overnight. ⚙️

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Make & Model:	Buccaneer 685 El Dorado Hardtop	Height on trailer:	2.85m
Manufacturer:	Buccaneer Boats	Trailerable Wgt:	2320kg
Priced From:	\$NZ	Test Power:	Suzuki 200
Price as tested:	\$NZ	Propeller:	20" 3 Bld SS
Type:	Walkaround	Maximum RPM:	6000
Construction:	GRP	Top Speed:	51 mph Knots
LOA:	7.13 m	Power Options:	Outboard
LOH:	6.82 m	HP Range:	175-250 hp
Beam:	2.48 m	Fuel Capacity:	240 litres
Deadrise:	22.5 deg	Trailer:	Enduro

CONTACT

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FUEL & PERFORMANCE DATA

Buccaneer El Dorado / Suzuki 200

RPM	Knots	L/h
1000	4.0	2.72
1500	5.5	5.45
2000	6.5	8.60
2500	7.5	13.1
3000	10.5	12.3
3500	15.0	22.3
4000	23.0	27.7
4500	27.5	35.5
5000	30.0	50.0
5500	33.5	63.6
5800	38.0	81.3