

### Buccaneer's Brilliant Billfisher

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As always, the action took us by surprise. I was standing at the transom studying the lures fizzing and popping in the west coast swell, marvelling at the quietness of the 250hp Yamaha four-stroke outboard, when a fin and a pair of cobalt-blue pectorals appeared behind the lure running off the



port outrigger.

The striped marlin gave the lure a good tweak before swooping in and grabbing another lure off the port corner. The rod buckled over and the reel howled.

Simultaneously at least one more dorsal broke the surface – it was hard to tell how many fins there were in the confusion – weaving behind one lure, then the next. The starboard short corner lure received a tug before the Kodak Killer, run well back off the shotgun on 15kg line, was taken, probably by a different fish. Suddenly, we had two fish on.

Our double was to be short lived. The first fish fell off after just a couple of minutes, but the second fish, on 15kg line, stayed connected, emptying the reel of half its line. When we finally got ourselves sorted, angler Wade Gerrand set to work on what proved to be a tough little fish, which we successfully tagged and released an hour later – points on the board for the Team Buccaneer in the Raglan One Base Fishing Tournament.

This had to be the perfect introduction to Buccaneer's flagship fishing boat, the new Billfisher 735. Gamefishing is its purpose and on this occasion – and not for the first time since its launch pre-Christmas – the new boat had fulfilled its destiny.

This particular boat is a pre-production model, though you'd never know it to look at her. Designer and builder Gerry Gerrand says there will be a few minor changes and improvements on production boats, following several months' trialling.

We were hard-pressed to find anything that pointed to a pre-production version, though Buccaneer Boats' Darryn Todd, responsible for the deck moulds, explained there were production issues with some mouldings.

The Billfisher 735 replaces Buccaneer's popular and long running Billfisher 237 and 720, now discontinued. Conceived in the early 1990s, they were ahead of their time in many respects and the only New Zealand-built walkaround trailerboats on the market at the time.



The 735 is a logical evolution of earlier boats, borrowing many of its most successful features and improving on other aspects of the design as a result of years of owner feedback.

Buccaneer Boats is so confident in the new model's future, it used a diamond saw to cut the old 237 deck moulds into pieces.



The new boat is longer than the old one and slightly narrower at the chines, which step in to a second shadow chine for reduced drag and a softer ride when the boat is on the plane. There is also more deadrise and the enclosed hardtop and deck mouldings are all new. The hull-bunk liner is Plexus-glued to the hull, for superior strength and stiffness, and sealed off from the boat's 280L fuel tank.

The construction methods have moved on with the times, too. Stringers are all super-strong, composite top-hat sections under the floor and the transom uses foam core rather than timber and composites are used elsewhere in the boat, including the upholstery boards.

Model: Buccaneer 735  
Billfisher  
Designer: Gerry Gerrand  
Builder: Buccaneer Boats  
Construction: GRP  
LOA: 7.710m  
LWL: 7.340m  
BOA: 2.488m  
Deadrise: 22.5  
Horsepower Range: V6  
Outboard  
Engine Options: Single Outboard  
Max Speed: 50mph  
Fuel Capacity: 280L  
Length on Trailer: 8.8m  
Height on Trailer: 3.1m  
Trailerable Weight: 2630kg dry  
Price: POA

ENGINE:  
Make: Yamaha  
Type: 4-stroke fuel-injected  
outboard  
Horsepower: 250hp  
Cylinders: V6

TRAILER:  
Manufacturer: Voyager  
Braked: Sensabrake four axle  
Suspension: Dual axle spring  
Rollers: Multi-Roller  
Features: Submersible Lights  
Boat Package: Supplied by  
Buccaneer Boats

Although our day started windless there was a considerable lift on the Raglan Bar, which had been closed the day before, and a confused slop outside leftover from a big blow in the days preceding the tournament.

This was to be my first experience of Raglan's bar which, compared with the Manukau or Kaipara, is short and sharp. Essentially consisting of two breaks, an inner and outer, it can be a formidable place. Local knowledge is important, especially since Raglan's channel shifts constantly.

Fortunately, Gerrand and Todd are regulars at Raglan and seemed totally unfazed by the waves breaking all the way across the bar in two distinct lines. It was a matter of judging which waves were lower than the rest.

After waiting a while, Gerrand picked a set of lower waves and gunned the 735 onto the plane, slowing to breast the whitewater of the first breaker. He then accelerated hard to cross the flat water between the first and second wave, which had also broken by the time we reached it. Once again, Gerrand slowed the boat so as not to bury the bow in mushy whitewater, then used the Yamaha's power and torque to squirt the 735 over the top and onto the back of the wave. Two breakers and we were out; the following sets were easily negotiated before they broke.



Despite looking a bit daunting to the uninitiated, the crossing was drama-free and we hardly took a drop of spray aboard. The bow appears to offer plenty of lift and 250hp on the transom is a bonus when instant throttle response is required.

In open water, Gerrand pushed the throttle forward and skimmed over the slop heading for deeper water well offshore. At around 60 metres, in amongst hundreds of dolphins and thousands of diving gannets, we set the gear and began trolling.

The big Billfisher is a comfortable traveller. Good for 50mph, it cruised comfortably at 40mph as the seas gradually glassed off, the enclosed hardtop offering complete protection. In inclement conditions, or when overnighting, the wheelhouse can be closed off using clears fitted to the after part. On a sunny day, when it can get hot behind the curved glass windscreen, a hatch in the fibreglass hardtop lets in welcome ventilation.



Considerable thought has gone into the dash layout, where everything falls easily to hand, including shelves and cubby holes, and the big Raymarine C80 chartplotter-GPS-fishfinder takes pride of place. For this model, Buccaneer have gone to an attractive two-tone tan and cream gelcoat finish on the dash and for other parts of the boat's interior.

Two-tier seats work well. The helmsman and front seat passenger sit high on swivelling buckets atop moulded bases containing aft-facing seats at a lower level. These proved to be comfortable perches from which to watch the lures. Under the

bases is a mass of stowage space.

Accessed via an alloy-framed cabin door, which folds to port and is lockable, the boat's spacious, lined cabin is well equipped for overnighting. Generous Vberths feature an infill to create a goodsized double and a quarter berth extends under the wheelhouse sole. The head is plumbed in; the cabin door affords privacy. A raised floor in the wheelhouse prevents any water in the cockpit finding its way into the cabin.

A fair-sized fridge under the door proved its worth on a hot day and there's a compact galley with a pressure fresh -water equipped sink, but no stove. Gerrand advocates using a canister-type portable gas cooker for safety reasons.

The front cabin is well endowed with stowage, under the squabs and in wide, deep side shelves; rod racks above the quarter berth are a sensible use of space.



Our tussle with a marlin endorsed the 735's suitability for its purpose. Gerrand fought the fish stand-up, using all the boat's generous cockpit and the walkaround side decks. At one point we contemplated sending him up to the bow so we could chase down several hundred metres of line. There's the room and enough support from the heavy-duty railings to realistically play big fish from the bow, along with a moulded bow seat.

A pair of under-gunwale moulded racks will accept rods, tag poles, boat hooks and similar gear. It was the tag pole Todd reached for as I took the leader and then leaned over the side to grab the fish's bill. All three of us clustered along the boat's starboard side, as Todd placed the tag. I unhooked the marlin, and Gerrand began reviving the fish for release.

The boat listed slightly, but not alarmingly, and I came to appreciate the gunwale height while holding onto the marlin's bill – it's high enough to offer good thigh support when fishing, but not so high as to make reaching the water difficult. Padded coamings were welcome.

But, Billfisher owners won't restrict their boating to gamefishing. The 735 is suitable for general fishing, diving and family boating. A double fairlead means there is no need to remove the main anchor to deploy a grapnel – a real bonus for anglers – and the walkaround configuration makes the boat ideal for drifting, lure casting, jigging and flyfishing.



A handsome Manta baitboard and large, moulded livebait tank is the focus of the transom; its curves are good for baits and anglers. It's flanked by transom lockers on either side. The transom door is a simple cut-out on the port side.

A huge underfloor locker dominates the cockpit, the striking image of a leaping marlin etched into its surface affirming the boat's aspirations. The lid lifts to reveal a removable moulded PVC bin. The locker extends well forward and is easily big enough for two fishbins of gear, plus dive bottles. Gutters around the lid are massive, as are the drains, which empty into the bilge where an automatic 2000gph bilge pump disposes of any water, so gear stored under the floor should stay dry.

A freshwater-saltwater washdownshower keeps the cockpit clean and ministers to divers and overnights. An 80-litre freshwater tank should provide a few decent showers.

Buccaneer has ensured the cockpit drains quickly. Channels around the cockpit perimeter direct water to four big, recessed drains which empty overboard. Side decks also have gutters to direct water overboard.



We raised one more marlin, mid-afternoon. It popped up in the gear, striking half-heartedly at a couple of lures before dropping back to the depths. By diligently working the area we raised the fish another three times, prompting a shortlived, ratchet-torturing strike on the second pass. On subsequent passes, a much wiser fish came up for a look, but no more bites were forthcoming.

In typical west coast fashion the sea state deteriorated as the day progressed. By the time we headed for base there was a sloppy two-metre sea running, but we comfortably maintained 20 knots. Wellpositioned handholds, including grabrails on the rocket launcher, were nonetheless welcome.

Returning over the bar was no more dramatic than our morning crossing, though I struggled to see a clear channel through the surf. Gerrand

expertly lined up the markers and positioned the boat on the back of a big breaker and rode the wave all the way in. I studiously ignored the breakers chasing us from behind.

Inside the harbour, Gerrand opened the throttle, trimmed the big Yamaha out and got the Billfisher boogying. At wide open throttle, 50mph showed on the GPS with the hull riding free and just a little loose – exciting stuff for such a big boat.

The Billfisher 735 is a big boat, but the beam has been restricted to keep it within New Zealand towing regulations, so it's not too daunting on the road. A Voyager multi-roller trailer, electro-hydraulically braked on both axles, took the sweat out of launching, retrieving and towing, which proved no trouble for the naturally aspirated Nissan Patrol diesel.

The latest incarnation of Buccaneer's Billfisher is the best so far. Bigger than the boat it supersedes, it's better laid out and has more useful features. Like the Billfisher 237 and 720 it succeeds, the new Buccaneer Billfisher 735 is a great fishing boat. At Raglan, it was in its natural element.

