

# Buccaneer Billfisher 650

Boat Test From Boating NZ Magazine

## Family Resemblance



A forecast of 35 knots already in the making and a steep, two-metre swell provided the right conditions for trialling Buccaneer's latest Billfisher, the tidy-sized 650 hardtop.

Until commonsense over-ruled enthusiasm, we were headed for a fishing spot or three off Motiti Island, about 12 miles down the coast from Mount Maunganui. About three miles

out, we turned back as the wind touched 30 knots and looked determined to do better. The boat could definitely handle it but a 20-mile return trip in big, jumbled seas didn't sound like a whole lot of fun. We opted for inshore waters instead.

The Buccaneer Billfisher 650 is an ideal boat for families who enjoy fishing. According to its manufacturers, it's New Zealand's only walkaround model with a hardtop in its size range. It's easy for one person to handle, including launching and retrieving at the boat ramp, but can happily fish two, three or four.

In a dark blue and ivory hull, it's an attractive, purpose-minded craft. We had met Gerry Gerrand, founder and managing director of Buccaneer Boats, and his son Wade at Tauranga Bridge Marina early that morning. Gerry was skippering the camera boat, a big launch, with photographic editor Mike Hunter onboard. I joined them initially so I could glean from Gerry his philosophy in creating this newest boat to his range.

This gave me the opportunity of observing the Billfisher from the height of the launch as we followed Wade and Boating's advertising manager Brett Patterson out through the choppy, boisterous Tauranga Channel. Once out in open water, I would transfer to the Billfisher while Gerry headed back to the marina.

### THE HULL

As the Billfisher played in the big swell, it was obvious these were the conditions for which Gerry Gerrand designed it. Buccaneers are known for their soft ride in the rough and even though the swells were topped with wind waves and being shoved around by the underwater landscape, the boat was clearly comfortable – staying straight and true to its line as it romped over the swells, landing upright and maintaining even power.

The key in these conditions is the deep, 21-degree vee in the hull, and the two, wide strakes both sides. The boat stays dry, too, thanks to the flared bow and a spray chine – the lead photo on page 33 demonstrates it well, as the boat has just come over a large swell, sending spray well away from the boat.



The sheerline follows contemporary styling, falling away aft just before the transom and sloping into a Portofino stern. The gunwales are on the low side, which looks good but they present less thigh support when fishing.

The cockpit has easy access, from the marina dock or for divers and swimmers from the water. A ladder is permanently mounted on the port side. All Billfishers except the 525 are walkaround. The Billfisher 650 is a slightly extended upgrade from the original 2008 and 635 Billfisher hull and is available in hardtop or softtop. The upgrade incorporates more modern styling and standard features such as washdown pump, electric toilet, hydraulic steering and winches that used to be options.

Aesthetically speaking, the only minus, to me, is the height of the hardtop atop the sleek, pretty lines of the hull, although a curve in the eyebrow of the hardtop canopy softens the effect.

Since founding Buccaneer in 1976 in Hamilton, Gerry Gerrand has pursued his own development and attended numerous overseas boat shows; he has always been among the first to take advantage of new technology.

The best example of this in recent years was the introduction of full, inner fibreglass liners for the interiors of his boats. Whereas in the past, the company would build the hull then add the interior components in stages, it now builds the interior – bunks, shelves, cockpit side pockets, battery housings, Portofino stern, underfloor hatches – in one piece and drops the whole unit into the hull. Special adhesives bond the two.

The most obvious advantage to the user is that the boats are easy to maintain and clean, with smooth corners and no places to trap dirt – especially important when



### Buccaneer 650 Billfisher

model Billfisher 635  
designer Gerry Gerrand  
builder Buccaneer Boats  
loa, incl bowsprit 6.765m  
beam 2.42m  
deadrise at transom 21°  
construction grp  
horsepower range 150-200hp  
engine options outboard  
max speed 50mph  
fuel capacity, approx 240L  
length on trailer, engine down 7.6m  
height on trailer 2.95m  
trailerable weight, approx 2160kg  
price as tested, approx \$126,620

### ENGINE

make Yamaha 200hp  
type four-stroke  
price \$29,790

### TRAILER

manufacturer DMW  
braked hydraulic over ride  
rollers multi-roller  
boat package supplied by  
Buccaneer Boats

dealing with fish.

In handling, though, the inner liner means the boats are a lot stiffer, which translates into better performance and longevity. Buccaneer puts foam between the liner and the hull for safety. "The foam makes it quieter too," Gerrand says. Gerrand admits that full liners have their disadvantages. "The boats are a bit heavier and it costs more because you use more fibreglass. There are more tooling costs because the moulds have more, complex curves so a lot of time goes into building them."

Another development has been the introduction of full length, fibreglass top hat stringers – ACST (Advanced Composite Stringer Technology) – to stiffen and strengthen the hull. "This came about through the advent of a new adhesive product, Plexus," says Gerrand. "It's so strong that you can glue two gelcoat surfaces together without sanding them and if you try and pull them apart, it will delaminate the glass."

"That's why we feel confident about putting the top hat stringers in the liner and be confident there will be no failure." The only wood in the boat's construction is where the trim tabs attach, where the engine bolts on and where the towing eye bonds to the hull. "Having no wood avoids the potential for problems in the long term," Gerrand says. "Our real expertise is in the construction of hulls and moulds and in the laminating shop." Buccaneer makes extensive use of a CNC technology for cutting upholstery, panels and boards.

## PERFORMANCE

With most photography done, it was my turn to join the Billfisher and experience the whole package for myself. The right boat-engine combination is more than just bolting on an outboard; the position of the outboard relative to the boat is a big factor but, after nearly 5000 boats, Buccaneer seems to get it right every time.

The Billfisher 650 is teamed with a Yamaha 200hp, four-stroke spinning a 19-inch Saltwater series propeller. "For the type of boat it is, it is perfect," Gerrand had told me. "I don't think you'd want to go with anything else."

At trolling speed of 8mph for marlin, the engine would be spinning at 1800rpm, and burning 8.9L an hour. Cruising speed is around 28mph at 3600rpm, burning 26L/hr.

The boat's top speed, which eluded us on our day, is 50mph at 5900rpm. More importantly, the boat proved it held on well in the turns, with no cavitation around the propeller, so the skipper can be confident the boat will do what is asked of it throughout manoeuvres.

Our outward course toward Motiti Island was with the conditions in the strong offshore breeze. The landings, although certainly indicative of the rough sea state, were never harsh poundings but rather a soft, scrunch-down as the hull absorbed the impact. While we certainly had to hang on as we fell off the backs of waves, there was none of the sudden jarring that threatens to shorten your spine by several centimetres.

As we decided to head back before the forecast delivered 35 of its best, we wondered how the boat would handle going into the conditions but Wade predicted it would be smoother. He proved right; the landings were softer as the deep vee did its work, and the cockpit remained dry. Wade applied the Bennett trim tabs for the conditions. There used to be a belief that if a boat had trim tabs there was something wrong with it but that changed with the development of deep vee hulls. This is especially so with hardtops which lean into a cross-breeze and need trim tabs to counteract the effect.

## FISHING

At 18m, the fishfinder indicated some good sign and Wade dropped the anchor using the Quick rope/chain windlass from the helm. Gerrand says the boat's design allows a good fall for the anchor chain into the bow, essential for remote-controlled anchoring.





The hatch in the foredeck is for ventilation rather than access so if there is a need to go forward, the skipper uses the walkaround. A Starboard pad on the spareman protects the foredeck from the chain. Wade has eight years' experience in the offshore fishing industry and is clearly comfortable using the electronics to find fish. It is the boat's fishing attributes which he particularly likes – the uncluttered, easy-clean cockpit; the ability to handle the boat single-handed, including launching and retrieving thanks to the multi-roller trailer, and the convenient towing weight. The hardtop, naturally, is a challenge when berthing single-handed in a cross-breeze. The cockpit has large scuppers for easy cleaning and a 60-litre kill bin underfloor and a live bait tank in the transom. While the blokes hung lines over the side, I sussed out the boat.

The vee berth has generous padding in the shelves above the bunk and an electric, on the sides, which worked well in the rough stuff; the inner coamings are well padded for thigh support too and there is plenty of toe room when leaning up against the coaming. The boat has accommodation for 12 rods – six on the rocket launcher across the top, two either side in the hardtop supports, and two each side on the coamings which have teak inserts. But, in the décor department, the best artwork is the large Billfisher motif of a marlin and lure moulded into the lid of the cockpit kill bin – the lid lifts with gas struts.

A large, removable baitboard is mounted mid-transom. Beneath this is a 120-litre live bait tank, with an inner light. A locker on starboard houses the two batteries; another locker to port is for rubbish or could take a shower. The finish in the cockpit is what Buccaneer calls ivory, a deep cream colour which prevents glare in bright sunlight. Despite what the fishfinder said, only one john dory came aboard and, with the deep vee feeling every rock and roll coming through, we soon headed for calmer waters.

It was my turn to take the helm. The challenge of designing a walkaround on a small boat is to minimise its impact on interior space, particularly on the helm dash. With minimal width available, Buccaneer has created a curved dash to take the Raymarine C80 chartplotter, Quick chain counter, Yamaha triple deal of Speed fuel and tachometer, Trim tab – Bennett, Switchboard and Raymarine VHF. The moulded Sandbrooks glass windscreen is classy and gives good, all-round vision as the mullions are well back, out of peripheral vision.

The large windscreen wiper came in handy on our day, although its position needed tweaking. There are no sliding side windows as a hatch in the hardtop top provides ventilation. The throttle position was comfortable but the throttle kept sneaking back to lower revs. The driver and passenger seats are both pedestal style but only the driver gets a footrest; the passenger would have liked one, too, however the passenger does have a handy glove box compartment and a good hand hold.

### SUMMARY

Buccaneer's philosophy in building boats is clearly about quality. Every job in the boat's construction is signed off so that someone is accountable. As Gerry Gerrand readily admits: "Our boats aren't the cheapest on the market but they are some of the best value for money."

So, after 31 years in business and nearly 5000 boats, what's the secret to longevity? "Passion, attention to detail," he says. "I'm probably a bit pedantic. People say I'm grumpy but I always tell them what they've got to hear not what they want to hear. If it's eight weeks for delivery that's what I tell them. "Building boats is not a job; it's a passion."



