



A refined Stabi with better looks and even more fishing function

A replacement for the most popular boat in its 16-strong fleet, the new Stabicraft 2050 Supercab is just the ticket for some wicked offshore fishing. In fact, wherever the elements challenge, safety matters and serious catching is your motive, these Kiwi-built pontoon-type alloy boats are right at home. After all, they're built at the bottom of NZ's South Island.

OVERVIEW

- A keel-up redesign with Game Chaser Transom and Arrow Pontoons

The timing couldn't be better. As we write this, the temperate east coast of Australia is in the midst of its best Southern Bluefin Tuna run in decades. Every man and his trailerboat has been landing barrel-sized fish from 50kg to more than 100 kegs in 18-19C currents swirling 24 to 50 nautical miles offshore.

Stabicraft, a Kiwi boatbuilder with more than 25-years history designing and building boats, is no stranger to these kinds of tasks, offshore boating, cool-climate fishing and weather adversity. The aluminium pontoon-style craft — akin to aluminium RIBs — come with a tough metal 'life-ring' for unsinkability.

It is their high safety factory that endears Stabicrafts to so many commercial operators including, most recently, an eight-boat order worth NZ\$250K for the NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services. NSW Water Police and a heap of other commercial operators in the Antipodes use Stabicraft, too.

Being developed in Invercargill on the very bottom of the NZ South Island for abalone (paua) divers, Stabicrafts are a product of their environment. Given the climate down there, Darwin's theory of boatbuilding evolution comes to the fore. Only the toughest survive, and the logic says your chances weigh in your favour when out wide fishing on these boats, too.

But while the traditional values have been retained, there are some evolutionary changes and mods on this new 2050 Supercab. These come from lots of R&D and CAD design work, we're told. The engineering on these boats is carefully considered.

The sharper looks and refinement have given Stabicraft broader market acceptance and a mainstream fishing-clique following these days. People no longer give that bemused stare at the servo and ramp. If you need further reassurance, our good friend Paul Worsteling from IFISH is a Stabicraft ambassador, having run several models over many years and a bigger one perhaps soon.

PRICE AND EQUIPMENT

- A lot of serious fishing boat with local enhancements

We tested our Stabicraft 2050 Supercab through Webbe Marine on Sydney's Southside and headed out to sea from Port Hacking on a day when the veiled light, steely ocean and pale-blue sky telegraphed winter. Out yonder, the big tuna were doubtless feeding and it's with this in mind that we tested this boat.

Standard features of the 2050 Supercab include: lots of inbuilt safety and seaworthiness; excellent dry storage and weather protection in the cabin; and also a very generous uncluttered cockpit for serious fishing. Then come the handy factory options to build your boat.

From the base price of \$71,700 with a Honda 135hp four-stroke outboard on Dunbier dual-axle trailer (electric brakes not needed), our demo boat kitted out by factory and dealer Webbe Marine cost about \$94,328.

Our 2050 Supercab was powered by an upgraded maximum-horsepower Honda BF150 outboard, a DOHC 2.35L engine with Variable Valve Timing and Lift Electronic Control (VTEC) for at-hand torque across the rev range. The 51A alternator gives 30A at 1000rpm to power all your fish-finding kit and there is the option of variable speed trolling with adjustable +/-50rpm idle if you specialise in downrigging, etc.

Other options included a full white-painted hull from the rubbing strip down, helm side-opening window (for improved ventilation in summer), flip-up bolsters on the helm seats (for extra driving room), a furry cabin liner and transverse cabin cushion, the Sea Star hydraulic steering, a wiper, Fusion stereo with Bluetooth and VHF radio, and Lowrance HDS 12in Touch Multi with StructureScan transducer and standard Broadband transducer (boat comes with dual transducer-mounting brackets).

There was an optional swim/dive ladder that assisted boarding from the ramp before launching, and Webbe added the excellent vinyl-tube flooring to make things more cushy underfoot. They also ordered a raw-water deck wash for removing the fish blood and a centre transom access hatch to improve battery access.

But everything else — including the excellent cutting board and transom live-bait tank with pick-up and pump — comes standard on the 2050 Supercab. Really, the serious fishing platform needs only electronics to be fish ready, although more rod holders and riggers will be welcome for bluewater fishing.

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LAYOUT AND ACCOMMODATION

- Cabin comforts without cockpit intrusion

There's no cabin hatch on the 2050 Supercab, but the windlass comes standard and our boat had 100m of plaited 12mm rope with 10 metres of chain. That's great for bay snapper fishing and inshore work. But for serious offshore boating and fishing over deep reefs you will need more. You also won't want to walk around the cabin sides, even though the task is assisted by non-skid side decks and front and side cabin-top rails, to reach the anchor well.

All seasoned offshore fishers know how to deploy a side-anchoring system and use a buoy retriever for deep-water work. Inside the cabin, the optional transverse seat lets you stash a tub with this anchoring kit and/or a 50-litre portable icebox (Esky) up front. That's what we would do.

Cabin sides kicked back inboard and a dedicated drainage and water-deflection system on the hardtop are typical thoughtful Stabi details. Such things add to the weather protection in the cab, while the optional opening side window helps with ventilation and communications from the wheelhouse.

Storage was surprisingly good with thought given to utilising every possible space without compromising floatation, from cabin side pockets and under-seat spaces to handy nooks for your personal effects, drink holders to a decent dash for navigational and fish-finding gear. Same deal with the grab rails, so crew have somewhere to hang on for the long run to the grounds.

Rod and tackle storage is given priority with an eight-rod rocket launcher off the cabin top and full-length cockpit side pockets for gaffs and other gear. There are a couple of holders in the cutting-board, but we'd improve on the rod-holder arrangement (an easy thing to do).

We would add heavy-duty through-bolted holders in the wide gunwales to keep our 24kg outfits in place and a pair of outriggers for trolling. The abundant drinkholder cups will serve to hold lures (knife jigs) and/or terminal tackle when running back up top for another drift.

But the transom layout with Game Changer set-up is hard to fault. Flip-down corner seats add to the impromptu seating without compromising fishing fighting room when tucked away. The portside seat doubles as a step out to the transom and there was a dive ladder much used by Kiwis for landing crays.

There's full toe-under support across the transom, the centre cutting board atop the live-bait well has increased in size over that on the Stabi predecessor, and you get handy storage for hardware (gloves, knives, fish grippers and so on). Our boat had a hatch to the battery, which was mounted well off the floor, and that we also welcome.

All told, the 2050 Supercab has a nice balance of cabin to cockpit, dry storage and seats out of the weather, with a comfortable working space for serious fishing. Some fish storage is probably your only remaining consideration. Fix an icebox somewhere for the reef fish, but take some hessian or insulated bags for the wicked tuna.

HULL AND ENGINEERING

- Life-ring for buoyancy and new transom for lift

Under the transom, the wiring set-up is tidy, with good access to the spin-off fuel filter and room to store things like a tub of bait. While the boat isn't self-draining, there's reassuringly direct access into the bilge under the splash well, a detail missing on some imported boats, we find. The fuel sender and aluminium tank are also accessible via a removable floor section should you need to get to them.

The hull itself is made from 5mm marine-grade aluminium on the running surface with 3mm thick tubes. Stabicraft calls it a surrounding 'life-ring' of independent buoyancy chambers. There are also underfloor watertight chambers for positive buoyancy.

Together, you get level buoyancy, terrific load-carrying capacity and stability that, with the deep freeboard, make Stabis one of the safest boats around. All the welds were very neatly executed and the 2050 felt, looked and performed like a well-made boat.

As the Kiwi company builds a lot of survey craft, recreational boaters enjoy the benefits. All Stabicraft boats are built to NZ Boating Industries Association CPC Certified standards, so you get an independent engineering certification of the hull structure, and an independent factory audit of build compliance. Rec warranty is three years.

ON THE WATER

- Eager during our offshore test

The Stabicraft 2050 hull comfortably wears the 220kg engine weight of the upgraded 150hp Honda we ran on Webb Marine's package. The new Game Chaser Transom has an extended running surface and more aft buoyancy and load-carrying capacity.

But we reckon the new lightweight 115hp four-strokes in the marketplace might be a nice match too. Hydraulic steering was a must-have upgrade appreciated at the helm.

The arrow-shaped transom helps displace water in reverse, hence the Game Chaser tag. The transom is shaped a bit like a convex vee, an arrowhead, almost a canoe stern of sorts. The intention is that it will drive and steer better in reverse and push water away to the sides of the outboard. It's a subtle design tweak that you can see in the last frame, the on-trailer shot, in the library above.

(But while some trailerboaters like to chase fish in reverse, we prefer to fight big fish while idling forward in our outboard boats. This way you have no chance of drowning your powerhead(s) — and dealers are seeing more drowned outboard engine these days — while also lessening the risk of gearbox damage.)

Spinning a 17in three-blade Solas stainless steel prop, with full 150 litres of fuel and two adults, the 2050 Supercab with the 150hp Honda was certainly eager. There was just a small amount of slip or cavitation in tight turns (offset by some in-trim) indicating a pretty good all-round set-up.

In forward gear, the hull just slips onto the plane and holds that down to 25000-2750rpm, indicating a very efficient boat and one from which you could fast troll on the plane for wahoo off the Gold Coast. Normal trolling speed of around eight knots instils a sense of invincibility for those scouting about out wide in temperate fisheries.

Low cruise at 3500rpm returns 17-18 knots and great comfort, while the eco setting of 4000rpm gives you a sensible 23 knots offshore speed for 21 litres/hour and a safe range of about 150 nautical miles. The official supplied data from Webbe Marine puts you at 23.2 knots at 4000rpm for 24.7 litres/hour or 1.06 litres per nautical mile.

Fast cruise of 4750rpm returned 28-29 knots for a 130nm range, with WOT of 5700rpm giving almost 38 knots. At the higher speeds offshore, with no gear aboard, the 2050 Supercab was getting airborne. This is a factor of weight and this high-lift hull form with lots of outboard grunt.

In short, the boat is about as comfortable as a tinnie this size and weight can be, with the cabin echoing some of the water action offshore, but without much hard slamming at all. Stability at rest is brilliant and this is a top fish-fighting and catching platform in our books.

VERDICT

- Enjoying the rewards of our booming trailerboat market

Stabicraft have always had utilitarian looks, but this year has brought a facelift and improved functionality to the new 2050 Supercab. The Kiwi yard has extended the hull, tweaked the cabin, added a new angled transom and narrower Arrow Pontoons to give a 'tighter' look (while also reducing chine slap up front).

The result is a very capable 20-footer with plenty of offshore intent. The rig weighs around 1800kg loaded on road and is therefore easily transported. If you still need convincing, our good friend Paul Worsteling from IFISH has done impressive things with his 2150 Supercab sister ship.

Stabicraft uses the catchphrase "adventure with confidence." They are well-chosen words.

LIKES

- >> Safety and stability aboard a virtually unsinkable hull
- >> Terrific offshore fishing application
- >> The seaworthiness and ability of a much bigger boat
- >> Engineering, construction, and overall attention to detail
- >> Handy cabin for weather protection
- >> Big cockpit and great transom arrangement

NOT SO MUCH

- >> No cabin hatch in this compact cuddy design
- >> We wonder about wheelhouse ventilation in hot weather
- >> Some might not be overawed by the pontoon-style cuddy-cabin looks

RATINGS

Overall rating: 4.6/5.0
Mechanical/equipment: 4.8/5.0
Packaging and practicality: 4.7/5.0
On the water performance: 4.5/5.0
Value for money: 4.6/5.0
X-factor: 4.4/5.0

Specifications:

Price as tested: \$94,328
Base rig price: From Webbe Marine, Sydney, of \$74,190 with a Honda 135hp four-stroke outboard on Dunbier dual-axle trailer and down to \$71,700 with 115hp outboard
Length Overall: 6.20m
External Beam: 2.25m
Internal Beam: 1.65m
Dry Hull Weight (Approx): 700kg
Tow Weight (Approx): 1500kg
Deadrise: 17.5 degrees
Tube Thickness: 3mm
Hull Thickness: 5mm
Adult capacity: 7
Recommended HP: 115hp

Maximum HP: 150hp
Maximum Engine Weight: 235kg
Engine Leg Length: 25in
Fuel Tank: 150 litres
Length on Trailer: 7.2m
Height on Trailer (Approx): 2.80m

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