

Smuggler run

Words and photos by **Norman Holtzhausen**



With a tight deadline to review the new Smuggler Strata 750 Cabin, the weather wasn't playing ball. But the builder dismissed any fears: "I'll be OK, mate – I'm in a Smuggler!" And so it proved.

Smuggler Marine's Strata stable of RIBs, combining fibreglass hulls with Hypalon inflatable tubes, was launched in 2004 and ranges from the 490 centre-console RIB up to monster 14m cabin boats.

The Strata 750 hull – with its centre-console, mid-cabin and twin-engine configurations – is a versatile and popular model. This hull's exceptional stability is well-proven, with the deep 27° deadrise rigid hull providing a smooth ride even through severe chop. On a conventional boat this deep vee would be extremely tender at rest, but that's where the massive inflatable collar comes into play.

Side pontoons deliver superb stability at rest, settling down on the water and completely eliminating any tendency to lean. But at speed three sets of planing strakes lift the pontoons clear of the water, creating a smooth, efficient hull.

This boat's cabin layout is the latest configuration for the 750 hull, with a

“ Built to savour the rough stuff ”



bimini top and clears providing an extended cabin area for further protection from the weather. Up front an overnight cabin has plush, upholstered squabs – and will make for a comfortable sleep.

There is adequate headroom in the cabin thanks to a step-down central floor section. An electric flush toilet is plumbed under the centre squab, while an infill squab drops in to create a generously-sized double berth.

The full-width cabin sits right over the side pontoons, so although walking around the outside of the cabin to the bow is possible (a small ledge is moulded into the cabin sides for this), it's not recommended. Instead, a large polycarbonate hatch provides easy access to the bow from inside the cabin. An anchor winch is tucked away under a neat cover, with an elegant stainless and teak bowsprit holding the anchor when not in use.

In the main section of the boat the helm and passenger seats



LEFT: Up front is a nicely-padded cabin with a plumbed loo under the squabs.
 RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT: Passenger seating includes a king-and-queen arrangement with storage below.



are fully-upholstered, well-protected by the smart black canvas top on sturdy stainless steel supports. The passenger side seat is a king-and-queen arrangement which swings up as one unit to reveal a large storage locker. Under the skipper's seat is a small fridge, and a hatch in the deck between the seats hides a wet storage area.

A beautifully-finished helm sees the instruments set into a carbon-fibre panel. A pair of the new Suzuki electronic gauges – the Suzuki Modular Instrument System – occupies the top section together with the push-button trolling control for the engine.

These instruments provide full engine monitoring and control, and also enable data overlays through the NMEA2000 network onto a Raymarine Hybridtouch multifunction display, installed in the second panel just below.

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The 9-inch Raymarine provides the best of both worlds: it's touch-screen but also has button controls for occasions when a touch interface is problematic, such as when you have wet hands. The screen is bright and sunlight-readable, and provides fishfinder and chartplotter functions in a widescreen layout.

Lectrotab trim tabs are fitted and the controls for these sit just above a Cobra VHF radio on the right. A beautiful Italian Isotta leather and brushed alloy steering wheel adds to the sense of "classy".

Set into the transom on either side of the bait board are two more upholstered seats, bringing total seating to five. But the large side tubes offer additional seating options on each side – this boat can comfortably cope with more passengers than there are seats for.

Out back are moulded steps either side of the engine, somewhat

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higher off the water than a normal swim-step but a boarding ladder on the port side offers easy access for swimmers.

This is definitely not a down-and-dirty fishing boat, although there are a number of rod holders, including a rocket-launcher style rod holder along the rear of the canopy and a bait board fitted to the transom. The cockpit floor is carpeted, and the carpets are easily removed for cleaning.

An additional underfloor locker is large enough to take several dive cylinders and other wet stuff, while the 400-litre fuel tank amidships ensures the trim of the boat is not affected regardless of how much fuel is on board.

POWER

Hanging off the back of the boat is the latest-generation Suzuki DF250AP outboard. The original DF250 was the first V6 four-stroke outboard on the market, and it's no coincidence that these have become a firm favorite with commercial users.

The 3.6-litre normally-aspirated V6, with 24 valves, multi-point sequential electronic fuel injection and double-overhead cams has proved exceptionally reliable, something critically important for anyone who makes a living on the water.

This latest iteration of the DF250 adds new electronic smarts, with lean burn and oxygen sensors to provide a claimed 14 percent better fuel economy. The engine runs on the cheaper 87 RON fuel, further shaving running costs.

But perhaps the biggest upgrade to the DF250AP is the full electronic control, with true drive-by-wire and instrumentation. With only electronic signal cables and power running between engine and the helm, this simplifies installation and adds reliability. Throttle and shift are smooth and light, and control is a pleasure.

Drive-by-wire opens up a number of new possibilities, including the electronic Suzuki Troll Mode System. This allows push-button adjustments to the engine speed at low RPM. No more endlessly fiddling with the throttle to try and get the

PERFORMANCE			
Figures supplied by Smuggler – Range based on 400l fuel tank			
Engine speed	Boat speed	Fuel burn	Fuel use
rpm	knots	L/h	L/nm
1000	6.0	4.0	0.7
1500	8.0	8.0	1.0
2000	10.5	11.5	1.1
2500	15.5	17.5	1.1
3000	22.0	30.0	1.4
3500	27.0	37.0	1.4
4000	29.7	47.0	1.4
4500	32.4	55.5	1.5
5000	36.7	70.5	1.6
5500	42.1	82.0	1.8

“The big pontoons provide excellent stability at rest, and run free of the water under way.”



perfect trolling speed – just push the button to change the revs in 50 RPM increments.

The owner of this boat is a keen paddle-boarder and has commissioned a custom paddle-board rack. This comprises a reinforced and padded stainless steel bar just in front of the usual rocket-launcher at the rear of the canopy, and a second, tall stainless bracket slotting into mounting brackets in the transom.

These will see a couple of paddleboards lashed to the brackets, keeping these long and generally unwieldy craft well out of the way. This same design could be used for kayaks or other similar craft, as

long as they're not too heavy to safely lift up.

As indicated earlier, the conditions on the review day were pretty rough, but the Strata 750 swallowed it up. The deep vee hull sliced smoothly through the rough stuff while the photo boat was being buffeted around a fair bit. While those big pontoons are right out of the water at speed, they are there to provide additional cushioning when needed, coming off a big wave.

We got intentionally airborne several times but the combination of an air cushion while coming down and the shock-absorbing quality of the

RIGHT: Set into the transom on either side of the bait board are two more upholstered seats, bringing total seating to five.





pontoons kept the landings far softer than with most other boats of this size. At rest those pontoons provide superb stability and a level of comfort, knowing that no matter what the conditions this boat can handle them.

The Suzuki proved well-matched to the hull, achieving a top speed (in those conditions) of 35-40 knots. This is a big boat with a fair bit of weight, but the 250 horses got it rocking quickly, and on a better day a higher top end speed will be possible.

Electronic controls, combined with the power-assisted hydraulic steering, make this boat an absolute pleasure. It turns

sharply when asked but no matter how hard it is pushed it remains superbly smooth. At the same time the pontoons create what is effectively an extra-wide chine, so spray was not an issue despite the conditions.

The new owner of the review boat is based in Perth and the vessel was due to be shipped off in a container by the weekend. One of the advantages of the RIB configuration is that the over-width 2.7m beam can be reduced to fit into a container (and also made road-legal for restriction-free towing when required) by deflating the pontoons.

The boat is supplied on a factory-made custom tandem-axle alloy trailer with the Switch Ezy electro-hydraulic brake system for safe towing. The boat comes with a five-year structural warranty on the hull, which is matched by the five-year recreational warranty on the Suzuki.

As is standard for Smuggler, the entire vessel is finished to an exceptional standard. Every detail is right, every join, corner and fitting perfect. The Smuggler graphics are discreet yet smart, and the gleaming stainless work offsets the white, grey and black trim.

A superb boat, with the highest quality of finish and ride handling. ☑

Smuggler Strata 750 Cabin

- **loa** 7.5m
- **beam** 2.8m
- **deadrise** 27°
- **construction** Fibreglass with Hypalon tubes
- **engine range** 150-250hp
- **engine** Suzuki DF250AP-X electronic fly-by-wire
- **fuel** 400 litres
- **water** 80 litres
- **packages from** \$139,000
- **price as tested** \$190,000
- **boat supplied by** Smuggler Marine Ltd, 09 838 9024, www.smuggler.co.nz

