
review

**Smuggler
Strata 700
Amphibious**

WORDS BY
NORMAN HOLTZHAUSEN
PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO
BY **ROGER MILLS**



MAKING TRACKS!

Once a 'party trick' with a limited market, amphibious boats have been steadily gaining traction with a wider audience of boat owners. Smuggler's latest Strata 700 – with its centre console configuration – will add further impetus.



ver the years we've reviewed numerous Smugglers – from the 'baby' rigid-hull 520 right up to the massive Strata 1100 RIB. All exhibit excellent build quality, ride comfort and versatility – every model's a smart package that turns heads wherever it goes.

The 700 extends the legacy.

We headed out into the Hauraki Gulf the first Wednesday of spring in conditions that were less than ideal but based on my previous experiences with the Smuggler boats, I wasn't unduly concerned.

On board with me was another fan of the marque – Rob Salthouse, international sailor and member of the New Zealand's Salthouse boatbuilding dynasty. Rob – a veteran of four Volvo round-the-world ocean races and six New Zealand America's Cup campaigns – is currently back in the country as Team New

Zealand starts to prepare for next year's America's Cup regatta.

This 700 is the amphibious version of the company's proven 23° deadrise hull, with a large centre console and side clears for protection from the wind. Rob likes the way the console is configured – “simple, well laid out and easy to use.”

The clears on either side unzip and unclip quickly – offering easy access to the front area. Putting them back up is equally hassle-free and they provide welcome shelter when heading into the breeze. And happily, the hull/tube design kept the boat dry, despite us travelling at close to 30 knots through a metre-high chop in an open boat.

The Strata 700, as Rob pointed out, has a wide flange built into the hull. This not only directs the spray down and away from the hull, but also takes a lot of pressure off the tubes. The tubes stay dry and water does not track up the sides, often a problem with RIBs.



ABOVE Rugged construction and easy to operate. A camera in the bow relays the terrain ahead to the MFD and also monitors anchoring activities.

BELOW The Yammie 200 propels her to around 40 knots – if you've got the *cojones*.

It's typical Smuggler – smooth, comfortable, and the boat cuts easily through the chop – that deep vee takes care of the rough stuff.



At Rangitoto's McKenzie Bay we deployed the amphibious technology to drive on the beach. The Strata 700's technology is the latest iteration of the Orion hydraulic drive system, with three independently-driven, all-terrain wheels.

And unique to this new model is the bow wheel that lifts and retracts into a space created by extending the tubes forward past the rigid hull. A covered platform hides the wheel away, further preventing any spray coming up from the drive mechanism. This also creates a usable forward deck area for soft baiting or fly fishing. Very neat!

At the same time the anchoring system remains attached to the rigid part of the hull and is similarly hidden under the extended tubes. This means that there are no 'sharp bits' extending from the front of the boat.

In its alternative target market (as a superyacht tender) the Strata 700 can be nudged directly up to the mother ship and passengers can step directly on or off the boat. Since the anchor and wheel are now hidden from the skipper's view, a waterproof camera hidden under the bow assists with steering and also deploying and stowing the anchor.

Other important but less visible components of the new drive system are a tighter turning circle, resulting in improved manoeuvrability. An automatic park feature incorporating a diff lock ensures the boat will not roll away when unattended. Much effort has gone into the control panel for the drive – it's very simple to operate with touch-buttons and a single joystick.

The steering is hydraulically linked to the helm, and with the bow camera the skipper can see exactly where the front wheel is going. Also, because of the taller wheel struts, it's not necessary to tilt the outboard motor before exiting the water. A really simple drive-in, drive-out experience.

Rob's enthusiasm for Smuggler boats relates largely to build quality and design. "The attention to detail is unbelievable, and there is nothing they haven't thought of."

As an example, he pointed to the exhaust for the 40hp engine powering the hydraulic drive. It's been hidden into the support pillar for the bait-board. And because the entire surround can be removed, servicing that drive engine is also very easy. You have 360° access to engine and hydraulics.

Rob also highlighted Smuggler's commitment to Kiwi suppliers. The 316 stainless work – incorporating a fold-down



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T-top to facilitate access into a standard-height garage – is fabricated by local craftsmen. The Ultralon decking, too, is manufactured by Skellerup. It's comfortable on the feet, hard-wearing and looks smart.

Although this is clearly a multi-purpose boat, it's been designed with an eye on the superyacht tender market. "You can comfortably seat eight people – a lot for a boat this size," says Rob. The boat has a payload of over 700kg.

At around 1,600kg dry weight the boat is light enough to be lifted by a yacht crane or boat lift. With all the sharp bits now hidden by those tubes it can safely be brought alongside

without raising the blood pressure of even the most demanding superyacht skipper.

Electronics fitted to the console include a Simrad NSS9 touch-screen chartplotter, Fusion stereo and speakers, and VHF radio. A colour Yamaha LCD display presents all the engine parameters, and the Maxwell anchor winch control completes the dashboard layout.

A soft-touch panel hides the PLC that controls the amphibious drive, while a joystick controls forward and reverse. Rod holders are fitted around the console and transom, with Railblazer units fitted to the tubes in the forward area providing additional



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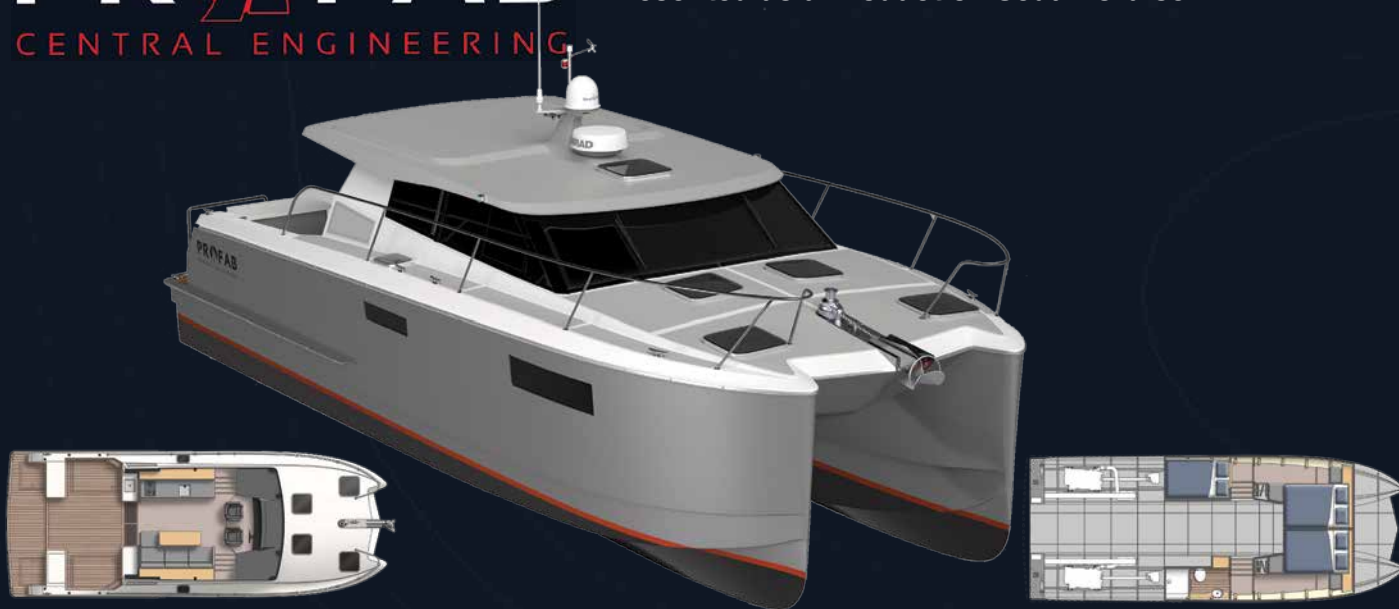
OPPOSITE LEFT Quality construction is a hallmark of the marque.

ABOVE Plenty of room on the dash for the Simrad NSS9 – and more.

PROFAB

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fishing rod capability. The stainless baitboard support also serves as a tow bar for water skiers or water toys.

RIDE

It's typical Smuggler – smooth, comfortable, and the boat cuts easily through the chop – that deep vee takes care of the rough stuff. It's also frugal with fuel consumption. The Yamaha F200 four-stroke outboard provides a 25-knot cruising speed, with the engine ticking over at 3,800rpm.

At this speed consumption was almost exactly 25 litres per hour, which translates to one litre of fuel per nautical mile. That gives the 175-litre underfloor fuel tank an effective

TOP Note that the legs are tall – you don't need to tilt the outboard when driving up the beach.

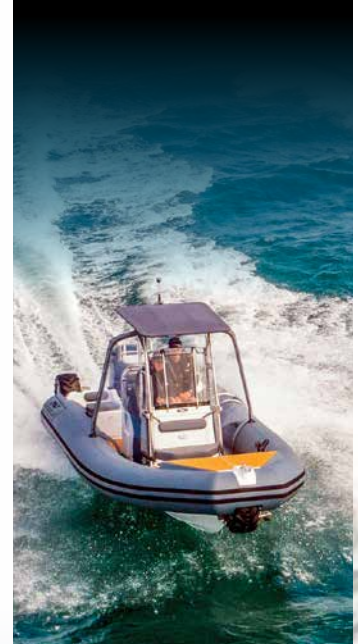
BELOW Are we flying or boating?

range of around 150 nautical miles, allowing for a margin of safety. Of course, the speed freaks can certainly crank her up, and top speed is close to 40 knots.

Back at the marina the advantages of the amphibious design come into their own: none of the usual tying up to the dock and going to fetch the trailer. Simply start the auxiliary motor, deploy the wheels and drive up the ramp. If the ramp had been busy we could just as easily have just driven up the beach. Note – there is an optional trailer for long-distance holidays – and the boat simply drives up onto it.

This is a versatile, comfortable and exceptionally well-made boat. Its extra interior space – and the wide stable platform up front – opens up any number of uses.

This package, including the electronics, folding T-top and the Yamaha F200, is priced at \$242,350. **BNZ**



Smuggler Strata 700 Amphibious

PRICE AS REVIEWED
\$242,250

MANUFACTURED BY
www.smuggler.co.nz

HIGHLIGHTS

The bow arrangement – no sharp bits to damage other boats

Performance – an adrenalin rush

Solid construction, smooth presentation

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 7.0m

beam 2.7m

deadrise 23°

height to top of T-top 2.95m

height to windscreen with top folded 2.56m

ground clearance 470mm

weight 1,600 kg (dry weight)

engine Yamaha F200

electronic four-stroke

fuel 175 litres

cruising speed 25 knots

max speed 40 knots

WATCH IT

