

review

**Smuggler Strata
780 SuperSport**

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VIEW FROM THE BOW

Smuggler Marine's boats extend the boundaries of functionality and design. The latest iteration, the Strata 780 SuperSport, is a new take on the bowrider concept.



L

ike all of Smuggler's proven Strata range of RIBs, the 780SS is a combination of fibreglass hulls and Hypalon tubes and these make for a spacious, stable platform in a range of configurations.

A slight extension of the 750 hull, the 780SS' new layout provides up to five additional seats in the forward area. When added to the six seats in the main cockpit, this gives the boat a remarkable 12-seat capacity. Access to the bow seating is through a split windscreen – a wide walk-through between the forward area and main cockpit.

This bowrider configuration will appeal particularly to watersports enthusiasts. Wakeboard racks are fitted either side of the hardtop, and a Fusion stereo and speakers have been installed to belt out the appropriate beat.

In the transom a strong Smuggler pole-mount provides a base for a ski pole, although in the review boat this was occupied by a stainless steel baitboard and rod holder unit – which indicates the dual purpose of the boat.

Smuggler Marine owner Dave Pringle makes it clear that he builds boats to suit what his customers need rather than simply producing a single design. Few people have a single-function boat – most use it in a variety of ways. Consider that the foredeck area can be completely enclosed with a tight-fitting cover and, with the walk-through windscreen closed, this effectively creates a cuddy cabin up front.

With the clears zipped up you have a snug, sheltered helm area, suited to the vagaries of New Zealand weather and ideal for fishing or other activities on less-than-ideal days. There is even a zip-up backdrop that attaches to the back of the stainless

hardtop supports, creating a fully-enclosed cabin, ideal for those cold winters days or when caught in a squall.

From bow to stern the extended cockpit floor has been covered in foot-friendly Ultralon non-slip decking – wet bare feet are likely to be the norm for passengers. Tek Dek panels on the boarding platforms, where a bit more wear and tear is expected, and UV-resistant waterproof upholstery means that cleaning the entire boat is a simple hose-down job.

Countering the very open cockpit are several dry storage areas. Forward of the helm and passenger seats are very large dry lockers – big enough to sit in – and a toilet with holding tank is an option.

Under the king and queen main seats is another large storage space, big enough for scuba tanks, lifejackets, or any other paraphernalia that may be required for watersports. The hardtop is mounted on Smuggler's typically high-quality stainless work, with the model designation laser-cut into the side supports.



RIGHT Those knife-like strakes give the Strata immaculate cornering characteristics. Hold on to your hat.

BELOW Only one issue with this beautifully-appointed cockpit – you don't want to spill fish guts all over it.



Of course, we could not take the Strata 780SS anywhere near its top speed of 50 knots – we don't have the America's Cup-type drones that can fly that fast.



The previously-mentioned wakeboard holders sit on either side together with rod holders, while a generous rocket-launcher-style rod holder runs along the back of the hardtop.

Again, as is typical on Smuggler boats, the helm position's very comfortable. A fully upholstered seat, with adjustable bolster for back support as well as a raised foot support, offer multiple driving options while seated or standing.

The boat uses maXtek hydraulic steering from Absolute Marine. Engineered for heavy-duty



LEFT Purpose-designed racks for your wake boards.

BELOW A cool place to relax – the superbly-padded bow area.



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RIGHT The cockpit is spacious and easy to live with. The moulded step on the tubes is a nice touch.

BELOW The Smuggler Strata 780 is a versatile all-rounder in ways most large RIBs are not.

commercial as well as recreational applications, it's suitable for inboard, outboard and twin-engine configurations.

Smuggler's carbon-fibre helm offsets the fully digital instrumentation, in this case a 12-inch Simrad NSS Evo 3 system and the Yamaha Command Link engine monitoring display. Controls for the anchor winch and trim tabs complete the helm controls.

Another neat feature of the Smuggler Strata range is the tucked-away anchor position. The bowsprit is positioned below the forward tube, meaning the Strata 780SS can be nosed up against the wharf or another vessel without the anchor causing damage. All Stratas have a brass keel strip, plus a stainless plate behind the towing eye, both designed to protect the fibreglass from knocks and scrapes.

The stern is, of course, set up for watersports, with a generous boarding





platform on either side and a wide boarding ladder on the port side. Unlike many RIBs, the boarding platforms extend almost to the end of the tubes so climbing aboard is easy. Although there is no step-through on the transom, it's an easy matter to clamber over using the stern seats as a step.

Hanging off the back is a Yamaha F250 four-stroke, the new 4.2-litre big-bore V6 block. Renowned for its awesome holeshot performance, this has the low-end grunt to get the 780SS up and going quickly while remaining smooth and economical. A 300-litre underfloor fuel tank provides up to 275 nautical miles of range at 25 knots, more than enough for anyone's day trip.

The fishing option's assisted by a livebait tank built into the stern, while a salt water washdown pump helps keep things clean. Additional rod holders are fitted into the transom surface.

The 750 hull's exceptional stability is well-proven and the extension to 780 has done nothing to change that. Its deep 27° deadrise provides a smooth ride even through severe chop. The tenderness this deep vee might exhibit while at rest is



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completely eliminated by the big pontoons.

The side pontoons provide superb stability when the boat's stationary. Planing strakes under the hull ensure the pontoons lift clear of the water at speed, making the hull both efficient and smooth.

Reviewing this boat was slightly more complex than usual due to the need to produce both the print story you're reading and a video to be displayed on the boatingnz.co.nz website.

Coordinating the resulting cast of thousands took some doing, and with the usual squally Auckland winter weather we headed out with some trepidation into the rain on a less-than-ideal day. Luckily conditions cleared.

Filming with the drone proved to be a bit of fun. Of course, we could not take the Strata 780SS anywhere near its top speed of 50 knots – we don't have the America's Cup-type drones that can fly that fast.

We also tempered the acceleration, since that big Yamaha got the boat flying very, very quickly. All of which is good for its watersport pedigree, of course, where pulling up skiers requires a serious amount of grunt.

The one area where this boat will perhaps not please the wakeboard enthusiasts is in the size of its wake – the hull is too efficient to push big volumes of water, and a very modest wake was all we could muster.

The boat comes on a double-axle braked, multi-roller trailer, and with the tubes inflated



is slightly over the standard road-legal towing width. An overwidth board is provided for daytime towing, while the tubes can also be partially deflated to reduce the external beam sufficiently to allow the boat to be towed at night.

All too soon it was time to stop playing and give the controls back to Pringle so we could head back to the office. Once again Smuggler Marine has produced a high-quality vessel suited to multiple uses.

The downside perhaps is that it is not optimised for any of those purposes, but instead is a multi-purpose boat that will serve its owners very well irrespective of their interests. **BNZ**



Smuggler Strata 780 SuperSport

PRICE AS TESTED
\$171,000

MANUFACTURED BY
Smuggler Marine
www.smuggler.co.nz

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 7.8m
beam 2.8m
deadrise 27°
construction Fibreglass with Hypalon tubes
engine Yamaha F250 V6 4.2-litre
engine range 200-300hp
fuel capacity 300 litres
cruising speed 25 knots
max speed 50 knots

PERFORMANCE

RPM	SPEED	FUEL
RANGE	KN	NM/L
600	3.0	0.90
1000	5.0	1.00
1500	8.0	1.00
2000	11	1.27
2500	18	1.17
3000	23	1.09
3500	28	1.11
4000	34	1.29
4500	40	1.43
5000	45	1.80
5500	48	1.77
5700	50	1.94

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