

# Shark Hunter

**Custom-fished and custom rigged, Larry Wiltshire's  
XT-640 Tournament has the power and range for Serious  
offshore hunting**



With the rain getting heavier by the second, we kept the boat heading into the wind so that the screen and hardtop gave as much protection as possible. At the helm was Larry Wiltshire, the founder, owner, designer and motive force of Spacecraft custom aluminium boats based in Toronto, NSW. We were idling into a brisk chop on Lake Macquarie aboard one of Larry's 5.2 metre fishing-specialised cuddy cabins. It was to be our photo boat for a test of the Tournament XT-640 Spacecraft that was on its way to meet us.

As we waited, Larry brought me up to date with his company's activities and the boats he produces. These run from the zippy 2.9 metre Humdinga MX 290 through to his eight metre Tournament XT800. All the boats are built up to the gun whale line in a jig for accuracy and strength, and then go on to be finished to individual requirements. Larry can deliver anything from a bare unpainted hull -*Cont Next Page*

*Continued* - through to a turn-key, sea-trialed, ready-to-run boat that has been set up to meet the specific needs of its owner. Larry specialises in fish and dive boats, and provides a three-year warranty on his hulls that are fabricated from hi-tensile marine grade plate aluminium.

The rain eased a bit as we talked and, peering through the clears above the screen, we dimly made out the emerging shape of a boat running fast toward us. Another minute or two had Mick Middleton alongside in his twin-Yamaha-powered 640, and we quickly arranged to do the photo runs whilst conditions were marginally brighter.

The 5.2 metre Spacecraft felt strong as we shot off into the chop, and gave a more stable platform for the photography than I'd expected. The 640 looked good through the lens, and I was keen to get on board just as soon as we had a few rolls of exposed film tucked safely away in the camera bag. Non-slip surfaces underfoot made the step across between the two boats quite easy, and I dropped down into the big open cockpit of Mick's boat as Larry slipped away in the 5.2.

## POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Mounted well apart on the 640's transom were two 90 hp (67 kw) three-cylinder Yamaha outboards spinning 15-inch pitch props. That's perhaps a lower pitch than you might expect, but Mick is a serious tournament shark fisherman and he typically takes out 200-plus kilograms of burley along with a crew of three or four mates. That's quite a load, but it's just preparation for the run home when there can be up to eight sharks weighing a ton or more in the cockpit. Lugging weight levels like that around, the lower pitch props allow the Yamahas to deliver plenty of thrust and they still top out at 31 knots (35 mph/57 kph) on the GPS. Economy is good too with Mick experiencing a 30-mile run out to sea and back, and the running whilst out there fishing, consuming around 150 litres.

There's a pair of 200 litre tanks under the cockpit floor, so even extended shark hunting excursions leave a good level of reserve fuel capacity.

The helm is well rigged with the wheel at a comfortable height, and the supportive bucket seat is located so that driving is relaxed whilst either standing or seated. The screen height is as I like it - you look over it when standing and through it when sitting down. Clears bridge the gap up to the hardtop, with zip-out panels for better visibility and/or a blast of fresh sea air. A full set of gauges is set around the wheel, with the throttles and shifts mounted on a panel to starboard.

The Spacecraft lifted quickly on plane, and the 20-degree deadrise hull slipped easily through the wind-blown chop. Larry has designed the 640 with a finer entry than his smaller boats (the extra size giving all the forward buoyancy he needs), and the ride was commendably smooth. Mick has added foam into the under-floor spaces, and that quietens water-on-hull sound levels as well as giving additional positive flotation. The 640 turns well and quickly with little effort needed on the wheel. The widely spaced outboards made lower speed maneuvering a snap and, with one Yamaha in forward and the other in reverse, the boat spins on its own axis an ability Mick has found useful when fighting sharks.

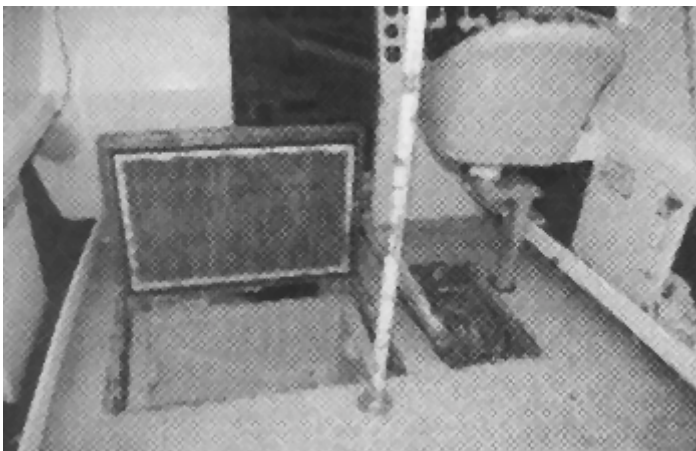
A rocker switch in the port throttle lever controls the trim of both outboards, with separate switches centrally in front of the throttle base allowing individual tuning of trim angles. The latter can be used to trim the boat laterally - again because of the wide-apart mounting of the engines. I was pleasantly surprised at how responsive the boat was to lateral **trim, and a slight** tendency to run starboard-side-low (possibly from the torque of both props spinning in the same direction) was quickly corrected with a touch of bow-up on the port engine trim. Cruising speed is around 25 knots.

A tunnel down the centre of the undersides fills with water when the boat is at rest. The weight of the water centrally low in the boat gives added stability when anchored or drifting, and at very low speeds. The water drains through holes in the transom, and it takes just a few boat lengths under acceleration to clear the tunnel and shed the weight for faster speeds.

## LAYOUT

Between the Yamaha engines is an extension of the cockpit that gives walk-through ability to a door aft of the outboards. Through that door, **Mick can haul sharks** on board using an electric winch he has mounted right up front in the vee of the cuddy cabin seats. The cockpit is wide, long and totally uncluttered for offshore action. The skipper's seat can be quickly removed to further open up the floor space. Stowage racks are along either side, with more storage under the floor. Just forward of the transom, a live bait tank is also under the cockpit floor. Rod holders are across the transom coaming and in the side decks, with more hardware finding a home in the rocket launcher across the back of the hardtop.

The latter is very securely mounted and braced, and carries a tuna tower for the greater range of visibility that additional height gives. Down the aft sides of the hardtop side panels are combined grab-handles and footsteps that make it easy to climb up top out of the cockpit - non-slip panels on top of the steps help too. The underside of the hardtop is carpeted and holds a cabinet for electronics up forward Mick locating his Eurovox stereo radio-cas - *Continued next page*



*Above - Underfloor storage is thoughtful and practical.*



*Above - The cuddy is fitted with a power winch to drag Sharks aboard.*

*Continued* - sette and GME 27 Mhz radio there.

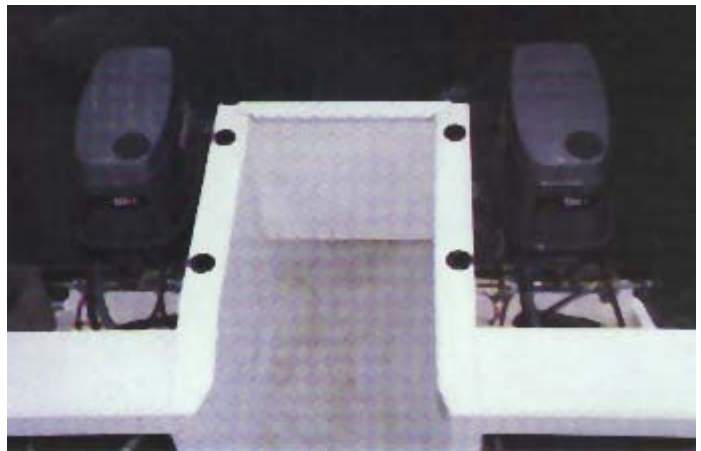
A large flat panel behind the screen gives space for more electronics, in this case holding a JRC JLR-4 110 GPS and a Raytheon VS50 colour echo sounder. The screen itself is tough with a frame formed in heavy-duty aluminium moldings and with glass in the front panels - lighter acrylic is used in the side panels. The cabin is large enough for over-righting with vee seats long enough to be used as berths. There's more stowage down the cabin sides and under the seats.

On the foredeck, strong guardrails run aft from the bow, which has a large bollard and anchor roller. Non-slip panels on the deck give secure footing. More bollards are on the transom quarters, and Mick has bolted an additional bollard on the starboard cockpit coaming.

Mick chose a Spacecraft hull because he wanted a very strong craft and because he knew of the good service and support that Larry gives to the owners of his boats. From my point of view, the XT-640 felt tough and reliable; it gave a sense of confidence and security which probably stems at least partly from the five millimetre plate that Larry uses for the undersides, with 4 mm in the topsides and 3 mm above the gun whale. The construction, fittings and rigging carried a stamp of quality and experience, as did the attention to detail in many areas. The Spacecraft 640 looked smart and felt well balanced - a point Larry emphasized as important in our discussions, and an aspect of his boats to which he gives particular attention. Spacecraft boats can be built to survey standards for commercial operators. For more information, call Larry Wiltshire at Spacecraft on (02) 4950.4083.



*Above - The helm is comfortable and fitted with all the desired options.*



*Above - The walk out transom is practical especially with rod holders fitted and an opening door*