

SPACECRAFT 5.2m Cuddy Fisher

Built with strength and practicality in mind, Spacecraft's 5.2m hull is ready and willing for serious fishing. Graham Lloyd reports.



I'VE had the pleasure of testing several of Larry Wiltshire's Spacecraft fishing and dive boats over the last couple of years, and have always come away impressed with their strength and practical design. Larry makes a point

of understanding the use to which his boats are being put, and invests extra effort to accommodate the everyday, real-world demands of those uses in each boat.

Spacecraft boats are good looking in a serious sort of way, with a high quality (but not overly flash) finish. The hulls are built up to their gun'ls in a jig for accuracy, and then Larry finishes the Cabin and interior as required for the owner's purpose. Larry designs all his own boats, and construction is carried out in his factory at Toronto south of Newcastle, NSW.

On a grey and rainy day, Larry took me for a test run in this 5.2m Spacecraft and, despite the weather (or even perhaps because of it), we had a great time as I put the boat through its paces and waited in vain for the sun to emerge so that the photos could do justice to the boat.

Design

Spacecraft boats are built more strongly than most, and Larry used very solid 5mm plate for the undersides of this 5.2, with 4mm in the hull sides and 3mm for the cabin. That helps explain what at first appears to be a quite heavy bare-hull weight of 650kgs, and it also explains the rock-steady stability of the boat in the water. For even further stability, Larry can build the boat with a centre tunnel that floods at rest. The bottom carries a constant 17 degree deadrise over the aft third or so of the hull, with a 650mm wide planing plank to help get the craft quickly running over the surface.

On board, the cuddy cabin has a recessed footwell for extra leg room, and is fitted with upholstered seats and storage to each side. The helm position is reasonably forward to make possible a larger cockpit area, and is covered by a very well secured hardtop. Clears bridge the gap between the hardtop and the screen, and that was just as well on the day, as they kept us quite dry despite the rain all around. Two swivelling chairs with arm rests and padded upholstery made Larry and I feel securely comfortable, and were positioned so that driving was just as good whether standing or seated.

The cockpit featured a huge insulated kill tank (or a monstrous cooler if you wanted to cater for a party on board) with a padded seat on top. Under the floor in front of the transom was a big live bait tank; storage pockets ran down each side of the boat. Also under the aft floor were the oil containers for the two Evinrude 70s, while the batteries were properly mounted in their own boxes to either side at the transom. Not to waste any of that underfloor area, forward of the kill tank were two 150 litre fuel tanks.

The self-draining cockpit is quite deep so you'd feel secure even when lifting a big one over the side, and there are handrails down each sidedeck along with rod holders and, in each stern quarter, good-sized bollards. Vertical grab rails come down from the back of the hardtop. An eight-pack rocket launcher runs

across the back of the hardtop, so there's no shortage of spots to keep the rods.

On the back were mounted the two Evinrudes, while up front, the fore deck has its own rails and a nicely sized anchor locker in the forepeak.



DRIVING

The helm position suited me, with starboard of the wheel, and a very workmanlike relationship between the latter, the seat, and the throttle/shift controls on the side of the boat. There's a big flat area behind the screen where you can put all your electronics, with this boat having a Raytheon EchoStar 790 GPS Navigator Echo Sounder. This, together with a GME 27 mhz radio and a Codan 8121 marine transceiver that were mounted in the side of the companionway into the cabin, showed the owner of the Spacecraft was quite serious about his navigation and communication facilities. It was pleasing, but not surprising in one of Larry's boats, to find a strong grab rail across the port side of the cabin top so the first mate could get a good grip. At the wheel, you have the classic alternative of looking through the screen while sitting, or over the top of it when standing. The screen itself has a substantial frame, with toughened glass in the front panels and acrylic in the sides.

The owner had just rerigged his Spacecraft with the two Evinrudes, replacing a pair of 50hp engines. Larry recommends a minimum of a single 90 on the boat, but the design can take up to twin 90s if you want the loads back home after each fishing expedition. The Evinrudes were still tight and running standard 17 inch props, but they quickly ran the boat on plane and cruised with relaxed style. The Spacecraft swept through the wind-blown chop with a soft and predictable ride. Turns were smooth and as quick as you like, and the twins as usual made low speed twisting and backing very easy. Top speeds range from around 56kph with a single 90 through 70kph with twin 70s up to around 74 kph with two 90s on the back.

The only thing I didn't like at the helm was the trim button for the starboard Evinrude which, in the top of its throttle arm, was too close to the side of the boat for easy operation. Actually, I'd suggest wiring both trims through the port button so using it alone would get the outboards to the angle you want, then the starboard button could be used only if needed to correct any slight trim misalignment between the two engines.

Wrap up

Larry has a range of Spacecraft from 5.0m through eight metres, and he can supply each craft at any stage from bare unpainted hull through to a fully finished, rigged, sea-trialed and ready-to-go boat. The 5.2 are more or less mid range and typify the style of boat that Larry produces. Strong and practical with sweet-

handling performance, the 5.2 gave me a pleasurable run and that big kill tank in the cockpit personified the great fishing you could have on board. For more information, call Spacecraft on (02) 49504083

