

Whittley's Stylish New 550 'Pocket Cruiser'

Following the astonishing success of the Whittley Cruisemaster 700, and the 2003 released 660 cruiser, brothers Neville and Steve Whittley turned their attention to expanding the family owned company in two new directions. Firstly, they have purchased a factory in the United States to build Whittleys 'Stateside. Secondly, and capitalising on their Aussie success, they are releasing another contemporary Whittley cruiser – this time, openly targeting the “first time” cruiser buyer. Darren Shiel words & pics.

With the acquisition of Darren Boxrall, a computer design specialist (with a background in motor industry design studios) and their own in-house computer technology, the Whittley team has launched an inspirational new 550 cruiser blending all the high tech methodology with their deservedly famous and very traditional boat-building methods.

Although Whittley has long had the Impala 5.3m in their range, the boat had become outdated, especially when compared to their own stylish 660 model.

After months spent trying to nail down a 550C to test, and a visit to the Melbourne Whittley factory, we were

finally in luck, scoring the outboard and the stern drive versions (on different days) to allow a more comprehensive comparo.

Design Keeping in line with the usual aim of Whittley Boats, the 550C is squarely designed to appeal to the leisure/cruising market. Set to appeal mainly to young families with limited budgets, the 550C will strike a chord with boating lovers and Whittley fans alike.

The main aim of this boat is to accommodate a small family for weekends away in the boat. Unlike most production boats, all Whittley Boats come standard with features such as a plumbed sink, portable stove unit,

full length berths with in-fills, a marine toilet and exceptional space utilisation.

The 550C continues this long held Whittley tradition.

Statistically, the 550C measures 5.30m in length, by 2.20m in width. The boat has an overall moulded length of 6.07m, while the hull carries a true 19-degree deadrise. The boat has two full-length berths, along with a full width stern platform (stern drive model).

Engineering/Construction

Utilising a number of new to Whittley production features, the 550C breaks new ground for the company.

The boat is completely designed on the computer, with everything

receiving the high technology treatment. The boat is broken into its parts, such as hull, deck, hull lining and then right down to every small part on the boat, such as hatch lids and doors.

The computer can generate like environments, to simulate how the boat will perform in the water.

The deck is built on the computer, changing and adding curves to increase the aesthetics of the boat, with the calculator calculating everything from cabin headroom, vision angles, walkway widths, and hand controls. The computer even makes sure all the cupboards open properly, using computer generated 3D figures.

The computer also has the abilities to calculate the exact weights of the boat, and predict the centre of gravity, a very important aspect when considering the boat's handling traits. This is especially important to Whittley, allowing them to ensure optimum performance for both the stern drive version and the outboard version.

The end product therefore, is very well designed and user friendly.

Whittley Cruisers has also developed a new construction method with this boat.

The computer design, combined with the in-house milling machine, allows Whittley to produce exact scale models. These scale models allow the team to run the boat in the water test tanks, enabling them to study the aesthetics of the boat and its handling characteristics.

This milling machine also allows Whittley cruisers to make a 100% accurate plug, constructed of foam material, after which the mould is then taken.

The boat is layered up in full fibreglass layers, and includes no timber throughout the boat. The main three layers, comprising the hull, hull lining and deck, are then joined together.

Using specially designed epoxy resin, the floor lining is joined to the hull. Once the two components have bonded together, the resultant cavity between the floor and the hull is then foam injected, to provide the boat with sufficient positive buoyancy to provide level flotation if swamped, a very important safety factor.

Finish As we've come to expect from all Whittley boats, the finish is



superb. The gelcoat and GRP mouldings are manufactured to an industry-leading standard.

The great thing about this new computer generated design is the aesthetic appeal, with the 550C using curved and rounded lines, to maximise the boat's usability and ease of maintenance.

The small things make a difference to the Whittley boats. Extra touches such as the Teflon skid pad for the anchor chain on the bow, strong deck hardware and intelligent design utilising all available space throughout the boat set Whittley boats apart from the competition.

The only negative I could find with this boat with regards to finish, was the canopy set-up on both boats. Factory

fitted, I found the canopy to be flimsy, poorly designed and made, and constructed from cheap materials. This is most unlike any Whittley product. The flapping from the canopy was sure to annoy any owner, and clearly didn't come from the CAD program!

Helm Set-Up In keeping with the recent Whittley styling, the 550C helm layout is similar to a late model automobile.

The helmsman has clear vision both forward and astern.

The dash arrangement includes all necessary gauges to allow close monitoring of the engine functions, a 4x switch panel, and also an optional CD player and 27 meg radio. I found the throttle controls lower than I'd like.