

Sportsman Reef 17

Getting airborne in the slop was great fun and you didn't dread the landing either due to the hull design ensuring great comfort and a cushioned effect.

By Luke Galea

The range of fibre-glass salt-water fishing and pleasure boats built in Australia has recently been bolstered by a tried and tested, true performer originally hailing from the good old U.S.A. Ladies and gentlemen, I am talking about the Island Reef series of ocean-going craft brought to you by the legendary "Sportsman" stable. Sleek in appearance, these boats just ooze class. There is little wonder why the opportunity to manufacture these immaculate and practical vessels on home turf was snapped up by forward-thinkers in Australia who simply knew just how popular these boats would be across the nation for a wide variety of fishing and boating applications.

Starting out in the U.S in 2011 and from the first hull being shipped in 2012, the demand for Sportsman boats has expanded exponentially. Commencing from humble beginnings, this reputable brand is now firmly etched upon anglers minds at an international level. Sportsman headquarters is in Summerville, South Carolina and encompasses a

wide variety of models flying under this banner. Although Sportsman boats had been imported and sold in Australia for quite a few years already, I remember very clearly in August 2020 when Sportsman Boats Australia announced on social media that the Island Series was soon to be hand-crafted from start to finish in Melbourne, Australia. The hype was electric. The Aussie fishing fraternity reacted to this announcement with great excitement, anticipation and positivity as the calibre and quality of these boats was already very well-known down-under. Melbourne is currently focused on building vessels from the Island Reef series but in time, there is also scope to build other models from the Sportsman range here in Oz.

The Island Reef 17 (overall length 5.2m) is available in four different colours and aesthetically, it is an amazingly beautiful craft. I have had my eye on them for a while now, so when the invitation was extended by Andrew Camilleri from Reef Marine Mackay to take one for a spin, I just had to take advantage of such an amazing opportunity. I could hardly wait for the day to roll around.

Launching the boat in Mackay's Pioneer River certainly attracted its fair share of onlookers. Yep, she's a head turner that's for sure, but more important than looks of course, is the main reason most people would buy a boat – practicality for its purpose. The Island Reef 17 has this in spades. Upon my initial inspection, it was obvious that the unique hull design and clever layout of this spacious centre-console just screams versatility. I couldn't help but notice its beamy 2.14m width and elevated casting deck and think just how awesome this rig would be for throwing poppers and stickbaits around the islands or across the reef flats. Plenty of space between the console and gunwale ensures five people could comfortably jig or drop down baits in deep offshore waters.

It's mere 300mm draft gives it ability to be floated in the shallowest of water so even fly fishing for bonefish or golden trevally over the sand flats is a high-value option if that's your caper. In fact, a big part of the meteoric rise of these boats in the States was off the back of chasing giant tarpon on the shallow flats on the fly.

I honestly feel that the Island Reef range is going to be a very popular option for those contemplating a fibre-glass offshore vessel. Its range of features, 10-year hull warranty, performance, aesthetics and extreme versatility in being able to tackle whatever fishing style you want to throw at it, makes it a very strong and capable option for those in the market.

The internal layout is extremely fisher-friendly and boasts exceptional attention to detail.

Neat storage options are concealed within the roomy floor and console. The two seats located on either side of the transom

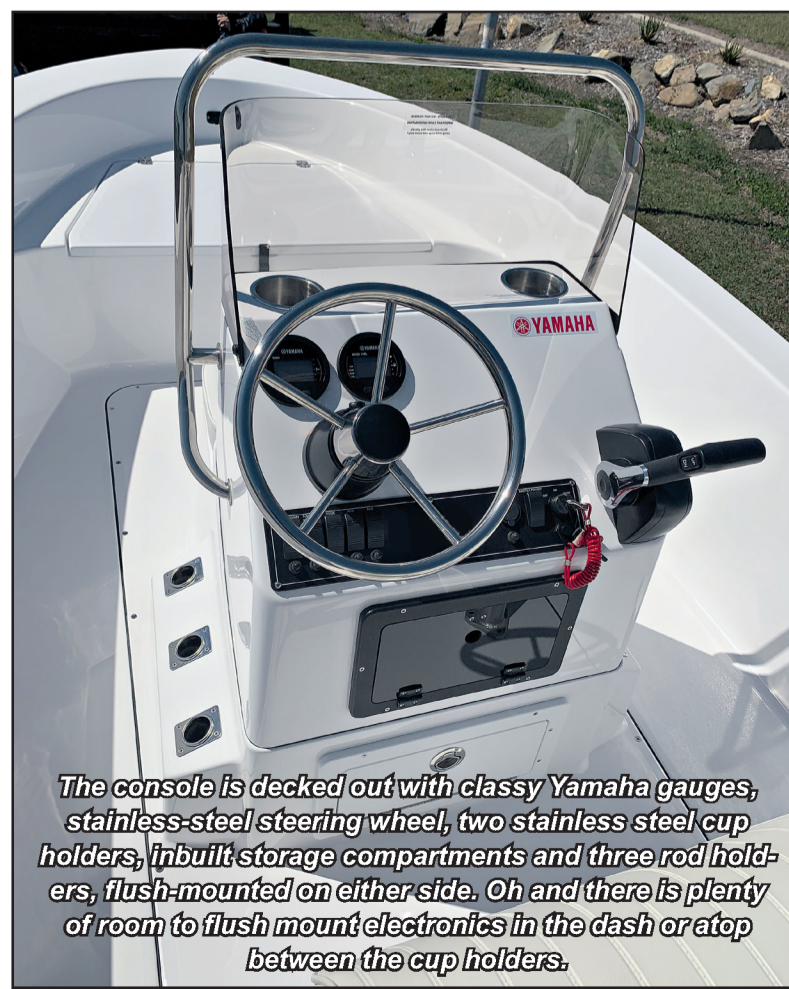
enclose a large storage compartment/kill tank/esky on the port side and plumbed live-well in the starboard corner and of course, like most boats, the largest storage hatch is located beneath the front casting deck.

The console itself presents very nicely with classy Yamaha gauges, stainless steel steering wheel, two stainless steel cup holders and plenty of room to flush mount electronics into the dash or atop if you so desire.

Another seat is situated immediately in front of the console and windscreen and as a really neat little feature, the storage compartment beneath this seat incorporates a cargo net useful for cradling more delicate items for those times when conditions may present themselves to be somewhat unfavourable.

Continued next page

The unique hull design and 16 degree deadrise makes for a comfortable, cushioned ride in not so favourable conditions. Note the port navigation light inconspicuously concealed within the rub-rail.



The console is decked out with classy Yamaha gauges, stainless-steel steering wheel, two stainless steel cup holders, inbuilt storage compartments and three rod holders, flush-mounted on either side. Oh and there is plenty of room to flush mount electronics in the dash or atop between the cup holders.