

When you need a weekend escape, it pays to have a fishing boat that's designed for a quick getaway.

The **get-away**



vessel

Words **Rebecca Hayter** Photos **Gareth Cooke**



Just do it. That's the key to getting away for the weekend: check the forecast, pack the chilly bin, top up the fuel, tell someone your intentions for the trip, launch the boat and go.

You need the right boat for the job though, and Ian Harvey – the foreman at Craig Partridge Yachts in Kerikeri – reckons

he's got it: the Weekender 7.7.

Auckland designer Kevin Dibley of Dibley Marine Architects designed the hull for the 7.7m trailerboat for a Kerikeri client.

"The key was to keep it simple, light and achieve high speeds in total control in adverse conditions," Dibley says.

The boat began construction at Craig Partridge Yachts in Kerikeri but when the

client's circumstances changed, Ian liked the boat so much he took it on as his own, including the design of the cabin and interior. His concept was for a fishing boat for the boys or a weekend escape vessel with a significant other.

He took over the project as a hull in glass over ply with 18-degree vee, taking shape in a female mould.

"We had the plywood panels all developed from Mylar templates," Ian says. "That way we could scarf all the plywood in straight sheets and cut them out, and everything is pre-developed. You lay it all inside your frames and it all fits together quite quickly. It becomes a four or five-day process to have the hull set up in the mould."

He added five fore and aft girders, and built the deck and most of the interior before removing it from the mould. The hull was then turned over for the bottom finishing, including a spray chine either side running three-quarters the length of the boat. Its three bulkheads plus the transom means it is a nice stiff boat and displaces 1800kg.

Photographer Gareth Cooke and I met Ian at the ramp at Waitangi Yacht Club and launched the boat from its multi-roller GT Trailer. We set out into open water off Russell where the skyline was dominated by a large cruise ship. There was a moderate chop on the water which the Weekender 7.7 munched over easily. It was a pity the conditions weren't providing a better testing ground as the boat appears to exhibit good sea-keeping ability, courtesy of her fine entry and the 18-degree vee.

Good sea-handling was a priority for Ian.

"In the bay, quite often past Tapeka Point, going over toward Roberton Island and further out, it gets quite choppy," he says, "and we get quite a sea state running so the idea of the hull is that it's got a nice vee in it and is very soft riding and we can be as comfortable as possible. We [Craig Partridge and I] were very impressed with the performance of Kevin Dibley's hull design the first time we took it out.

"The idea is to stay dry in the cabin, so if it's raining you can pull up next to your





mate's boat, slide the window open and have a little chit-chat without having to go outside."

The plywood construction and simple interior make the boat relatively light for its size, so the Honda 225hp easily pushes the boat to a top speed of just under 80km/h (43.2 knots) at 6000rpm. At 4000rpm it comfortably delivered 56km/h (30.2 knots) which also seemed an agreeable speed for the cormorant flying along beside us.

"The secret in achieving the speeds is the careful placement of the longitudinal centre of buoyancy, as well as keeping the build light and the buttocks aft, flat," Dibley says. "There has been so much literature, study and tank testing over the past century on powerboat hull shapes that it would be pretty hard to get it wrong, unless you try something that is outside the normal. This launch is certainly not 'outside the square' as such."

The flat aft sections help to provide a barely-perceptible transition up onto the plane. At rest the boat feels stable, although it reacts to weight on one side of the boat and some chine slap is discernible. The trim tabs will help ensure she travels at best trim for the conditions.

In moderately hard turns she held a reasonably flat attitude and remained a comfortable ride. She was readily obedient, steering-wise, while backing up, but shipped generous dollops of water through the twin open transom.

The cabin, designed by Ian, is in composite and fully lockable. It's a lovely space thanks to the almost, all-round windows, light cream paint finish and light faux teak and holly sole. The passenger

and helmsperson each have a pedestal seat; other passengers inside need to stand. The helm position is good – a little far back for me but the typical owner would probably have the benefit of longer legs – the throttle position was fine and visibility was pretty good although I had to sit up and peer to see over the foredeck (but again, most people would be taller). Offsetting that, the windows give good views for most of the 360 degrees. The curved windscreen is acrylic moulded.

The helm console is an attractive, moulded GRP array of Raymarine chartplotter and Honda Marine instruments for volts, speedo and rpm. The wheel in faux walnut delivers firm, positive steering. There are controls for the trim tabs, a fuel tank gauge (220 litres), water tank gauge (60 litres) and control for the electric windlass on the bow. The anchor stows underdeck up for'ard, raised and lowered by a rope-chain windlass.

A simple teak trim lifts the interior décor and provides handholds, although not quite deep enough to get a really solid grip on them. The vee berth is forward with padded shelving running above. The berth was long enough for me but a six-footer might struggle to stretch out.

The galley, to starboard, is basic with a two-burner stove, an 85-litre fridge, a small sink and cupboard and an extremely nifty slide-out pantry to port. The headroom is massive, about 2m inside and 1.8m under the hard bimini extension in the cockpit. There is generous, secure stowage under the for'ard berths and under the saloon sole, long enough for fishing rods.

The electric head is just to port inside the saloon-cockpit bulkhead and is in a



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tight space. Privacy is compromised by the choice of a pull-out, almost transparent screen rather than a solid door which would have created more space issues. The gas califont is mounted low against the slope of the hull, just behind the toilet.

The cockpit has plenty of room for four to fish in comfort with generous toe kicks, wide coamings for good angler support and the shelter of the bimini. Seats in the cockpit double as lockers. The central island is home to the fuel filler and a hot and cold water shower.

There are two rod holders a side and drained storage space for rods in the cockpit liners, but no washdown, live bait tank or

built-in ice bin, so it suits casual fishing rather than hard-out tournament fishing. Fuel and water tanks are under the cockpit sole. The start and house batteries are in a self-draining locker beneath the for'ard cockpit sole.

Weekender 7.7

technical

- ▶ **loa** 7.7m
- ▶ **beam** 2.5m
- ▶ **displacement** 1800kg
- ▶ **draft** 250mm
- ▶ **power** Honda 225hp
- ▶ **trailer** twin-axle GT trailer
- ▶ **price** \$195,000 + GST

BOATING'S VERDICT

The Weekender 7.7 nicely combines easy fishing and cruising. Either way, it looks set to provide a safe, comfortable ride which will serve its passengers well in the open waters of the outer Bay of Islands.

Ian calls it "a bit of Kiwiana", reflecting its simple approach to boating and that is one of its charms. It's an easy boat to manage, and that makes it ideal as a quick get-away vessel for the weekend.

PROS

- The boat's rough water handling ability
- At 1800kg, the Weekender 7.7 is easily powered to good average speeds by a Honda 225hp
- Good views from inside the boat
- A spacious cockpit suitable for the casual fisher

CONS

- At \$195,000 plus GST with a Honda 225hp and multi-roller GT trailer, it might struggle to compete with fibreglass production boats in its size range
- Compromised privacy in the head
- No livebait tank or washdown

