

GAME ON!

Still tingling after his encounter with Surtees' 7.3 Gamefisher, Angelo San Giorgio goes big game hunting with its little brother, the 6.1.



WEATHER CONDITIONS

Wind: 20 - 25kts SSE
Sea: 1-1.5m and messy



ON THE WATER

Story: Angelo San Giorgio
Photos: Ellen Dewar



My Kiwi mate Jason is a practical guy. He's a get-your-hands-dirty sort of bloke who doesn't stand much for pomp and ceremony, a truckie who reckons Stubbies and King Gee shorts are the closest thing to designer labels that will ever grace his frame.

A big bloke, Jason comes across all serious and intimidating when you first meet him, yet scratch through that menacing veneer and he's actually a big softy underneath. He's loyal, dependable and doesn't back down when the going gets tough.

My mate has plenty in common with Surtees' 6.1 Gamefisher, except Jason gets seasick and doesn't float all that well.

A HAPPY ACCIDENT

This test came about as the result of a rather fortunate coincidence. I'd arrived at Melbourne boat dealer M.Y. Marine to test the recently-released Stabicraft 1850 Supercab, and discovered our assigned camera boat was still in the workshop. In need of a replacement that would also double as a viable test subject, we settled on another NZ immigrant in the form of the Surtees 6.1 Gamefisher.

"Dr Crack-a-Back's not getting my business today"

To be honest, this particular model had been on my radar ever since I took the company's flagship 7.3 Gamefisher surfing in 4-5m seas off the coast of Victoria's Warrnambool in a region ominously known as "The Shipwreck Coast". That encounter left an indelible impression and has served as a yardstick for most boats I've tested since.

The 6.1 Gamefisher we were about to unleash on Port Philip Bay is the spiritual successor to the original Surtees 6.1m Barcrusher. No, it's not a typo... and my lips are sealed.

Legend has it that the edgy and innovative hull design that defines all Surtees boats was conceived by boilermaker Neil Surtees in 1993 when he couldn't find a production vessel to meet his exacting needs. One can just

imagine the conversations in the pubs and clubs surrounding Neil's home waters of Whakatane — the correct pronunciation of which would probably get me fired — when the general boating public first heard rumours of a bloke designing a boat with a gaping hole in the transom that actually let hundreds of litres of water flood in below the floor.

"Don't we have bungs to prevent that sort of thing?", "What's he making, a submarine?"

Neil had the last laugh, however, and many of those nay-sayers and their offspring have since become proud Surtees owners after realising the unusual hull actually worked. Very well.

METHODICAL MADNESS

To elaborate for those who have been

living under a rather large rock for the past two decades, Surtees hulls incorporate a keen leading edge to slice through chop that moderates towards the transom — 20° in the case of the 6.1 Gamefisher. The company refers to this rather descriptively as their Non Pounding Super Deep V Hull.

To negate the inevitable tenderness inherent in Deep V hulls, Surtees employs a flooding keel chamber that fills at rest to settle the chines deeper into the water and improve stability when stationary. Cavity size and volumes vary with hull size, from 180L for the diminutive 4.85 Workmate that so impressed our judges in Australia's Greatest Boats 2011, to 530L for the surfing 7.3 Gamefisher.

The 6.1 Gamefisher on test is graced with 300L of ballast, or Original Stabilising Ballast Technology in Surtees-speak. A simple cord-and-rope-jam actuated gate allows water to be trapped in the keel, essentially creating a heavier, more balanced and significantly denser underwater structure to aid in progress through the rough stuff. Opening the gate prior to planing sees the ballast water



Left: The boat performed exactly as expected — and as desired. Above right: Comfortable roto-moulded shell seats. Bottom right: Room for up to four anglers to fish in comfort.



On the plane...
Clean, uncluttered lines
Clever technology that works
Functional yet simple hardtop
A fishing boat designed by fishermen

Dragging the chain...
You don't get more than you need
Your mates will want to steal it from you
The baitboard's too big for the tiddlers I catch



“The entire experience was intuitive, as if the boat could sense my intent”

jettisoned in around five seconds, creating negligible impact on acceleration from a standing start.

Either side of the keel cavity is a complex matrix of six stringers — three per side — which are welded to the floor then reinforced with cross members at 400mm intervals, locking them in place. The alloy checkerplate floor is then welded in situ, creating a pair of rigid airtight voids that are factory pressure tested for integrity. This Ultra Strengthened Deck System, while not entirely unique to Surtees, adds to the overall impression of innovative design.

WATER TORTURE

Once again, I lived up to my nickname “Weather Magnet” as a stiff 20-25kt south-south westerly whipped up Port Phillip bay into more than 1m of froth — not dangerous, just potentially very uncomfortable. The waves were vertical and close together, with the odd trough revealing the local council had not been steamrolling in the area. Good thing I have my chiropractor on speed dial, although my spine remained relatively intact after a rodeo ride in the aforementioned Stabicraft 1850.

At the insistence of Theo Rozakis, the fish-bothering host of Channel 31’s River To Reef fishing show and one of the principals of M.Y. Marine, I flattened the throttle, made the Honda 135 scream and hung on for dear life.

For those of you not familiar with my local waterway, Port Phillip is generally comparable to Queensland’s Morton Bay or any other broad, relatively shallow waterway you’d care to mention. It’s open and exposed without the benefits

of islands or significant headlands to create shelter, not that I needed it. In fact, standing behind that tall, toughened glass screen, all was right with the world to the point I kept running away from the camera boat searching for dirtier water.

The fall-away of the cabin ensured great vision even when we did push that nose up a bit. We hit the slop head on, beam on, and barrelled downwind. I found myself no longer driving the hull, but rather pointing the nose in the general direction I wanted, and the 6.1 Gamefisher did the rest.

On throttle, off throttle, trim up trim down, the entire experience was intuitive, as if the boat could sense my intent, and it responded without argument. No significant bangs, jarring or scuttle shake. I kept waiting for it to bite me, but it didn’t. Dr Crack-a-Back’s not getting my business today.

After 20 minutes, the Surtees and I synched with each other’s rhythm and kept the big Honda four-stroke on song. I drove until our photographer ran out of film, or so she said (do they even still use film?).

For a period, I locked down the ballast gate and trapped 300kg of water on-board. While I could feel the additional integrity the weight provided, I found the ride so good without it I’d probably only engage it if conditions were utterly atrocious rather than just moderately bad. I reckon it could be just the ticket if you were making a long moderate cruise home after a trip to the continental shelf.

I didn’t log my normal in-test performance figures because, quite frankly, I don’t believe they should



Above: Everything clear and close to hand at the dash. Right: Spacious cabin will offer some welcome respite. Below: Manhole-sized forward hatch is large enough for Maori warriors to storm through. Below: Starboard windscreen wiper is an absolute must if you drive like a maniac...and why wouldn't you?



TRAILERBOAT RATES THE SURTEES 6.1 GAMEFISHER	
1 Fun factor	★★★★
2 Innovation	★★★★
3 Design and layout	★★★★
4 Quality of finish	★★★★
5 Handling and ride	★★★★
6 Stability at rest	★★★★
7 Ergonomics	★★★★
8 Standard equipment	★★★★
9 Value for money	★★★★
10 X-Factor	★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★

FISHING FRIEND

Surtees brochures constantly reference the company’s commitment to fishing, and I found nothing to the contrary. Four anglers can quite easily conduct proceedings from this platform and the fishing cockpit is a natural extension of the functionality evident throughout the Surtees 6.1 Gamefisher.

Gratuitous use of upholstery on coamings and side pockets has been eschewed so as to not take any focus away from all of that delicious aluminium. Raised shelves that skirt the perimeter are broad and deep and the transom shelf houses the

battery(s) at a good height. A simple folding bench is flanked by removable side seats and topped by a generous filleting / workstation with four rod holders and a very nice removable ply cutting board.

The port transom has convenient step-through access with a large plumbed livebait tank with perspex viewing window tucked in for good measure. Coamings are of a generous height and thoughtfully draped in rubber tread deck, punctuated by six alloy rod holders and four flush-mounted cup holders, which can also hold sinkers while rebaiting.





govern the way you drive this rig. I did run the standing start and rev counts but I fatally stuffed up the GarminGPS to the point where it refused to cough up the info I attempted to capture. Trust me to leave the hand-held at home.

MORE OR LESS

I managed to pry myself from the wheel just long enough to take in my surroundings, and to be honest, there wasn't much there that was out of place. In fact, there wasn't much there at all.

In typical Surtees fashion, what's been left out makes the boat just as much as what's been included. The helm is simple to the point of severity, but that's not really a criticism since you probably won't be paying much attention to the gauges. This boat is best driven on gut feeling.

The tiller sits at a natural height so it's not too taxing after several hours at the helm and everything falls naturally

to hand. Once again, that broad shelf formed between the windscreen and the helm is a practical touch and a great spot for wallets, phones and other pocket adornments. In this instance, a 7in Garmin GPSmap also resides there — with enough space for another. Below the shelf there is a neat cabin divider with a zip door to provide access to the spacious cabin behind.


The single wiper to starboard is an option box I would definitely tick, even if you don't drive like a maniac. The rotomoulded shell seats are fine, as are the token padded seat squabs and backrests. And once again, simple yet functional seat boxes are included — no more or less than you need.

Overall, the welding's so consistently good that even close-up it looks like an exercise in aluminium origami, seemingly folded out of one sheet. A slight exaggeration, sure, but the quality of welds on most NZ product,

as well as an increasing number of local rigs, gives me confidence that the dark art of alloy welding is being carefully nurtured.

THE WRAP

To the uninitiated, Surtees and their ilk may seem somewhat stingy in their appointments, but closer inspection reveals everything you need, and usually in the most considered form. They excel as fishing platforms and the inclusion of an enclosed hardtop just adds to their functionality.

But to drive the 6.1 Gamefisher is to love it. Fair dinkum — and I am going to go out on a very shaky limb here — alloy boats like the Surtees (and a couple of others recently tested) prove once and for all that production fibreglass boats no longer have the monopoly on ride quality. If you have any doubts, get your arse into one today and be prepared to eat your words. 

SURTEES 6.1 GAMEFISHER

HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: \$73,990
Options fitted: Paint and Nyalic finish; dive ladder; Garmin 750S combo; Raymarine VHF radio; cabin divider; plumbed livebait tank; walk-through transom; folding rear bench; clip-on side seats; and more.
Priced from: \$64,990

GENERAL

Type: Plate alloy fishing hardtop
Material: Aluminium — 5mm bottoms, 4mm sides
Length: 6.24m
Beam: 2.37m
Weight: 1350kg (BMT)
Deadrise: 20°

CAPACITIES

People: 6
Min. HP: 100
Max. HP: 150
Fuel: 170L
Water: 300L (ballast)

ENGINE

Make/model: Honda BF 135
Type: Four-stroke DOHC inline

four-cylinder / 16-valves
Weight: 253kg
Displacement: 2354cc
Gear ratio: 2.14:1
Prop: 14.25x17in

MANUFACTURED BY

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