



Boat Test by John Eichelsheim

Every once in a while I step aboard a boat a boat and think 'wow!' That was how I felt when I climbed onto the new Seaforce Discovery recently

For Seaforce has been building a range of small boats fibreglass boats known for they're for their sweet handling. For most of those years owner of Seaforce boats have been pestering the firm to produce something bigger than the 15foot Utility-perhaps a eighteen footer. After three years of development, the boys have gone one better with the Discovery 645 MAV (multi activity vessel), a full-blown general-purpose offshore cruiser of 6.45m overall. The boat manifests the accumulated ideas and experience of two lifetimes of boating and boat building and it's a cracker.

The Discovery is a striking looking boat, quite different from the general run of production fibreglass boats available in New Zealand. It's quite bluff and broad inn the shoulders with a unique deck line which steps down three times from the bow (drop sheer line) giving the boat a purposeful stance and hinting at its blue water aspirations. It's a big, beamy boat with lots of freeboard, a relatively fine entry, 20-degree vee at the transom and marked reverse chine's aft.

The stern treatment is quite unconventional almost portafino, but raked more steeply than normal, with a sloped planning surface under the boarding platform to give lift when the boat is reversing.

It's a big boat in most respects: quite tall and weighing in at around 1.8 tonnes as tested.

Certainly my diesel Terrano knew it was towing a boat particularly on the steeper grades and I was thankful for the excellent over-ride brakes fitted to the Monarch tandem trailer.

Launching at Gulf Harbour was painless and we were surprised by how few trailers were parked at the ramp given that an America's Cup race was on with the starting line in plain view. Ignoring the temptation to zoom over and join the spectator fleet, Rick and I fired up the 200hp OptiMax (supplied by Mike's Marine, Silverdale) and got down to the serious business of putting the boat through its paces.

Oh and we thought we'd have a bit of as a fish as well.

It's very clear that the Discovery is a labour of love. There's some superb detailing and lots of good ideas throughout its interior. Seaforce has gone to great lengths to present the boat properly using only the best quality upholstery and the top quality fittings. One example of the innovative touches is the little moulded step on the starboard seat pedestal, designed to aid embarking.

Another excellent idea is the access hatch behind the dashboard, which allows easy inspection and maintenance of all the wiring electronics and steering installation. Yet another neat touch is the way all of the cabling is tucked away into the space between the hull and the deck.

As expected performance with the 200-hp Mariner is excellent. We easily manages an indicated 50-mph into a building easterly sea with the hull seeming to relish the speed. In fact, ride improved the faster we ran. At a comfortable 40mph we covered a lot of water in a very short time and were soon out to Tiri.

The helm position is good especially when the seat is adjusted properly (before and aft and up and down adjustment is possible), all the instruments are easy to read and the toughened glass windscreen keeps wind and spray out of the eyes.

For vertically challenged drivers, there's a drop helm step and the Sea Star wheel adjusts for rake. The moulded footrest is well positioned and the passenger has a decent stainless steel handrail to hold onto.

We stopped at the buoy close to Shearer's Rock to throw a few jigs at the sometimes-resident kingfish. Rods stored in the folding stainless steel rocket launcher were brought down and placed in the rod holders in the back of the seating modules. They're very useful for storing rigging rods while you're fishing and I'm a great believer in having rods ready to go at a moment's notice as some of the best opportunities in fishing last only seconds.

Our jigs produced only a few halfhearted follows from rat kings and we quickly decided to leave the buoy and try fishing for snapper behind the island. The sky threatened rain and the wind looked set to fill in from the east so we didn't know how much time we'd have.

We anchored over a likely looking bit of foul: an easy operation thanks to the Maxwell chain rope winch system, which is completely controlled from inside the boat.

The Discovery has a huge anchor locker, so carrying enough warp and chain is not a problem. Access to the sharp end is good, too, either through the generous acrylic hatch in the cabin or via moulded side decks. A good quality stainless steel bow rail supplied-like all the stainless on the boat-by Waikato Stainless Steel, offers some security forward.

The cockpit is a generous size. We easily fished three anglers without any crowding and 830mm of freeboard make it very safe in big seas. Teak coamings are warm to touch and wide enough to sit on, although I found that the gunwales were too high to make comfortable seats for someone of my height (175cm) The layout is practical with the moulded sink unit serving as an excellent platform for my optional bait board. The sink unit is equipped with a foot-pump-operation fresh water tap and an integrated tackle box is standard. Across the transom are a number of hatches to access the batteries (two), oil reservoirs, pumps and other paraphernalia. A bait locker on the port side could easily double as a live bait tank



There's removable seating on the port side quarter and plans to fit a removable insulated bin into the starboard side. Interestingly. Seat bases in-fills and the like are made from strong lightweight PVC plastic, rather than plywood, which is more common. Consequently, there's no chance of rot or water damage.

The pullout Perspex transom door (branded with the Seaforce logo as many other components on the Discovery) accesses the large, non-slip swim step (double tiered on the starboard side). A stainless telescopic dive ladder is in operation.

The moulded cockpit liner is non-slip and self-draining. A 5000-lph-bilge pump is fitted as standard to quickly dispose of any water that finds its way inside the boat. Storage has been well thought out on the Discovery. Full-length side pockets will accommodate a lot of odds and ends, including

Tag poles, gaffs and fishing rods. There's more shelving forward and in the cabin. Under the floor two hatches lift out to reveal a 140-litre stainless steel fuel tank (ample with the economical OptiMax but any size tank can be specified) and space for fish bins, dive bottles, spare rope and much more. The seat bases also contain useful storage and there's quite a bit of room in the lockers under the seat squabs in the front cabin.

Incidentally, because nearly every space between the hull and the liner is foam filled (40 cubic feet of foam), the forward lockers are superbly insulated, making them ideal for storing food etc.

An interesting feature of the boat is the hidden tube lighting around the inside of the cockpit. It's unbreakable and provides subdued diffuse light for night fishing or other activities after dark.

The forward cabin is large and airy, aided by the open bulkhead on the side, fully lined and quite large enough for overnighting. There's space for a portaloos (a courtesy curtain is available) and a stowaway gas cooker is an option. In-fill squabs and bases stow neatly behind the helm and the cabin floor drains into the bilge. Halogen lamps supply the lighting. The fishing proved to be extremely frustrating with hordes of undersize snapper demolishing our pilchard baits within seconds. A succession of small fish did nothing to fill the bin and we were forced to try elsewhere after the first packet of bait disappeared in 30 minutes.



Our second spot was no better, although a couple of the fish were over the legal limit just. Still with nothing to show for our efforts and the rain looking ever more likely, we up anchored (so easily) and shifted again. Alas spot three seemed to be populated by the same ravenous hordes of pickers as the other tow had been, and another move was soon undertaken. It would be nice to report that our final attempt over the sand of Army Bay produces the goods, but it didn't. Once again small snapper, and lots of them, ensured we were soon out of bait and out of patience. With the rain beginning to fall at last, we called it a day about 6pm.

By this time the sea had built and was running with a decent two metre easterly swell and the typical harbour chop on top of that. The Tiri Channel was its usual self, but the Discovery made short work of the passage. We pushed along at a better than thirty miles an hour, comfortable and reasonably dry. Ride and handling excellent. The chines do a good job of shouldering the seas aside and the Discovery is dry under most conditions. Only with a stiff breeze on the quarter did we get spray on the toughened glass screen (by Sandbrooks Taylor Made Systems), which does a fine job of deflecting it from the seated passengers.

As already mentioned the boat seemed to revel in speed and performs best, and a most comfortable, skimming across the top of the waves. Of course speed is not always an option and severe conditions will mean making slower progress. The big Opti provides heaps of power on demand so picking your way through big seas should present no problems.

We put the Discovery on the trailer pretty soon afterwards, fishing-less but having enjoyed a great afternoon with an interesting and very capable newcomer to the New Zealand trailer boat cruising scene. Design as something of an all rounder, the 645 is nonetheless entirely suitable for serious blue water fishing on both coasts, as well as a diving and family boating. And Seaforce can customize the boats to any specification or supply the as a 'bare boat' equipped with a variety of seating options and just standard features (a comprehensive list nonetheless). In this guise the Discovery retails for \$37125 plus the motor of your choice.

All Seaforce Discovery meet CPC standards and come equipped with Epirb, fire extinguisher, flare pack, nav. lights, and switch panel, instruments-even a first aid kit. The list of optional features is almost as long as the list of standard features. The Seaforce Discovery's 6.45 is versatile, well finished and beautifully detailed all-round. It has real blue water aspirations with performance to match. With a variety of fit-out options and a huge list of features. It is suitable for a range of application, included serious sport fishing