



BOAT TEST: QUINTREX FREEDOM CRUISERS
STORY AND PHOTOS: RICK HUCKSTEPP



QUINTREX'S NEW WATERSPORTS WEAPONS, THE 540 AND 580 FREEDOM CRUISERS ARE POLLING WELL, WRITES RICK HUCKSTEPP.

A VOTE FOR FREEDOM

With family board sports increasing in popularity, the number of skiboats bobbing up at boat shows is on the rise. Missile-shaped craft adorned with the latest in anodised

bar work designed to hold racks of boards and skis, as well as audio systems that would shame the majority of those in the average household, seem to be the status symbol among the younger set that enjoy

the watery outdoors.

I can't help but think this trend is at the expense of PWC sales in many parts of the country. In any case, many sales have been lost to imported boats, with some 3000



fibreglass sterndrives imported and sold in Australia in 2005 alone.

All that skiboat flare, pizzazz and regalia comes at a price.

Those wishing to dabble in this area of boating often hold back in fear of outlaying serious dollars for a 'suck and see' project that might not be the source of the fun they're searching for.

Recently, I received notice that Quintrex had a couple of boats for me to look at that had been released at the Melbourne Boat Show.

Sure enough, Telwater had evolved its Millennium hulls into yet another segment of the market with the 540 and 580 Freedom Cruiser.

Both of these models feature Quintrex's

Maxi 2 transom, which in itself offers increased buoyancy in the aft end of the boat, with a finish very close to something that has come out of a fibreglass mould. A large, full-beam platform performs well as a swim-out, seat or stowage area for skis and boards. It also acts as a veranda over the Alpha sterndrive leg.

A telescopic drop-down boarding ladder



Clockwise from top: The Freedom Sport has the look of an imported bowrider; Helm offers all the bells and whistles; The Millennium hull has this boat riding nicely; 4.3 MerCruiser powers the 580; Mercruiser leg with alloy prop.



is secreted under the swim-out without interfering with available topside space.

MAKEOVER

The Maxi 2 transom has had a big makeover and the size of the transom bulkhead has been increased to house the inboard motors. The 540 Freedom utilises the 3lt, 135hp petrol MerCruiser, while the 580 is teamed up with the 4.3lt MerCruiser, outputting 190hp.

The hump at the forward end of the engine box rebates on the port and starboard side, making for a cosy wraparound lounge, a place where you can safely wedge yourself during high-speed manoeuvres. The full-beam top sunlounge rises on gas struts and the engine box has its own lid that also provides support under the expansive lounging area. Lifting the engine box lid, one can see the effort that has gone into soundproofing. The result is pleasantly effective. The belts at the front of the engine are easily accessible for servicing and a rotaform insert under the engine will catch any oil or other

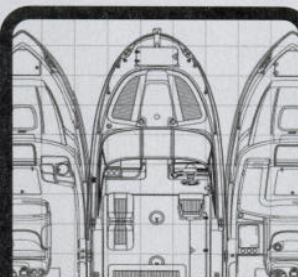
deleterious material that might leak. This box is fitted with a dash-operated blower, as seen on all inboard petrol engine-driven boats. The air is vented astern.

There is stowage space on either side of the engine box. While the battery occupies one and the power steering pump for the engine leg is installed inside a modified battery box and fitted in the other, both have either wiring harnesses or power steering pump lines running across the open space. If these areas are used for stowage and whatever is in there rolls around, it might spell trouble down the track in either of those mechanical or electrical departments. I would have liked to have seen the offending articles re-routed and held high against the transom bulkhead.

Under the permanently-fixed lounge base, a hatch comes away, revealing a rotaform stowage box either side of a smaller aperture that leads into the bilge where a pump is located. This is the true aft end of the bilge of the boat and it is totally sealed off from the

engine compartment. This prevents any inflammable liquid or its fumes from permeating the underdeck area of the cockpit, where the engine box blower would have no affect.

Also under the main deck, there is extra flotation in sealed plastic bags. This can be seen through the drain at the bottom of a stowage hatch in the main deck between the helm and passenger seat. Further buoyancy is fitted under the coamings behind the intricate cockpit liners that feature sidepockets, and drink and rodholders.



QUINTREX FREEDOM CRUISER

HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: \$41,775 / \$34,818

Options fitted: Stereo

GENERAL

Material: Aluminium 4mm

bottom, 3mm top / Aluminium 4mm

bottom, 2mm top

Length overall: 6.55m / 6.3m

Beam: 2.38m / 2.38m

Deadrise: 12 degrees / 12 degrees

Max/rec HP: 220 / 135

Weight, boat only: 1118kg / 985kg

CAPACITIES

Fuel: 120lt / 95lt

People: 8 / 7

ENGINE

Make/model: MerCruiser TKS /

MerCruiser WPS TKS

HP: 90 / 135

Displacement: 4.3lt / 3lt

Weight: 383kg / 288kg

Leg: Alpha / Alpha

Gearbox ratio: 1.62:1 / 2:1

Propeller: 21in alloy / 19in alloy

SUPPLIED BY:

Estuary Marine, Mandurah, WA

Phone: (08) 9581 8444

Website: www.quintrex.com.au

HIGHS

- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ Soundproofing works well
- ✓ Good holeshot

LOWS

- ✗ No gauge on resale value
- ✗ Stowage on either side of engine box may cause problems
- ✗ Slight oversteering at times

Swivel bucket seats feature at the dashboard and lifejackets and other gear may be stored under the dash and retained by an elastic mesh.

A hinged gate between the helm and passenger module opens, as does the split windscreen, allowing one into the bowrider area. Seating here is plush, with full-height backrests lipped over the coaming for elbow comfort. The bases hide stowage boxes made of rotoform material.

The functional anchor well is at the bow of the boat, where there are low profile rails for the passengers.

READY TO PERFORM

To say we were pleasantly surprised by the performance of these two boats would be an understatement. The 580 performed with exhilarating power and felt like it had the weight of an equivalent 'glass boat'. The engines were quiet with little reverberation travelling through the aluminium superstructure. The on-water ride was quiet also, no doubt partly due to the extra buoyancy fitted underfloor.

At the helm, holeshot on both boats was faultless and manoeuvrability easy enough for those weak in the arms. At idle, there was slight evidence of oversteering in the 580 which corrected when the leg was trimmed up slightly from full in or when the revs of the engine were slightly increased.

The low centre of gravity of these weighty engines delivers a good deal of stability and a soft ride to the hulls.

With the 580 running at 3000rpm, the cruise speed was 30mph on the dashboard gauge, or around 49km/h. Wound out to full throttle of 5000rpm, it could crack along at just over 56mph, which converts to 90km/h.

The 540 stretched its legs to 38mph, or just under 62km/h at full throttle.

As seen by the retail pricing, these boats have hit the mark price-wise and will allow families to start skiing or boarding on a smaller budget; cheaper in fact than they would if they opted for a similar boat with outboard power.

Well done Quintrex. You're on the money with these two rigs, for sure.

