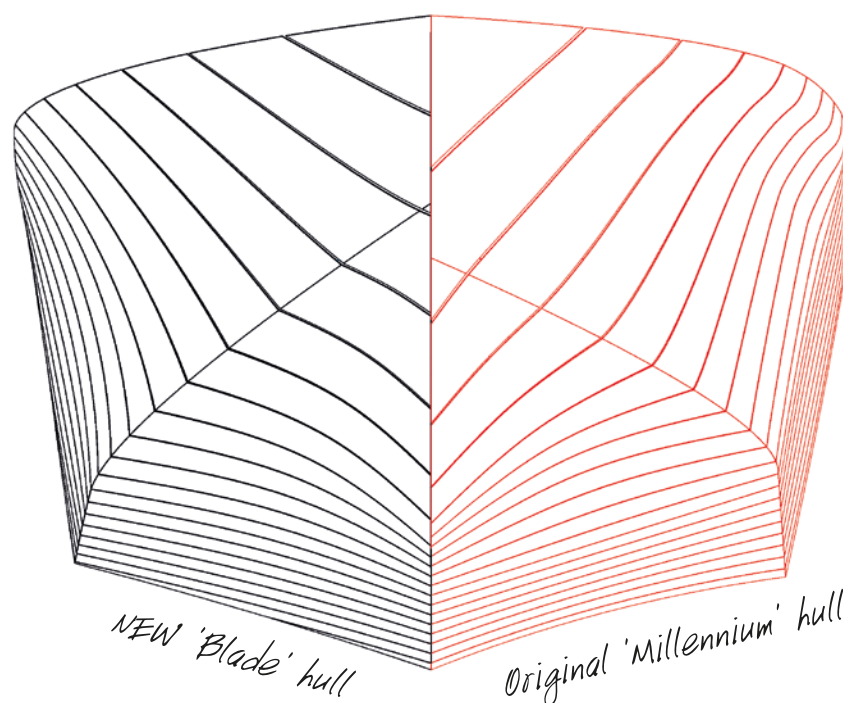


A SHARPER BLADE

Quintrex introduces a new standard for bluewater tinnies



Quintrex, Australia's iconic brand of aluminium boats, has delivered an improved version of its already ground-breaking Millennium hull. Warren Steptoe tests the new 'Blade' hull and finds it a revolutionary improvement that blends the toughness and advantages of aluminium with the performance required on the open ocean.

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In Australia, the smaller boat market shows a preference for aluminium hulls. However, that changes when the boat is purchased specifically for offshore fishing. There is sound reasoning for this. Tinnies do stand up well to abuse on rough roads and typically sub-standard launching facilities. But out on the bluewater, fibreglass is often a better choice because the relatively sophisticated hull shapes of 'glass boats make them more comfortable to travel in and fish from on the open ocean.

This does leave those bluewater anglers faced with bad roads and other hazards in something of a quandary. Do they choose a

boat to suit towing and launching conditions, or do they opt for a boat tailored to open-sea conditions where a curvaceous and weighty 'glass boat is often ... well, nicer!

LOCAL ALTERNATIVE

One of Australia's best solutions, for some years now, has been offered by Quintrex. They have a proprietary process to stretch aluminium sheet, forming hull shapes considerably more sophisticated than other aluminium brands. The result is a hull with more of what I like to call 'seakindliness'. They initially used this process to create the characteristic Quintrex flared bow, but in 2000 they also began stretch-forming the

hull's bottom sheets to create a variable deadrise hull they called 'Millennium' (for obvious reasons).

Quintrex's stretch-formed, variable deadrise hull revolutionised the perception of aluminium hulls as rough-riding, noisy boats – a view that persists among competing brands. Quintrex's enclosed water boats (in particular the deservedly legendary 'Hornet' range) have been clear class-leaders ever since. Their offshore hulls, however, faced firmly entrenched opposition from 'glass hulls, which despite Quintrex's best efforts, generally maintain their superior seakindliness to dominate the bluewater fishing scene.

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To claw back some of the market, and to celebrate their 40th anniversary in 2008, Quintrex introduced a 'Vee Flare' variation of the Millennium hull to their bluewater fishing models. This extended the steeper deadrise achieved by those stretch-formed bottom sheets further aft. It resulted in a clear step forward in seakindliness comparative to 'glass hulls of similar size. For the first time, Vee Flare hulls compared reasonably well with all but the very best fibreglass offshore fishing boats. From that point forward, bluewater anglers faced with bad roads and bad ramps could take advantage of aluminium's ability to shrug off such abuse without getting badly beaten up every time the wind blew over five knots. Which, of course, it seems to do every time we plan to fish offshore!

NEW MILLENNIUM

For 2011, Quintrex introduced the next generation of Millennium to their bluewater hull range. They have named it the 'Blade'. Blade hulls feature an extensive reworking of the bottom shape and are available only in hulls larger than six metres. These are Quintrex's 610 (6.1m), 650 (6.5m) and 690 (6.9m) hulls, which include the Freedom Sport (bowrider), Spirit (cuddy cabin) and Legend (centre console) models.

After first testing the Blade hulls at their launch I was satisfied that, in terms of a soft ride, Blade represents a profound step forward. Without the benefit of side-by-side testing it's difficult to make an accurate comparison between a Blade hull

and its fibreglass competitors. But after spending time in several different Blade-hulled boats, notably the 610 and 650 Spirit cuddy models, my gut feeling is that Blade still hasn't quite reached the heights of equivalent Signature and Cruise Craft hulls, for example. And they are certainly no match for the best American hulls of similar size.

However, having offered an opinion that Blade-hulled boats aren't *quite* up there with 'the best of 'em', I should also say that there are plenty of 6m to 6.5m 'glass hulls from lesser brands that these new Quintrex boats compare favourably against. Of course, with any boat, it is the overall suitability that is important. The on-water abilities of this new Quintrex hull, combined with the toughness of aluminium, are what will make these boats winners.

TESTING CONDITIONS

These opinions were formed after a day when wind against a falling tide had the Gold Coast Seaway standing up in conditions sufficient to test the presence – or lack – of

any hull's soft-riding characteristics. And as for how the Blade hulls handle big-swell conditions, there came an opportunity for a whopper ferry-wake broach test. Jamming a boat between a pair of metre-and-a-half wake waves, then pulling the throttle back until it starts surfing, tends to quickly reveal a variety of undesirable idiosyncrasies in most craft. After several attempts, I couldn't get the new Blade hull to exhibit any nasty habits at all. So it passed that test with flying colours!

Most of the development in this new hull has taken place in the bows. Immediately noticeable is a more acute rake to the stem angle. And if you look closely, you can see that the area where the bows cut into chop now has a steeper deadrise. These new angles also reflect back to the hull's 'shoulders' where the bows swell out to full beam. Here the new Blade hull is noticeably slimmer, and the narrower shoulders reduce the pronounced flat surface that previous Millennium hulls exhibited where the hull's bottom met the chine.

"Blade represents a profound step forward."



SPEC CHECK



PRICE AS TESTED

Both the 610 and 650 Spirit test boats were priced at \$56,750.

PRICED FROM

Basic boat/motor/trailer packages start around \$53,700.

OPTIONS FITTED

Mercury 175 Optimax Pro XS, bimini top, transom door, rocket launcher, boarding ladder.

GENERAL

Material: 3mm aluminium sides, 4mm bottom and transom.

Hull Type: Variable deadrise monohull

Length: 610 – 6.08m; 650 – 6.35m

Beam: Both 2.4m

Deadrise: Variable

Weight: 610 – 760kg; 650 – 873kg (hull only)

BMT Towing Weight: 610 – 1450kg; 650 – 1560kg

CAPACITIES

Maximum Rated Power: 610 – 175hp; 650 – 200hp

Maximum Engine Weight: Both 256kg

Maximum Number of People: Basic flotation: both 8

Maximum Number of People: Level flotation: 610 – 6; 650 – 7

Fuel: Both 120 litres (With optional second tanks)

ENGINE

Make/model: Mercury Optimax Pro XS

Type: V6 direct-injected 2-stroke

Rated hp: 175hp

Displacement: 2507cc

No. cylinders: 6

Weight: 195kg

Gearbox ratio: 1.87:1

Propeller/s used for test: Mercury Vengeance 17-inch pitch

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ESTABLISHED DESIGN

Inside, the 610 and 650 Spirit models follow a route well established among Australia's cuddy cabin offshore fishing boats. A roomy, high-sided cockpit provides the necessary thigh-high leg support around the periphery. There's an aft lounge across the transom, and an optional workbench and livewell mounted in an aft bulkhead, which includes a transom door.

A rod-stowage 'rocket launcher' above the helm seats mounts a shading bimini top. The windscreen sports a singular yet noteworthy departure from convention with an opening centre section. This facilitates very easy access to the bow for anchoring and so on. Don't be surprised if some of the Spirit model's 'glass competitors soon follow its lead here!

The cabin and screen lines are new on the 2011 model Spirits. It's a nice change that I think makes them much better-looking boats. Their two-tone paint is another option that enhances their appearance.


PERFORMANCE POWER

Performance wise, the 175hp Pro XS Mercury Optimax outboards powering both the 610 and 650 boats I tested provided spirited performance, with top speeds well over 35 knots.

Mercury Optimax motors deserve more recognition, in my opinion, when power alternatives are being considered. The 175s certainly made our test boats sit up and take notice, delivering a shove in the back reminiscent of the good old days of carburettor 2-stroke power. As indeed contemporary low-emission, direct-injected 2-strokes such as the Optimax motors tend to do.

I'm not arguing the popularity of 4-strokes (I own one myself), and unless they intend to use their Spirit for towing kids on wake toys, I suspect that many people would be happy with 150hp on either of these hulls. However, if a 150hp 4-stroke is your choice, my advice would be to look at one of the V6 150hp 4-strokes rather than an inline 4-cylinder motor.

Thanks to Mercury's SmartCraft instrumentation in one of our test boats, I can report remarkably miserly fuel consumption. Our 175 Optimax was burning less than 20 litres per hour at 3000rpm and cruising speeds around 25 knots or thereabouts. As I said, Optimax motors should be considered more often!

The new Quintrex Blade hull is very definitely worth a long, hard look from any bluewater angler with something to gain from the advantages of an aluminium boat. 

HIGHLIGHTS

- The softest-riding bluewater fishing tinnie yet.
- Great-looking boat, especially with optional two-tone paintwork.
- Interior layout follows a well-established and successful formula for fishing cuddy cabs.
- The toughness of a tinnie combined with a ride as good as all but the best 'glass hulls.
- Performance and fuel efficiency with Mercury's direct-injected 2-stroke 175hp Optimax.