

BUILT WITH A PASSION

The Strata 550 is suited to outboards 60-90hp.

Text & Photos by Barry Thompson



Smuggler Marine have in a few short years established an international reputation for their Strata RIBs, more especially their tender range. Barry Thompson took their most popular model, the wide bodied Strata 550 for a run.

THE FIRST SMUGGLER RIB LAUNCHED in 2004 was a 7.5m version, with the range of tenders and trailered RIBs now extending from 4.5 to 11m. They have proven very popular both as luxury tenders as well as recreational sports boats. The ability to be able to offer custom finish tenders is a big plus and owners can get exactly the layout that suits their purpose. Smuggler split their RIB range into three separate divisions; family cruisers, Strata tenders and amphibious ribs, of which there are now more than 25 models available. The Strata 550 is one of 14 models in the Strata RIB range and according to Smuggler Marine's David Pringle is also their biggest selling model. "Currently the RIB division of Smuggler Marine makes up about 80% of our business, and it's growing all the time. We have built 54 of the Strata 550s," says David.

David Pringle admits that he is very passionate about his RIBs and he loves building, designing and releasing new models. He was the first outside Sealegs themselves to embrace the Sealegs Technology on a RIB and to date has built just over 20. Not bad for a very specialist type of boat.

"We have never had so many boats on the order books and with about 2/3rds of those for the local market I am more than happy the way the market is heading in New Zealand.

The deep vee hull under the current Strata 550 is a new generation from the earliest Strata 550, being about 300mm wider, offering more internal beam and is being marketed now as the wide-body version.



The very efficient hull gets the boat right up out of the water at speed.

There is some flexibility in the hull mould, as it is also used for the Strata 450, 490 and 520 models.

Smuggler offers both PVC or Hypalon for the tubes, with about 25% of the owners choosing the more expensive Hypalon. David commented that most of the Strata 550s he builds for superyacht tenders were in Hypalon. The tubes have five chambers with safety ropes inside and out and double wear patches where required. The hull is a two piece grp construction with an inner liner. Smuggler offers a five-year structural hull warranty. Under the cockpit sole is a 90-litre stainless fuel tank and a dedicated ducting tube for all the controls and electrical wiring through to the helm. Nice and tidy and out of the way.

CHOICE OF LAYOUTS

The basic Strata 550 starts with a grp

sole, completely open with no console or seating. From there it's your choice. You have the option of a side console with some access down the port side or a jockey console with a central helm and access both sides. You can add a teak floor if you want to give the boat that luxury look and then there are various seating layouts as well.

Our test boat had the most popular option, with the side console arrangement. Personally I like this better than the jockey console where your passengers have to sit straddling the seat behind you. Sort of like a PWC or motorbike. There is still excellent access down the side and with the double helm seat and forward seating style there is sitting for five people...and that's without utilising the tubes.

The double helm seat on our test boat has storage under and a reversible roll back cushion. You can have single or twin pedestal seats, twin buckets or nothing at all. It's your choice.

The helm is extra large on this model and allows for up to a 12" MFD screen, plus still leaving space for all the other instruments and switches. Probably a 5" is enough, but if you do like the look of a big screen, then no problem fitting one. The perspex screen works keeping the wind off your face when driving and there's also a good solid handhold surround.

The bow seat hinges to give access to not only the deep anchor locker and all the required anchor tackle but also the battery box. The extra weight of the battery forward helps to balance the boat better than having the weight of the battery in the transom. Something I appreciated when driving the boat on my



Plenty of useable space all round.



The console is very generous in space and storage.



Under the seat you have the option of a cooler bin.

own. A moulded fibreglass support holds the stainless fairlead in place.

In front of the helm seat is a fully insulated chilly bin/storage with seat cushion lid. There is also two in sole storage lockers as well as extra dry space in the helm console. No shortage of places to put both wet and dry gear.

POWER OPTIONS

Our test boat came with an Evinrude ETEC 90, which gave a top speed of ?? knots. The base boat comes with an Evinrude 75hp ETEC. David says that they have built a few with 115hp outboards, but when they do, they raise the transom to 25" (standard 20") to cater for the larger engine. Quite frankly I reckon the 90hp is enough power for the Strata 550. On a calm upper Auckland Harbour, with just myself aboard, I found the boat

extremely responsive and acceleration was exceptional. Even at maximum speed and with a lot of trim, it wasn't hard to control. However, if you are going to run the boat with an 115hp outboard, you will need some experience to drive it safely at speed.

The underwater sections are so efficient, the boat runs only on the last 20% of the hull at speed, so there's not much hull in the water. The tubes certainly help stability both at speed and it really comes into play at rest. The wide overhang also helps keep the boat dry.

The Strata 550 is a very capable and versatile little boat that is not only a nice size for a big boat tender, but also is small enough for having fun with the kids, beach launching and with the smaller horsepower very economical to run.



Both the battery and anchor tackle is stowed up forward.



The rear bin seat has a reversible backrest.

SPECIFICATIONS

Model:	Strata 550
Priced From:	\$NZ38,000
Price as tested:	\$NZ46,944
Type:	RIB
Construction:	GRP / PVC
LOA:	5.50m
Beam External:	2.40m
Beam Internal:	1.30m
Deadrise:	23 deg
Trailerable weight:	750 kg
Test Power:	Evinrude ETEC 90
Propeller:	Viper 17
Power options:	Outboard 60-90hp
Fuel capacity:	80 litre
Trailer:	DMWd.

Notable Standard Items on Test Boat
5yr structural warranty, UV resistant upholstery and s/s grab handles
PVC tubing, 5x chambers, Stainless steel fairlead, 80lt fuel tank, bilge pump, Switch panel, nav lights, brass keel band, battery, box and switch gear

Notable Options on Test Boat
Chilly bin, Lowrance Elite CHIRP 5", Cobra VHF, Railblaza ports, baitboard, ski arch

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There is plenty of space down the side of the console for access.

WHAT IT'S GOT