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oating spent a couple of hours playing around with a pair of Strata 580s. *Silent But Violent* belongs to a customer while the second boat belongs to Smuggler Marine's Logan Pringle. Logan's is powered by an

Evinrude E-TEC 90hp, a lightweight, three-cylinder two-stroke displacing 1297cc, while *Silent But Violent* has a Mercury 100hp FourStroke on the transom, a four-cylinder engine displacing 2100cc.

Logan's boat is the more basic of the two, though it's still well-specified. It's pitched as a luxury yacht tender with lots of deck space, but it's also ideal for soft bait fishing, diving and watersports.

Logan's interests include fishing and spearfishing, so the open layout with a narrow centre-console for easy walkaround is ideal. The console is still big enough to accept a flush-mounted Simrad NSS9 EVO 3 MFD with

fish-finding and chart-plotting-GPS features.

The Evinrude throttle lever is mounted on the right-hand side of the console, which has been moulded so that the throttle lever doesn't catch on bodies or clothing when people move past the console to the bow. The lever falls nicely to hand, though the trim controls are on the outside of the handle, which is a bit of a fiddle.

Logan likes to tow skiers and water toys, so the sturdy leaner (aft of the console) accepts a drop-in ski-pole. A separate pole supports the bait board. The tow point is well forward, rather than on the transom, so the back of the boat doesn't get dragged around by the weight of what's being towed.

The powder-coated stainless-steel leaner frame also provides upright storage for four fishing rods, as well as retaining the 60-litre Icey-Tek icebox. The icebox has a cushioned, upholstered lid and doubles as a rear-facing seat; there's a shallow forward-facing seat on the front



TWO-RIFFIC

Smuggler Marine has really found a niche with its Strata range of high-quality, immaculately finished rigid inflatable boats (RIBs). The company's latest is the Strata 580, a development of its popular 550 with a bit more length in the cockpit and slightly more beam.



review

**Smuggler
580 RIB**

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of the console, but driving the boat is accomplished standing up.

The console with its tinted acrylic windscreen provides reasonable protection for the helmsman, but two people standing behind the console stick out a bit on either side. However, the handrail around the top of the screen and the sturdy leaner means they can brace themselves securely. On both boats, a good quality stainless steel fuel filler on the right-hand side of the console feeds a 90-litre underfloor fuel tank.

A feature of Logan's Strata is the Ultralon deck covering, which not only looks good, but is also very easy on the feet. It's warm in winter and cool in summer, which are also features of the two-tone, carbon-look Hypalon tubes of both boats.

Although the RIBs are essentially the same, Logan's gains an underfloor locker in the cockpit. It's the same size as the underfloor bow locker of both boats, which means it's big enough to hold a pair of dive bottles. So, in theory Logan can carry four.

Storage is always an issue for RIBs, but both Strat



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are well-endowed, though there's obviously less space available in the smaller console. There's still enough room to stow a few items in the console locker besides the fuel filter and battery isolation switch, while the glovebox is perfect for keys, wallets and phones – there's a combination USB charging port and 12V outlet inside.

Additional dry storage is available under the seat in the front of the console; the bow seat, cushioned and upholstered in attractive grey vinyl with red piping, covers the battery and moulded GRP anchor locker.

Both boats feature Railblaza receptacles on the tubes, four on Logan's boat and six on *Silent But Violent*. These accept a range of fittings, including adjustable rod holders. There are Railblaza mounts on the consoles as well and both boats feature fold-away drink holders.

Silent But Violent features a wider centre-console, which provides better protection, along with a sturdy bimini top. The



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bimini has a black canvas top, VHF aerial, LED cockpit floodlight and a stainless-steel rocket launcher for five rods. It folds away so the boat can be stored under cover.

Although this boat has the wider console, the 580's extra beam means it's easy enough to sidle past it to go forward. On the Strata 550 this console is offset to one side to leave enough room to access the bows.

Silent But Violent's owner was after a lightweight but capable craft he could easily launch off the beach, equipped with all the bells and whistles. He has specc'd his Strata to a high standard, including a Simrad NSS9 EVO 3 display with CHIRP and a 1kW through-hull transducer. The waterproof Fusion SRX 400 speaker is secured by a Railblaza mount.

With its wider console, this boat benefits from more storage, including under the larger seat in front of the console, though it misses out on the underfloor locker in the cockpit. The owner has two sets of bait boards, nets and other fishing paraphernalia, one for the front of the boat and the other for the back, but all of it stows away neatly. A stainless rod holder in the bow supports the second bait board.

Unlike Logan's boat, the throttle lever is mounted on top of the console behind the windscreen so the trim button is on the correct side. Inside the console locker is a fire extinguisher, fuel filter, fuse panel and battery isolation switch.

The tubes of each boat use different combinations of carbon-look grey and black Hypalon, all of it CNC cut so it mates perfectly with the GRP hulls. In addition to *Silent But Violent's* Railblaza mounts (six), the tubes also support four sturdy handles and tough belting to protect the tubes from damage when coming alongside. Additional rod storage is available on

MAIN PIC The two RIBs feature different consoles, engines and equipment but have identical hulls.

INSET TOP The Mercury 100hp FourStroke is quiet and economical. The hoop provides six fishing rod positions.

ABOVE *Silent But Violent* is well equipped and has a versatile layout.

the stainless steel hoop over the Mercury.

Silent But Violent differs from Logan's boat in that it has swim steps either side of the outboard.

One of these is used to support a berley pot and the other a portable live bait tank, which plugs into the 12-volt outlet inside the seat base behind the console. This is a fixed, large volume storage bin that also functions as a seat with a reversible backrest. A stainless dive ladder hangs over the tube on the port side.

Although the boats have different engines, performance is quite similar with top speeds approaching 40 knots. The larger displacement four-cylinder, four-stroke Mercury would undoubtedly have the edge if the boats were heavily loaded, but lightly laden, both feel equally nimble and responsive.

Engine noise was pleasantly muted for both vessels, though their engine notes are quite different. The three-cylinder Evinrude sounds busier at speed but feels ever so slightly sportier when you throw the boat around a bit, perhaps because there's less weight over the transom.

One of the beauties of a RIB design is a comfortable ride and the Smuggler Strata 580 doesn't disappoint. The ride is quiet, soft and dry, while Baystar hydraulic steering provides effortless directional control. Both boats are fun to drive, almost sports boats, but should still deliver excellent fuel economy – we were told real life fuel consumption figures are almost identical.

Due to their versatility, RIBs continue to grow in popularity. But not all RIBs are created equal. Buyers of a Strata 580 can expect a high quality, great handling RIB with a five-year structural hull warranty. With a long list of available options, customers get the boat they want: a more basic model like Logan's, or a comprehensively equipped RIB like *Silent But Violent*. **BNZ**



Smuggler 580 RIB

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HIGHLIGHTS

Sporty performance with modest horsepower, comfortable ride and good fuel economy

High-quality build, versatile layouts and a long list of options

Extra length means more cockpit space

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 5.8m

beam (external) 2.4m

beam (internal) 1.3m

weight on trailer 850kg approx.

Height on trailer: 2.1m (bimini folded)

deadrise: 23°

construction GRP with Hypalon tubes

engine Mercury FourStroke 100hp/Evinrude E-TEC 90hp

fuel 90 litres

cruising speed 26 knots

max speed approx 40 knots

WATCH IT

