

review

Smuggler Strata
780 Super Sport/
750 Centre Console

WORDS BY JOHN EICHELSHEIM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER MILLS

EBONY &

The latest line-up of Smuggler Marine's popular Strata 750 range includes full cabin, mid-cabin, centre-console and split-console bowrider (SuperSport/SS) models. We tried a white 'Ivory Series' 780 SS model and a black 'Ebony Series' 750 centre console side by side, both with 250hp outboards.

T

he contrast between the two boats extends further than the colour of their Hypalon tubes and GRP moulded hulls. While both the outboards are 250hp, one is a Mercury V8 four-stroke in white and the other an Evinrude E-TEC direct injection two-stroke V6 in black. The boats' hulls are identical but different engines impart a subtly different character to each.

Of the pair, the E-TEC-powered boat is the slightly more urgent and is also a knot or two quicker. There's not much in it though, with both Stratas achieving better than 50 knots.

Which engine you choose might depend less on outright performance and more on personal brand experience, a preference for four-stroke over two-stroke, price considerations,



IVORY

or even whether you prefer the V8's soundtrack over the V6's. Smuggler also offers Yamaha four-stroke power, so there's plenty of choice.

One advantage of the E-TEC, explains Smuggler Boat's Dave Pringle, is that it comes with integrated power steering; a separate power steering system is required for the V8 Mercury, adding cost and complexity. In this case the power steering was supplied by Mercury, but customers can specify Sea Star or other steering systems. And with the Mercury V8 in high demand worldwide, the E-TEC also doesn't suffer the same delivery delays.

The Ivory Series 780 SS is pitched as an all-rounder, its bowrider layout perfect for family fun days or hanging out with friends. The split console and hinged windscreen afford

easy access to the bow, which has seating for a crowd. One of the things builder Pringle wanted to achieve with the SS was as many seats as possible. The SS has seating for up to 12, which is one of the reasons this model has proved so popular as a large yacht tender, and the transom is set up for watersports.

Like every other Smuggler, both Strata models are beautifully finished. The tubes are made from Carbon Series Hypalon, which is standard on these models. It doesn't get as hot as regular Hypalon, so tubes last longer, with light-coloured tubes generally outliving darker ones. On request, Smuggler can also supply boats with PVC or TPU tubes, the latter heat-welded rather than glued. Teak-coloured U-Dek flooring looks smart and feels great underfoot.

There's a lot of useful dry storage inside the 780 consoles,



LEFT The 750 CC's carbon-look dash has ample space for a Simrad 12-inch MFD and the wrap-around screen.

BELOW LEFT Smuggler uses high quality carbon-look Hypalon, black for the more fishing oriented centre-console Ebony Series boats and white for the Ivory Series.

RIGHT Plenty of carbon for the 780 SS dash as well with room for a 12-inch Simrad display and a generous walk-through to the bowrider style seating forward. A bait table caters to fishers.

which are large enough to sit inside, as well as under the King and Queen seat bases and in wet lockers under the floor forward and aft.

Access to the drum winch is gained by lifting the bow seat squab and opening the hatch beneath it. The raised bow platform is a useful casting option, as it is on the Ebony Series boat. With the middle screen closed, a close-fitting cover over the foredeck area, and clears fitted around the T-top, the helm area is sheltered and snug. There is even a zip-up backdrop available to completely enclose it.

The Ebony Series 750 also enjoys ample dry storage – in its GRP centre console which has a front-facing moulded seat with more stowage, in the helm seat's base, and in underfloor cockpit and bow lockers. The centre console is large enough to accommodate a toilet and the dashboard has ample space for electronics, gauges, controls and switches.

A tall, wrap-around acrylic windscreen, complemented by a black powder-coated, stainless-steel framed GRP T-top with easily removable side curtains, gives good protection from the elements.

The Ebony series 750 is a more fishing- and diving-oriented vessel, with plenty of clear deck space, rod holders, a bait table and a well-angled rocket launcher. The tall, moulded GRP seat base is designed to safely store up to four dive bottles.



The contrast between the two boats extends further than the colour of their Hypalon tubes and GRP moulded hulls.



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The 780 SS has the more luxurious look and feel, thanks to fabric-covered seats, strategically placed drink holders, a Fusion stereo system, teak trim, cockpit shower and courtesy LED lighting, but with its spacious, versatile layout, it can still tackle fishing and diving duties.

On the SS fishers still get Smuggler's standard baitboard/ski-pole combination, an Icy-Tek chilly bin and stylish rod holders on the stainless-steel T-top frame, a stainless-steel boarding ladder and wide, U-Dek covered swim steps. Both boats feature LED ceiling lights, padded head-linings and 300-litre underfloor fuel tanks.

Of the two boats, the centre-console model has been the

stronger seller, says Pringle, particularly in New Zealand, but the 780 SS is also finding a comfortable niche, both here and overseas.

The well-proven Smuggler hull in RIB configuration is an impressive beast. The handling is assured and rewarding, the hull tackling the hardest, sharpest of turns with aplomb and smoothing the lumpiest of seas. Pringle demonstrated full-lock turns at 30 knots, which didn't upset the 780 SS at all, but required a white-knuckled grip from the passengers to combat the G-forces. Of note is the way the Mercury V8 holds its revolutions in the sharpest of turns, maintaining boat speed throughout.

With a constant deadrise of 27°, both Smugglers make easy

Of the pair, the E-TEC powered boat is the slightly more urgent and is also a knot or two quicker.

BELOW and RIGHT The Strata 780 SS Ivory Series is a smart-looking vessel with a versatile bowrider layout. The 250hp V8 Mercury sounds great and provides the RIB with 50-knot-plus performance.





LEFT The Strata 750 CC Ebony Series has a more fishing- and diving-oriented layout popular with Kiwi boaters. The engine is an Evinrude E-Tec 250hp direct-injection two-stroke with integrated power steering.



Smuggler Strata 780 Super Sport/ 750 Centre Console

PACKAGES FROM
\$120,000 (SS),
\$162,000 (CC)

PRICE AS REVIEWED
\$190,000 (SS),
\$162,000 (CC)

MANUFACTURED BY
Smuggler Boats
www.smuggler.co.nz

HIGHLIGHTS

Great ride, exciting performance and safe handling

High quality materials and excellent build quality

Identical hulls, but different deck layouts and engine options offer customers plenty of choice

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 7.5m
beam 2.8m
draft 0.5m
deadrise 27° constant deadrise
construction GRP with Hypalon tubes
engine 1 x Mercury 250hp V8/ Evinrude ETEC 250 GEN2 with power steering
fuel 300 litres
cruising speed 35 knots
max speed 50 knots plus

WATCH IT



work of any chop, cushioning and coddling their occupants. Any tenderness at rest you might expect from such deep vee hulls is eliminated by the inflatable pontoons, which contact the water's surface when the boats are stationary, plus a 150-litre flooding chamber along the keel, which empties as the boat gets underway. Moulded hull strakes quickly lift the pontoons clear of the water to reduce drag and tabs combat any inclination to lie over to one side.

The 780's helm position is very comfortable, with good support from the bucket seats and an attractive carbon-look fascia large enough for the 12-inch Simrad MFD, Mercury Smartcraft digital display, Maxwell drum winch control and compass. Lenco trim tab controls

are positioned close to the digital throttle and shift, where they're easy to reach and there's a double bank of switches below the steering wheel. It's a nicely uncluttered layout.

The console opposite is plain gel coat with a stainless steel grabrail, flush-mounted Fusion stereo head unit and a large chart/ odds-and-ends locker furnished with USB and 12V outlets.

Both boats are supplied on braked, tandem-axle, multi-roller road trailers with an overwidth board for legal towing provided the lights of the tow vehicle are switched on. Partially deflating the pontoons to reduce the external beam allows the boats to be towed legally without overwidth boards. **BNZ**

