

CLASSY purate

Words and photos by **Norman Holtzhausen**



Big pontoons, a legendary deep-vee, triple-straked fibreglass hull, twin engines and a hardtop cabin offering a warm, dry ride – Smuggler’s new Strata 820 Cabin is a head-turner.

The Strata 820 Cabin is a smart looker – a classy composition of white cabin and decks, the two-tone grey Hypalon pontoons, and the dark grey of the twin Yamaha F150 outboards hanging off the stern. Offsetting it all is the Tekdek on the transom and stern platforms, oversize stainless bow rail and a massive curved glass windscreen.

Smuggler Marine has a reputation for superbly-finished boats, and the new 820 Strata is no exception. It’s hard to fault any aspect of the presentation. Although a completely new design, she’s essentially an upsize of the 750 Strata we reviewed almost a year ago.

The extra length allows for a full hardtop cabin, a bigger boarding platform and space for additional engine options. This model has a beam of 2.8m, slightly over-width for standard towing. But with the side pontoons partially deflated she becomes road-legal. With the internal beam of close to two metres, cockpit space is enormous.

In the forward cabin a luxuriously-upholstered twin berth (with



infill to turn it into a double bed) offers a comfortable sleep. A fully-lined interior keeps things warm, and a toilet's hidden under the centre squab. The cabin feels spacious, and a quick test showed it's also quiet – no appreciable chine slap to disturb the night's rest.

The hardtop cabin accommodates a surprising number of features. Hidden under a drop-in panel on the passenger's dash area is a two-burner gas stove, perfect for a quick fry-up or to boil a cuppa. The king-and-queen seat unit on that side hinges up to reveal the gas bottle and a massive storage area. A luxuriously-upholstered skipper's seat sits on a pod containing a 12V fridge.

A smartly-configured helm area features a 12-inch Simrad NSS12 EVO2 touchscreen chartplotter and sounder set into the carbon-fibre helm panel. Yamaha's digital display gives engine and fuel parameters, while a control for the electric windlass, a Cobra VHF radio, and electronic controls for the trim tabs complete the

fit-out. A Fusion UD40 stereo unit drives the music, while the alloy spoked wheel complements the power steering unit.

Hypalon tubes offer a great seat while fishing or when underway. The cockpit sole – lined with Ultralon marine decking – is a soft but durable surface that's non-slip even when soaking wet. It's also easily hosed clean.

On the port side a curved boarding ladder folds snugly up against the tubes, and it's deployed in seconds. A trio of Icey-Tek bins, each with an upholstered squab, forms the rear bench seat.

These are easily carried ashore for a picnic, but they also offer maximum flexibility for separating bait, food and the catch. A large underfloor wet storage bin handles anything too big for an Icey-Tek.

A baitboard with rodholders sits over the transom, neatly allowing muck to drain out the back. Although the twin outboard configuration takes up a fair bit of the stern space, there is still room to stand or sit on either side, and fish off the rear.



The excellent dash layout is easy to read. On the opposite side you'll find a two-burner cooker for making a cuppa while the fish are drowsy.



Alternatively, the baitboard can be lifted out and replaced with a ski pole for water-toy fun.

Access to the bow area is around the cabin sides – the pontoons are a comfortable walkway. A small ledge with non-slip surface extends either side of the hardtop, and numerous grab-handles add to the safety.

Once there the over-side bow rail helps keep you safe. Access through the forward hatch is, of course, also an option. An electric windlass takes care of anchoring duties, with a Boss galvanised anchor fitted into a conventional bowsprit. In the usual Smuggler style the windlass is hidden under a neat hatch cover.

PERFORMANCE

The twin Yamaha 150hp outboards are at the top end of rated horsepower for this hull – and they are superb. The engines are counter-rotating, ensuring the boat tracks straight at all speeds.

Power steering makes handling a one-finger job, and she's extremely responsive to the helm. We could let go the helm to have her track straight and true, or the lightest touch would have her respond as required. The trim tabs felt redundant on this boat – the twin engines tend to counteract any imbalance.



PERFORMANCE		
Engine speed	Boat speed	Fuel burn
rpm	knots	L/min
600	3	6.5
2000	7	16.2
2500	10	22
3000	20	29.9
3500	25	38.1
4000	30	51.2
4500	36	61.2
5000	40	75.8
5500	44	94.4
6000	48	123.6

“Performance is eye-watering, to say the least, but go easy on the throttles if you want to save fuel.”



A decent-sized fridge is tucked below the helm seat, and if you fancy overnighting, the cabin offers enough room for a couple.

Performance is eye-watering to say the least. Despite the slightly choppy conditions, we got her up to nearly 50 knots (57mph or 90kph) with two people and about a third of a tank of fuel on board.

This was still a few revs short of what she is capable of, according to Smuggler's Dave Pringle. He has recorded 52 knots (60mph or nearly 100km/h) in ideal conditions.

At that speed the pair of 2.8 litre in-line, four cylinder Yamaha's were thirsty beasts, and the underfloor 400-litre fuel tank would only sustain a few hours running flat-out. But throttle back to a more moderate 3,500rpm and she cruises along at 25 knots with a range of over 250 nautical miles.

Like most planing boats she has a fairly flat consumption curve, and there is little difference in fuel usage per nautical mile between 20 knots and 35 knots. Only once the engines run higher than 5,000rpm do they start drinking more heavily.

With the hull rated for between 200 and 300hp, other engine options are available. While a single engine would be cheaper, both in terms of initial outlay and maintenance, anyone who travels far out will appreciate the peace of mind that comes with having a twin rig.

And the performance of a pair, both at the top-end and when manoeuvring at low speed, means that most people who've become converts to a twin configuration will not switch back.



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Smuggler Strata 820 Cabin

- **loa** 8.2m
- **beam** 2.8m
- **towing weight** approx 2,160kg
- **construction** GRP hull and cabin, Hypalon tubes
- **engines** Twin Yamaha F150
- **hp range** 200-300hp
- **height on trailer** with rocket launcher 3.1m
- **deadrise at transom** 27°
- **fuel capacity** 400 litres
- **max speed** 52 knots
- **max passengers** 10
- **priced as reviewed** \$235,280
- **packages from** \$167,000 with single 200hp Evinrude E-TEC outboard
- **manufactured by** Smuggler Marine
- **boat supplied by** Ssmuggler Marine

At low speed she manoeuvres beautifully, with the two engines again allowing tricks (like rotating on her own axis). The pontoons settle on the water at rest, offering superb stability. Anyone who has tried to overnight in a slightly windy anchorage will appreciate the benefit of the big Hypalon tubes.

Despite the big pontoons she is relatively light. Trailerable weight is around 2,160kg. This makes her a far easier towing proposition than a similar-sized all GRP boat. On her braked, galvanised DMW tandem trailer she's within the capabilities of a modest towing vehicle. But she does stand 3.1m high to the top of the rocket launcher, so you'll require a high-roof carport or garage to keep her under cover.

Smuggler Marine has once again produced an exceptional boat, finished to the usual impeccable standard. With a five-year warranty on the hull and tubes, the brass keel strip, the extra reinforcing in high-wear areas around the tubes, and the five-year extended warranty on the Yamahas – this boat is built to last.

My only concern is that she may be too slick to be used as a hard-core fishing machine. She would, though, be a fantastic, safe family boat.

Prices start from \$133,000 for the hardtop version of the Strata 820, excluding engine(s). Price as tested \$235,280, including the trailer and twin Yamahas. **B**

