

Thrills COME STANDARD

Text by Barry Thompson

While the RIB market is saturated with centre consoles, the same cannot be said for cabin boats, or to be more precise hardtop cabin RIBs. There are a scant few and from what I have seen, it's the Kiwis that do it best.



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The Strata 820 is one of the few full cabin RIBs on the market.

One such company is Smuggler Marine that has built a considerable reputation with their Strata range of RIBs. From as small as 4.5m to over 11m, Auckland based Smuggler Marine has always been at the forefront of innovation and their Strata range is a perfect example. Owners of Smuggler Marine, David and Pauline Pringle are both perfectionists and every boat that comes out of their factory, no matter what the size has their stamp of approval. Every detail has been well considered, with layouts meticulously planned combined with quality materials and a striking appearance.

While all that sums up the Strata 820 Hardtop, I have to add how immensely versatile it is, with the ability to be a boat for all reasons. Okay, so it is used a lot, but in my opinion, the Strata 820 Hardtop is a true all-rounder. It's a boat you can fish, dive, tow water toys, overnight and day cruise and all that in an efficient layout. But while you could say that about a lot of boats, the one thing that makes the Strata 820 a pitch above the rest is the hull.

Based on the ultra-deep 27 deg vee Smuggler hull, there is no better blue water performer in this size range. While the first Smuggler hull dates back to the mid-1970s, it has undergone some tweaks since then to make it even better than the original. Plus by wrapping tubes around it, it has gone from being a great hull to an awesome hull.

Any boat with a very deep vee and a 2.5m beam on the chine is likely to be a little tender at rest and even when underway, are susceptible to weight movement. Not so with the Strata 820 because of the Hypalon tubes that are glued above the hard chine. When the boat's at rest the last 1m or so of the tube sits on the water and now with a 2.9m beam with the tubes inflated, so comes extra stability. Moving



Opposite Page: got the Smuggler Strata 820 Hardtop to almost 60 mph (52 knots) in the calm water.

Left: Big open cockpit that lends itself to fishing.

3-4 people from side to side makes very little difference to the heel of the boat.

Then, when underway the rear of each pontoon tiptoes across the surface and again adds extra stability, without adding any drag. Another advantage is because the tubes extend so far past the chine they form a natural barrier for water running up off the hull and bow areas. The result is an amazingly dry boat.

While there is no question about the boat's rough water capability, test day was mirror smooth and ideal for shooting our video. I have previously tested this hull in a centre console version with the same engines and also other similar models based on the same hull with single engine packages. Never found a bad one amongst them.

The twin rig set up is in my opinion, however, the best, but then I like a bit of speed and the sound of those twin 150hp Yamaha V6s add a new dimension to the Strata 820. You feel you are in a big tough, no-nonsense boat that will go anywhere in any conditions and you will do it in relative comfort.

With the engines trimmed out so far that another gentle touch of the trim switch would



They don't get much deeper vee than this.

have exposed them to huge cavitation, I got the Smuggler Strata 820 Hardtop to almost 60 mph (52 knots) in the calm water. It felt rock steady and effortless to drive, even with 300hp on the transom. Of course, that was only short lived and I soon had the boat back into a conservative cruise mode of around 3,500rpm @ 25 knots. Based on a full load of fuel, (400 litres), that gives the 820 twin rig a range of around 220/250 nm. At 4500 rpm @ 36 knots the range only decreases marginally. But if you keep the throttles down all the way from Auckland to Russell in the Bay of Islands, you may not quite have enough. At the other end, you will get close to 300nm at trolling speeds.

There is even a compact cooker provided.

TWO TRANSOMS

The Strata 820 twin rig has most of the space between the tubes taken up with the engines, so access aboard is over the tubes or via a Dixon RIB ladder. Smuggler utilises different transom mouldings for the single or twin-engine package. With the twin setup, the transom has built-in storage lockers and stowage for the batteries, plus allows you to drop in some removable bin seats. In our boat, we had a trio of Icey Tek bins which make great places to stow bait and the catch and can be moved out of the way when your fishing.

Icey Tek bins multi task as bait and catch storage as well as seating.

With the single engine option, you get a couple of moulded rear jump seats and easy access both sides of the engine to the water. The imitation teak surface adds a quality finish around the transom. Central on both is a custom bait board with rod holders, mounted on a stainless post, that can be replaced quickly with a ski pole for towing the water toys.

Yes, you can certainly fish from a soft-sided

RIB and quite successfully, it's just that you have to be a little more cautious about jaggling hooks, a tag pole or a gaff into the tubes. Other than that it's no different to fish from than any other boat of this size. Big bonus, as I have already mentioned is the at rest stability. Brilliant when your mate comes over to net that 12 kg Kinghie.

SEATING CHOICE

When it comes to seating, you have plenty of options. We had the most popular choice, back to back King/Queen to port and a single swivelling bucket seat for the skipper. The helm seat is mounted on a moulded box base that also houses the fridge. There is storage under the King/Queen, as well as under the cockpit sole.

In reference to its weekender mode, there is a two burner gas hob ahead of the passenger seat that comes with a cutting board lid. If you don't go for the cooker option, then this is just another big storage space.

Opposite, the helm is split into two large flat facias with room below for a 16" MFD and that still leaves plenty of space for all the other necessary controls, switches, navigation and electronic add-ons. Seated or standing it's a great boat to drive and if you do get some spray or rain on the screen there's a wiper to take care of it. Storage shelves either side take care of some of the smaller items such as keys, cellphones and sunnies. Of course,





The Strata 820 can be powered by single or twin outboards.

The Dixon RIB ladder is a must have.

being a RIB, there are no side trays in the cockpit, so if you have a brace of rods you need to stow, then you have the choice of mounting them across the transom or in an overhead rocket launcher.

Downstairs it's as I would have expected with twin berths plus an infill. Upper shelves and under the side squabs take care of a lot of the storage issues, with a plumbed in head under the forward squab. Solid cabin doors or a privacy curtain are optional. One thing I did like about the cabin is the depth of the foot recess, which also means when you enter and exit the cabin you don't have to duck excessively to miss the fibreglass deck.

There is a deck hatch but you'd probably never use it as all anchoring can be done from the helm. If you do need to go forward, there is limited access around the side of the hardtop.



Long enough to overnight, with a head beneath.

SUMMARY

What can I say? I loved it! There are not many boats that really spark my interest, but this is one of them. As a RIB it does it all and it does it well. Ever since I first experienced the Smuggler hull way back in the mid-1970s, I have followed its path with interest and seen it morphed into quite a few different styles. However, one thing that has never changed is the iconic name and while the hull may have been given a few tweaks in recent years to make it even better and the topsides redesigned entirely, to me it will always be a Smuggler and long may it remain.

Model: Smuggler Strata 820 Cabin HT

Priced from:
 Price as tested:
 Type: Hardtop
 Construction: GRP/Hypalon
 LOA: 7.50m
 Beam: 2.80m
 Deadrise: 27 deg
 Height on trailer: 2.80m
 Trailerable weight:
 Power: 2 x Yamaha 150
 Power options: Outboard Single/
 Twin 150-300hp
 Propeller:
 Fuel capacity: 260 litres
 Trailer: DMW

PERFORMANCE & FUEL

RPM	Knots	L/h	L/NM	Range (NM)
1000	5.0	6.5	1.300	270
1500	6.0	10	1.700	210
2000	7.0	16.2	2.400	150
2500	10.0	22	2.200	160
3000	20.0	29.9	1.500	240
3500	25.0	38.1	1.600	220
4000	30.0	48.2	1.700	210
4500	36.0	61.2	1.700	210
5000	40.0	75.8	1.900	180
5500	44.0	94.4	2.200	160
6000	48.0	123.4	2.600	130

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