



Trimmed to perfection.

Swims like a Bonito with the Sting of a Bee



The 21 degree Vee hull carves up the chop

Bonito is a name that has been synonymous with New Zealand boating for close to 50 years.

Recently, the well known and respected husband and wife team of Dave and Pauline Pringle of Smuggler Marine purchased the Bonito moulds and brand, wanting to ensure the continued production of this well known and loved range of Kiwi fibreglass trailer boats. The model range included the Chico 485, Profisher 535 (now rebranded the Bonito 550 Sting), the very popular Profisher 585 range, the Kingfisher 635 and the Calais 685.

Back in the early days of Bonito, the most popular boat in the range was the Bonito 16, which was a huge success; in its first 18 months of production over 230 boats were sold. You could buy a Bonito 16 cabin for \$3375 in 1977. Bonito's next

5-metre boat was the Scott Robson designed 522 (of which there were over 800 produced). The successful 522 model was then followed by the more recent 535, and there are lots of these models scattered about New Zealand today.

Boats from 5.0m to 6.0m are the most popular in the New Zealand power boat market, and it was for this reason and the fact it was the first Bonito out of the Smuggler factory, that we chose the Bonito Sting 550 to take out for a run with Dave Pringle.

The Smuggler team has given the 535 'the Smuggler touch' and rebadged it as the Bonito Sting 550.

On arriving for the test at Westhaven, the 550, even from a distance, had a stylish look about it. The smooth, flowing lines, the colour coordinated upholstery and the outboard all blended agreeably, having instant appeal. The tasteful placement of teak on the boarding platform and coamings also added a feel of affluence.

At the helm, all felt comfortable and natural - the engine controls and steering wheel (hydraulic) were well positioned when standing or seated. The instrumentation, that included an Eagle Fish Elite 640C, Cobra VHF and the gauges for the ETEC i-Command engine management system were well placed, set into mock carbon fibre panels. There were two matching Aquatech switch panels tidily mounted either side of the helm. Immediately below is a handy shelf for all your personal effects, including keys and cell phone and the likes. Also carpeted is the dash, to stop possessions from rattling and sliding about.

The Smuggler design team has added a new windscreen and side windows. The new screen diverts the airflow effectively for those who are seated and want to avoid the wind messing with their perm. Adding an optional bimini top would be well worth considering - offering you and your loved ones protection from the sun.

The seating arrangement in this test model is a moulded pedestal on a slider



The Sting 550 looks equally as good at rest.

for the captain, and for the crew - a hinged King and Queen back-to-back, offering great dry storage. All the upholstery was well padded and very comfortable. There are two removable aft bin seats that provide further storage, and these can easily be removed, and either left at home or placed in the cabin on days when the team are heading out for a fish, ski or wakeboard and just a little more room in the cockpit is needed.

Not that I like to do it but the seat is used as a step to scale over the transom to the teak dressed boarding platforms (with a boarding ladder starboard) on the either side of the outboard well - the upholstery is made of a hard wearing UV stabilised vinyl so it is well up to the task.

Behind these seats, tidily concealed behind an upholstered curtain there is further storage space, this cavity is also the home to the battery and oil reservoir. While on the subject of storage, there are two large upholstered side pockets with rod holders - big enough to store skis or a wakeboard, and for your fishing rods there are two rod holders mounted in the teak-

capped coamings either side and provision for another four in the well-built bait station. For the fisherman or clean freak there is a well-located salt-water wash-down hose mounted in the transom - great for hosing off any mess or your bait station. Remove the bait station and replace it with the ski pole and you can ski home from your favourite fishing spot!

The cockpit has a generous feel to it, measuring 1800mm across the inside of the cockpit. Under the heavy vinyl covered (dome down carpet is an option) cockpit sole (a moulded floor liner that runs chine to chine and part way up the side of the hull) there is a 120-litre fuel tank - previous models had employed tote tanks, immediately there is a wet locker of a similar size (120 litres - a couple of dive bottles) that drains any excess water directly into the bilge.

There is plenty of dry storage available within the fully lined cuddy cabin, both under the three squabs and in the side pockets down each side. Add an infill and there is a double berth for those keen enough to overnight. There is lighting available by the



The comfortable seating is tastefully decorated in a UV stabilised vinyl

cabin lighting for the darker hours, daylight oozes in through the large opening to the cabin, through the side windows and large Cule access hatch. There is easy access through the hatch to the foredeck to the reasonably large anchor locker, which has room to mount a windlass if favoured; there is a stainless chain plate to prevent damage to the fibreglass deck. Up front, Smuggler has added higher bow rails from previous models for both appearance and the obvious safety factor.

Weighing in at 1300kg on a DMW trailer the rig is easily towed behind an average family vehicle.

Out on the water, the Bonito Sting 550 was a predictable, quick little boat that is manageable and performs well. The original Scott Robson designed hull had a reputation for being soft riding, although a little wet. Modifications were consequently made to the 21 degree hull by altering

the strakes and making the bow section a little fuller. Combined, these changes have created a well balanced little boat that is very capable of handling water conditions most people would sooner not be out in, in a 5-metre boat. Adding a bimini top would be worth considering - offering a little protection from the elements.

The 115hp E-TEC pushed us along at a very respectable speed of just over 45mph burning 39 litres per hour. At a more practical speed of 28mph (at 4000rpm) consumption fell to just 18.6 litres per hour - one could travel for well over 6 hours on the standard 120-litre tank, for a distance of over 180 miles, and that would represent a very rare day's boating! Slow down to a sedate displacement speed of 6.2mph at 1000rpm and the E-TEC is running in its lean-burn mode, sipping fuel at a miserly 1.0 litre per hour. At this speed it would travel for 120 hours at an incredibly fuel-efficient 6.2 miles per litre. (That's 28mpg in the old imperial



The helm is comfortable and wind free when seated.



The self draining wet locker is great for throwing dive bottles and wet suits after use.

The transom area area with the removable bin seats.



There is plenty of dry storage area available under the cabin squabs.



Upholstered Side pockets are big enough for your rods or skis.



The large wet locker for your wet gear and dive bottles drains into the bilges.





measure – truly amazing! Compare that with what old carburetted 2-strokes manage – at displacement speeds their fuel economy is worse than it is at planing speeds – Tech. Ed.)

Well done Smuggler – you have produced a quality boat using quality materials and workmanship, constructing a boat that rides well and looks good. A first-time buyer should feel secure knowing that this is a safe, proven

design, and if you are a seasoned boater you will have a lot of enjoyment getting to know the Bonito Sting 550.

Touches of Teak as used on the boarding platform all add to the high finish.



Standard features on Test Boat

- ✓CPC rated for 5 people ✓Cabin squabs
- ✓Canopy and back drop ✓Bow rail
- ✓2 x 4way switch panels and wiring loom
- ✓Removable fish bin seats ✓Bilge pump
- ✓120-litre alloy under floor tank ✓Compass
- ✓Boarding ladder ✓2 x pedestal seats
- ✓2 x rod holders ✓Hydraulic steering
- ✓LED Nav. lights Large battery
- ✓Isolation switch ✓90hp Evinrude Etec

Notable Options on Test Boat

- ✓12V outlet ✓2x extra rod holders
- ✓Rod racks both sides of cockpit
- ✓Bait board, ski pole ✓Infill squabs
- ✓VHF, Eagle 640C GPS, plotter sounder
- ✓Fire extinguisher ✓115hp Evinrude Etec

Make: Bonito
Model: Sting 550
Price as Tested: \$61,385
Packages from: \$49,950
Designer: Bonito Boats
 Scott Robson

Material: GRP
Type: Cabin
LOA: 5.70 m
LOH: 5.35 m
Beam: 2.24 m
Deadrise: 21 degrees
Hull Config: Deep V
Trailerable Weight: 1300kg weighed
Height on Trailer: 2.10 m
Engine Capacity: 90 - 150 hp
Power Options: Outboard only
Fuel Capacity: 120 litres

Performance	Speed	Fuel L/h
600 rpm	4.6 mph	0.7 L/h
1000 rpm	6.2 mph	1.0 L/h
1500 rpm	8.1 mph	2.5 L/h
2000 rpm	9.0 mph	6.6 L/h
2500 rpm	12.0 mph	12.0 L/h
3000 rpm	20.0 mph	12.7 L/h
3500 rpm	25.4 mph	16.0 L/h
4000 rpm	28.2 mph	18.6 L/h
4500 rpm	33.7 mph	24.4 L/h
5000 rpm	40.0 mph	30.0 L/h
5500 rpm	43.0 mph	37.0 L/h
5600 rpm	45.2 mph	39.0 L/h

Speeds recorded on a Lowrance GPS

Engines
Make: Evinrude E-TEC
Model: 115
Type: Direct injected two-stroke
Horsepower: 115
Cyl. Config.: V4
Max RPM: 5600
Propeller: 19" Viper
Retail Price: \$22,500

Trailer
Make: DMW Premier 500
Axles: Single
Suspension: Leaf Springs
Braked: No
Rollers: Multi Roller
Std Equipment: LED lights, 5:1 winch, drop-down jockey wheel

Boat Supplied by: Bonito Boats by Smuggler Marine Ltd
 09 838 9024
 www.smuggler.co.nz