



ESCAPE WITH YOUR FAMILY ON FREEDOM'S 5.3M

By Gary Howard.

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THERE'S a lot more to purchasing a boat than just hitching anything up to the back of the car, slipping it in at the boat ramp and hoping to have a good day out on the water. As there are so many different applications in the boating world, it helps if you have a boat that has been designed for a specific job or group of jobs. This is one of the reasons why there so many different models available from the various manufacturers.

So many times I've seen people in boats that are just not suited for the job at hand. This can not only put people off boating, but it can make it dangerous or so impractical that the boat sits all year under the tree in the back yard, collecting leaves.

The first time user or family boating group is the most unsure when purchasing a boat, be it new or used. There is nothing wrong with being unfamiliar with a product. We have all had to hop into a boat, car or even onto a push bike for the first time.

I know I was pretty unsure the first time. Boating can be such an enjoyable experience and sharing it with the family can bring great pleasure. Catching fish is such a small part of the day's outing that it doesn't really matter if you catch fish or not.

More people are taking to the water to enjoy their spare time and a lot of these are first-time family groups. With this in mind, it is important to purchase a boat that has been built to suit the needs of this group.

Sunshine Coast boat builder Freedom Boats has concentrated its efforts on building family boats which are affordable, practical and user-friendly.

Their first rig was the Freedom Escape, a 5.3 metre half cabin. It has a number of areas which show the effort that has gone into its design, the most obvious becoming apparent when getting into the boat. The transom is stepped up, with the duck board being just above the water line. This makes it easy to get in and out of the boat when in the water. Trying to pull yourself out of the water and up onto a duck board can be difficult if there are no handles to grab onto or the duck board is too high out of the water. The set up here is more than satisfactory.

Once you are in the boat, the deck is straight forward, with the sides nice and high to give security for the family as they move around the boat.

Keep in mind that boats can get a bit wobbly under foot as the weight load moves around the boat or the boat is rocked by choppy conditions or another boat passing by.

If you have a look at the hull out of the water, you will note its very generous outer spray chine. This reversed chine and the planning strakes add considerably to the stability of the boat, making it nice and stable to walk around.

The Escape also has a reasonable eighteen degree deadrise which helps the boat cut through the chop and softens the general ride of the boat. Both of these contribute to making the day out on the water that much more enjoyable.

The cabin area itself is open at the helm, allowing good ventilation and a clear view into the cabin. On those times when they do go up the front, the kids can see you and you can see them. They don't mind being there and you can be sure that they are okay.

In the event that you are in an area with a cooler climate, you can soon have clear covers made for this area to keep the cool out yet still see both in and out.



The dash and helm area has the basic instruments and a good flat dash area with a substantial grab rail in front of you. The beauty of the big dash is that you can spread out a bit of lunch.

In addition to the two swivel pedestal seats at the helm, there is the bench seat across the transom of the boat. This is split into two sections. Both are built on storage boxes and one or both are completely removable. These fibreglass boxes have many applications. One can be used as the esky for the day and the other as a fish box or for storage.

When you pull up on the beach or bank for a picnic, the box, food and all, can be taken out so that you have everything you need next to you, without going back and forth to the boat. Outside of these uses, it acts as a toy box for all the kids gear, keeping the deck of the boat clear.

Most of the time you will find Freedom Boats have a four-stroke Honda outboard fitted to them. The four-strokes are reliable, easy to start, economical and have none of that burning oil and fuel smell that is often associated with two-stroke outboards.

Just looking at a few of these major features, you can understand why I was pretty impressed with the boat and the company's approach to making family boating enjoyable and safer.

Last year, Freedom introduced the 4.94m Getaway to their range, which is a smaller version of the Escape but in runabout style. This has a walk-through windscreen and storage area up for'ard.

About to be released is the five metre Hunter, which I tested a few weeks back. It has a bigger cab than the Getaway, allowing for bunks and the ability to get out of the weather. In the moulding stage is the 6.2m Freedom, which I feel is going to be a real bonus for anglers and their families. It is anticipated that this rig, with a 130hp four-stroke Honda outboard, will sell for around the \$40,000 mark.

This price is more than competitive and offers a boat in a size that has good bunk area and room to move. Overnighters and weekends away are certainly within the scope of this rig.

It is good to see a small company doing well because it has done the homework and then put it into practice.

Freedom Boats: www.freedomboats.com.au