



## FREEDOM ESCAPE 1750 REVIEW

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This low slung family rig is threatening to do a "Hyundai" to the boat market thanks to its low package price.



The Queensland coastal town of Noosa is best known to the public as a up-market resort, yet these days it's also developing a reputation for the development and production of new trailerboats, Noosa Sharkcat is the big success story of the area, but lately a budding new brand from Noosa is making a name for itself on the east coast.

Freedom Boats is a new brand developed by local marine dealer, Glen Grams, based around a very affordable 5.3m cuddy fibreglass boat.

Called the Freedom 1750 Escape this newcomer was the surprise success story of this year's boat shows walking away with seven sales, alone at the Sydney Show.

And this was before the boat got any publicity, or fanfare.

One may well ask what's the secret, particularly since the design is really a rework of a 1990s Yaltacraft model, and therefore not the very latest in design.

After a test run in Sydney waters I believe the answer is simple price and the fact the boat covers the basic features of the family buyer.

In many ways this is the ideal entrylevel boat for such people because it can do a bit of everything including fishing, water-skiing and the Sunday picnic cruise. The boat's big enough to take a family group in comfort and when you combine that with a budgetbeater price you have a winner.

Admittedly the Freedom 1750 isn't a hard core fishing rig. Yet we feel it has enough features and potential to be an occasional fishing rig for estuary and close inshore work. Afterall, not everyone wants a fully dedicated fishing rig and that does include some of our readers! That's a big attraction of this boat, but so too is price. At present boat buyers are also becoming very sensitive to the rising prices of trailerboats and the low price of the Freedom is a real clincher.

It will certainly be interesting to see where Freedom goes from here because there certainly seems to be a slot for a lower cost GRP range in the market at present. Provided the features can be maintained within the price a boat brand like this could do what Hyundai has done to the car market of late!

### DESIGN

The Freedom 1750 features a moderately veed hull form with a fairly constant 18 degree deadrise, soft, rounded keel line and exceptionally wide chine flats. This hull form provides a lot of lift and therefore should pop the boat onto the plane quickly.

The Freedom also has a fair bit of topside flare which also helps to keep the ride dry and the hull sitting high when it is running through choppy water.



There's also a fair bit of ski boat in the lines of this fibreglass boat, especially in the low, flat sheerline and the low cabin and windscreen. The ski boat influence is also seen in the very clean, aerodynamic foredeck which has flush-fitting hatches and low hand rails instead of high rails.

There's a small anchor hatch just in front of the forehatch which gives you direct access into the vee berth cabin. The low, three panel windscreen sits atop the low cabin which flows back into the cockpit which features built-up coamings and direct access to the water via the extended rear pod. The latter goes almost full depth to give buoyancy at rest and forms a stepped platform either side of the motor for very easy access into the back of the boat.

While this stern design mightn't be the best option for fishing it certainly will be appreciated by families who want easy access from the beach or water.

The outboard well is designed to take single outboards upwards of 115hp, with 90hp motors being the popular choice for the package.

The cockpit itself features a comfortably appointed area with floor carpet, padded side pockets and a three-seater rear lounge. There's also padded bucket seats for the driver and passenger. The latter sit atop fibreglass stowage boxes which come in handy for stowing things like tools, torches and gear of that nature.

The open back cabin provides two full-length berths and should be a popular feature with kids and families.

The upholstered vee berths feature padded backrests which also provide good stowage room behind in the wide shelves. The bunks are big enough for sleeping and should allow the boat to be used for campedboating trips.

The low headroom below is a drawback, though it actually has the sitting room to fit four people. No doubt it will be a great place for the kids to play.

The cabin could also do with a liner for the exposed wheel steering and instrument console. From a trailing point of view the Freedom will certainly provide a good 'escape' machine for those with a medium to larger sized car. We put this boat over the weighbridge before our test and with about a third of a tank of fuel it was 980kg exactly. This was in line with our estimates and confirms the boat will suit cars like the Holden Berlina, Toyota Camry and Mazda 626. Even allowing for an extra 1 (10kg or so of gear/fuel the Freedom will stay within the legal towing range of such vehicles in NSW.

## TEST RUN

We gave the Freedom a short but none the less thorough workout on the waters of Pittwater and offshore Broken Bay. In the flat waters the boat ran easily and without any problems. However in the lumpier water offshore we did notice some ventilation problems with the propeller due to the motor being mounted a touch too high on the transom.



The Freedom displayed a reasonably good ride in broken water, though at times landed hard due to the wide side chines.

The boat responded well in turns and accelerated out of the hole very quickly to achieve a top speed of 36 knots. That's not bad going at all for this motor/boat combination.



I particularly liked the bodygripping driving seat and recessed throttle lever, however it did seem to me that the boat could do with a partial bulkhead to stiffen up the deck structure. However, that would only really apply if you were doing a lot of offshore work.

## FISHABILITY

Overall the design comes across as good all-rounder which does a bit of everything - fish, cruise and water-ski without favouring one sector. You only have to look at the low windscreen and the lack of cockpit floor space to see that other priorities are working here. However, with the rear lounge seat boxes removed you start to get a half reasonable working area for fishing.

The seat boxes turn out to be two good sized fibreglass 'kill boxes' whilst the lounge backrest makes a great leg-pad when you are fishing the stern.

The boat also comes standard with two gunwale rod holders and a reasonably compact outboard well. The extended pod does place the angler further from the stern, but at least the moulded stern platform shouldn't snag lines too easily.

The narrow side coamings aren't the best for fishing because they make it hard to fit extra rod holders, and they're not comfortable for sitting. However, the raised side pockets give good stowage space for gear like handlines and owners could at least use the standard boat for some bottom bouncing.

The factory also offers several "fishing" options which do brighten the picture. Items like a stainless steel targa rod rack and folding bimini, raised cutting board over outboard well and moulded bowsprit.

## POWER



We tested this boat with an oil-injected 90hp Yamaha which gave us more than adequate performance for a fishing boat carrying two adults. As the GPS performance figures confirmed, there was more than enough power/perform to cover fishing needs. The boat achieved a low speed range of 21 knots (3500rpm) a mid speed range of 28 knots (4500rpm) and a top speed of 36 knots (5500rpm) No doubt those who are viewing the boat from a

ski/sport cruising perspective may need more grunt, in which case they can go to the maximum horsepower of 115 hp.

Alternatively, the person more interested in fishing may want to go for a 70 hp motor trading some performance for other fishing items on the boat.

We didn't conduct fuel tests but would expect the fuel consumption to be around the 20-24 litre mark in mid speed running. The moderate vee hull and low windage superstructure should make this a better than average fuel consumer. In other words, with the standard 80 litre tank you would could look forward to a range of upwards of 100 nautical miles. That translates to a safe range of 90 nautical miles, which should suit most inshore boaters.

## VERDICT

One has to admit up-front that this isn't the best fishing rig you're ever going to buy. It's in fact the sort of boat which a guy buys because his wife is simply not going to let him spend "all that money" on a boat which she and the family can't use.



The attractively finished interior with its comfortable rear lounge is a big drawcard for such buyers. Also the fact that the boat can ski the kids and take the family for a picnic cruise gives it a very broad appeal.

There are of course several other cross-over fishing/family boats on the market at present, but I can't think of one quickly which matches this price range.

Currently Freedom's East coast dealer network can delivery one of these boats from as little as \$21,000 as a ready-to-boat package using a 70hp motor. With a few extras and a 90hp the price comes out to around the \$23,000 - \$24,000 but even so still looks pretty good alongside the more up-market rigs of this size.

In the final analysis buyers will be willing to overlook some (fishing) shortcomings if the boat offers the basic features they want. Quality of finish is good enough to win the ladies, even if the boat doesn't quite have the depth of quality of more expensive brands. Then again, if the crafts not being used for hard and serious offshore work, it will suit the needs the buyer of the buyer.

Time, of course, will tell whether the Freedom represents a new trend in the market or not, but I wouldn't mind betting that this won't be the last low cost GRP package boat we'll see on the market this year.

The boat as tested in Sydney came to \$23,850 including a 90hp oil-injected Yamaha, nav lights, Dunbier Rollermatic trailer, 80 litre in-floor fuel tank, fuel gauge and sender, bimini with front clears, depth sounder, upholstered bunk cushions, inshore safety gear pack, pre-delivery and onroad registration.

Freedom Escape 1750	
Configuration / Style	cuddy
Construction	Fibreglass
Length	5.3m
Beam	2.2m
Depth	N.A
Hull Weight	475kg
Max engine hp	115hp
Sheet size	N.A
Fuel Tank	80L
Deadrise	18 deg
Tested Power	90hp

Freedom Boats: [www.freedomboats.com.au](http://www.freedomboats.com.au)