



FREEDOM GETAWAY 494 RUNABOUT REVIEW

Reproduced with permission of Trailerboat Fisherman

Issue: March 99

Freedom Boats of Queensland has expanded its market appeal with the launch of a stylish looking sports runabout which has cross-over value for fishing enthusiasts.



Since we first wrote up the Freedom boats in 1996 this Noosa based company has established itself as one of the hot new performers in the fibreglass market.

Not many people had heard of Freedom before, but their Freedom Escape's very low price gave them a real success story on their hands. No doubt

some boat dealers must now be congratulating themselves for taking a punt on this newcomer which is now one of the top sellers amongst entry-level designs.

You might well wonder how a 'newcomer' brand could get it so right with their first boat, yet the man behind the product, Glen Grams, is actually a very experienced marine man who's worked in many facets of the industry.

Glen has seen both sides of the retail fence and these days owns the successful Suncoast Marine Centre at Noosaville. This background has given him a very good feel for the market and enabled him to see the market opening for an affordable, mid-sized fibreglass boat package a few years back.

Most importantly Glen saw the opportunity to cut the price down by using contractors and also packaging the boat to one fixed, ready-to-go level which buyers would appreciate. Hence the establishment of Freedom Boats as a separate operation to build and market his range of boats.

Admittedly there was nothing particularly special about the Escape 5.2 cuddy boat when it first came out. However, what really makes it really special with boat buyers, particularly newcomer boaties was the attractive price several thousand below similar GRP boat packages.

The Escape has since been upgraded to meet current market demands, however the price is still very competitive. Glen has also expanded his operation with the launch of the Getaway, a sporty looking runabout which sells for as little as \$16,000 with standard two-stroke motors.

Again the Freedom marketing formula is used to 'package' the boat in a way which gives the potential buyer a ready-to-go craft for a very low price.

This is very much the 'Hyundai' approach to boat marketing, but it really works because the pricing is very competitive and all the basic features like rear lounge, cockpit carpet, rod holders and navigation lights are all included in the standard package.

Admittedly neither of the Freedom models are hardcore fishing boats, yet they definitely have a cross-over appeal for those who might like to mix fishing with general recreational boating.



The low prices of these boats has certainly enabled them to win buyers from the tinnie ranks. Glen says that's not surprising when people start to look at the benefits like a smart gel coat finish, and the softer ride of a glass boat.

The Freedom boats are sold through a national dealer network which includes Glen's own Suncoast Marine as well as Blakes Marine in Sydney. The dealers get a fair margin as well as good support from the factory.

This year the Freedom range will have three models on the market. The Getaway will shortly be joined by a cuddy deck of the same hull called the Hunter. There's also the possibility of a centre console version, though this will depend on market feedback over this current summer.

The cuddy deck boat will be geared more directly at the serious fishing enthusiasts, however there's no doubt that a certain sector of the fishing buyers will see value in the Getaway, tested here.

Particularly for those who want to mix a bit of inshore waterway touring and fishing the Getaway should have strong appeal. The sports boat styling makes it a natural runabout for places like the Gold Coast waterways and other such waterways. The price is also a big draw card at only \$18,750 with a Honda 50hp motor.

Freedom Boats tooled a totally new set of moulds for this model which includes the cut-away dash to allow you to attend to the anchor without leaving the cockpit.

While not specifically designed for the four-strokes the Getaway proved to be a surprisingly good match for this style of motor. According to Glen this will suit most boat buyers who he believes aren't into speed these days as much as smoothness, fuel efficiency and quietness. That's why his own dealership is exclusively Honda.

Admittedly the boat's speed performance will be better achieved with a lighter two-stroke motor, however as long as buyers are happy with a 28 knot top speed they'll have no trouble with the Honda 50hp package. Certainly it should have a lot of appeal to the older age buyer who isn't that fussed about super fast speed.

DESIGN



This is a modern hull which is 4.94m in overall length including a semi-pod at the stern. The design is right up to date with current trends and features bubble-curve topsides and a fastback transom with recessed landing steps.

A sharp bow entry flows back to a moderate deadrise angle of 16 degrees at the stern, which is about average for 'glass boats of this size, though some do run a bit more deadrise depth than this.

The hull looks particularly efficient with sharp lifting strakes each side, together with wide chine lips and a rounded keel 'runner plank.'

This bottom shape should promote quick planing and deliver pretty reasonable fuel efficiency. This was proved in practice by the test boat getting reasonable speed results with just a 50hp sized motor.

The sporty topsides of this boat are evident in the curved foredeck and rounded windscreen. There's also a slight reverse curve to the sheerline which enhances the look of the boat as well as improves forward vision from the helm position.



From a trailing point of view you'll be able to easily match this rig to medium sized cars like the Mazda 626. The hull weighs just 350kg which translates to a dry road weight of about 730kg. Even allowing for fuel and personal gear the weight shouldn't exceed 830kg.

Even if the dry weight does fall below 750kg you should ensure you do get trailer brakes fitted as you could very easily find your rig exceeding that figure. In all states you have to have trailer brakes once the rig hits 750kg or greater.

The compact size and low profile of this runabout should make it an easy craft to store at home in the driveway or garage. You'd probably do well to get an overall boat cover to keep the topsides and upholstered interior looking good.

PERFORMANCE

We ran this boat on a rather unpleasant day on the Gold Coast when a southerly was whipping up a nasty chop down the main channel. The ride was pretty good considering the boat runs only 16 degrees at the back end. I can only suppose the relatively fine entry and the well padded bucket seats are doing a good job of softening the wave impacts when you're driving at speed.

The low sporty cockpit and wraparound 'screen also provides better than expected wind and spray protection. Obviously there's just enough height in the screen to do the job of protection.

Overall handling was quite good, though the boat definitely lacked that performance sparkle which you'd get with more engine power. Obviously with this smaller size motor we weren't going to get fantastic hole-shot performance from a standing start.



Whilst I wouldn't rate the Getaway boat as the top ride performer for its size, it's still pretty good for a boat of this size and price. Certainly there'd be more performance sparkle with a 70hp sized motor, however I wouldn't think you want to go any higher in the power band unless you were seriously into water-skiing.

At-rest stability was about average for a boat of this size and quite acceptable for semi-sheltered estuary waters. After all this is a low sports boat and it's not really the hull you'd choose for offshore fishing, unless it was a real calm day.

POWER

The Getaway works surprisingly well with such a small motor as this 808cc, three-cylinder Honda 50hp. This motor weighs a quite reasonable 88kg in dry weight, however, in terms of weight on the transom you really wouldn't want to go up to the next size Honda 75hp since it's 70kg heavier in weight.

In two-strokes you could go up to a 70hp, but I doubt whether you'd need to go for a 90hp given that the boat is so easily driven

by a 50hp motor.

Also there's a strong possibility some of the two-strokes 90s would be too heavy for this transom.

Certainly the beauty of the four-strokes is its quiet and people-friendly performance. The motor is virtually smoke free and brilliant on fuel savings. We estimated that even after a day's running we'd used no more than half the 60 litres in the floor tank.



The boat is supplied with a battery, navigation lights and a basic switch panel to allow easy addition of extras like a sounder.

There's also negative feedback steering and the stainless steel floor tank with deck filler/breather also standard.

DECK LAYOUT

The standard package provides a bow roller with capture pin, stainless steel Tee bollard and anchor locker with hatch cover. There is also low grab rails around the bow which are quite useful for pushing the boat off the beach.

The five panel windscreen provides a centre opening panel so you can use the lean-through passage in the dash. There's also a glovebox on the passenger side, angled instrument dash and a sports steering wheel standard. There's room here ahead of the wheel to mount an LCD sounder.

The driver/passenger seats are quite comfortable and you also get footrests rising off the carpeted floor which also forms stowage bins under the foredeck for the lifejackets and other gear.

The cockpit features long side pockets with padded facias and a split rear lounge which gives you two fibreglass stowage/kill box bins under the seat bases. For fishing you could leave one of the lounge base/bin sets ashore to give you more room to work at the back of the cockpit.

The Getaway also comes standard with two stern rod holders, mooring cleats and two transom steps with stainless steel grab/boarding handles. There's also ski hooks provided as well.

From a fishing point of view the lounge boxes and the rod holders provide a reasonable start to a basic inshore estuary fishing rig. You could easily build on this with the Freedom factory extras of a live bait tank (fitted in the stern deck) and raised cutting board. You can also order more rod holders and through your dealer a sounder and two-way radio.

With both lounge bases removed you actually get quite a good work area for fishing so that's something to keep in mind when you do decide to convert the boat to more serious fishing purposes.

SUMMARY

As the name implies this is a good 'getaway' for weekend cruising and maybe the odd bit of fishing. The compact size of the boat makes it especially ideal craft for a couple, especially if they don't intend to do offshore boating.

The layout isn't overly orientated to fishing yet the Getaway could very easily be upgraded to a reasonable fishing platform, especially with the addition by the dealer of just a few fishing accessories.

The standard rear lounge is a handy addition for those times when you do have a few extra passengers along for the day and the under seat bins are also handy for fishing, or simply for stowage purposes.

While it lacks quite the same sophistication in design details of some of the well known GRP brands the Getaway shapes up surprising well overall. The fibreglass finish is actually quite reasonable for a boat which is after all an 'economy' rig.

Glen himself probably sums up the Getaway's appeal by calling it an 'affordable all-rounder' for the person who wants to maximise their boating options be it cruising, fishing or even water-skiing.