

This Queensland Walkaround model puts the value back into fibreglass fishing boats as well as breaking new ground in hull design. Test report by James Hill, photos Baitbox.



Freedom 595

Up in sunny Queensland, Freedom Boats is one shining example of a boat builder actually driving down prices. Principal Glen Grams has been hard at work in his Noosa factory producing a range of fibreglass trailer boats that are very well priced. In fact, he's matched the 'tinnies' right across his range.

The Freedom approach is smart thinking because these days boat buyers are definitely more price-conscious than they've ever been before. In this climate the first-time buyer is going to balk at the idea of paying more for one boat than another just because it's fibreglass.

After concentrating on the 'cruz fraternity' this past two years Freedom this summer has launched something really exciting for the mad keen fisho.

As the name implies the Freedom 595 Offshore is pitched at open water fishing and purpose-designed for that very reason. At just over six metres it's the right on the money for many anglers these days wanting to head offshore and chase big fish.

And it's also right on the money with BMT (boat, motor, trailer) packages starting from a low \$50,000. You might say that's still expensive, however, in today's terms the 595 Freedom is exceptional value and something that two mates could buy on a shared basis.

Earlier this season I had the chance to give the new Freedom Offshore a run on Gold Coast waters with its creator, Glen Grams.

From the very outset this boat shouts fishing with its generous-sized fishing cockpit and genuine deep Vee

ride. There are also extensive fishing features like rod holders and live bait wells either supplied standard, or as a factory option.

Design: Freedom's latest fishing model proves it's an eye-catcher with its black topsides and latest aero-deck cabin styling. The boat has a moulded 6.2m length that includes the full-size cab, moulded bowsprit and fastback transom. It's called a 'Walkaround' though in truth it's really a cuddy with a very generous side deck to get to the bow.

However, whatever name you care to give the 595 Offshore, it's going to work pretty well as a family cruiser or fishing machine. Either way you're going to love the great access via a stern landing deck and folding transom ladder.



Offshore

However, what really excites even more about the 595 Offshore is the revolutionary 'tunnel' bottom shape we first saw in the Freedom 640 Seasport two years ago. Starting with a deep Vee hull of approximately 21-degrees deadrise the Freedom features the clever addition of a hollow tunnel down the keel centre line that tapers out up near the forefoot.

The benefit of the tunnel soon becomes apparent when you hit the throttle. It directs better water flow over the propeller, thereby improving acceleration and certainly fuel consumption by better engine efficiency.

Another major benefit of the tunnel keel is that the Freedom goes onto the plane without your having to touch the motor trim button. This not only

makes the Freedom easier to drive, but also better able to cross shallow water areas (like river bars) more easily.

All told, the tunnel makes the Freedom 595 Offshore a very user-friendly craft. In an emergency, less experienced crew will be able to take the helm and drive the boat.

The tunnel also means you can throw the boat into a hard turn at speed without having your heart in your mouth. Please don't try this at home, but if you do turn hard, the 595 Offshore just spins through the turn without the motor going into a mad cavitation fit, or flipping.

Yet another innovation that pleases me about the Freedom 595 Offshore is the use of a fully moulded fibreglass stringer system. In fact, the only timber in the boat is the cockpit floor, which is

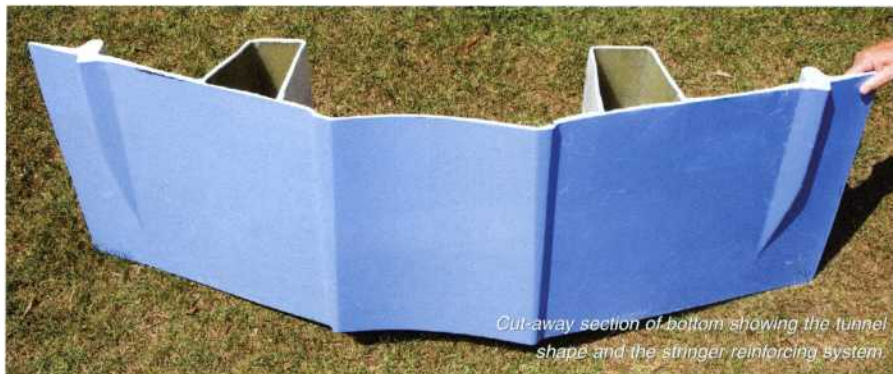


made from a sheet of specially treated marine plywood. Apart from improving hull longevity this feature also helps to improve and speed up boat production.

While not quite as light in weight as previous Freedoms, the 595 hull comes in at an acceptable 950kg. Throw in the trailer, motor, fuel and other gear and you're looking at a tow package about 1,900kg on the road. This is pretty good for a six-metre boat and puts the 595 within the range of medium-size four-wheel drives like the Volvo XC90, Pajero and current Nissan Pathfinder.

Performance: Queensland was in a 'perfect mood' the day we took the new Freedom for a run on the sunlit waters of the Gold Coast. Fortunately there were no signs of wild hailstorms like we got on our last Freedom test and we were able to spend a few enjoyable testing this new fishing craft.

What wave chop we did encounter was easily dismissed by the smooth ride of the innovative deep Vee design. The strakes on the bottom and down deflecting chines ensure the ride was quite dry, while the tunnel blasted us onto the plane.



Cut-away section of bottom showing the tunnel shape and the stringer reinforcing system.

Offshore was quick to plane and accelerated nicely through the rpm range. Indeed, it was a remarkably fast test run as the following speed results attest:

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| 3500rpm | 27 knots |
| 4500rpm | 37 knots |
| 5500rpm | 42 knots |

Frankly, you shouldn't be going faster than this unless you're doing something illegal! Rather, I suggest you might step down to a 140hp or

130hp size motor and still achieve very good performance. However, I really loved the sizzling performance of the V-6 E TEC and would suggest you could save by driving it at lower revs.

If you did step down to a smaller motor I'd be thinking of either the Suzuki's excellent 140hp four stroke, or Honda's BF135 four-stroke.

The 595 Offshore comes with a 175-litre in-floor fuel tank so there shouldn't be any shortage of fuel. There's also a rear deck filler and full instrumentation.



With the tunnel you hardly need to touch the trim button, though by doing so you'll only enhance performance and give you even more speed and fuel savings.

Not surprisingly, the Offshore tracks very true to course with the tunnel giving a really good grip on the water. On the downside the ride is not quite as soft as the traditional deep Vees but I'm sure it's faster and more fuel efficient. In any event, family boaties coming from a tinnie are going to be pretty happy with the ride.

Yours truly certainly enjoyed the comfortable helm position with its well-padded bucket seat, moulded footrests and easy-to-view curved instrument dash.

High at-rest stability also was another bonus and keeps the Freedom 595 well within the comfort range you'd require fishing offshore. We had four blokes aboard for our test and the boat had no problem accommodating all that without feeling crowded.

Power: While rated to a maximum of 200hp, this latest Freedom performed beautifully with the 150hp Evinrude E-TEC provided in the dealer package.

Quite apart from the great hole-shot of the E-TEC motor the Freedom



