



## FREEDOM ELITE 620 REVIEW

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Freedom has surprised the trailer boat market by producing a smart looking fibreglass 6.2m boat for under \$40,000. It might be the new player on the block, but Sunshine Coast based Freedom Boats is quickly getting the reputation as the 'price buster of fibreglass boats.'



Glen Grams kicked the brand off a few seasons ago with a cuddy deck, Freedom 1750 Escape. Despite being an unknown this boat notched some very solid sales due to its attractive mix of smart styling and incredibly low price.

Glen has followed up that success up with a smaller runabout, which also blends trendy modern lines and pricing that's the same as a tinnie.

Fibreglass boats generally don't match the tinnies on price so it's no wonder these Freedom boats got immediate buyer reaction. However, despite these early successes the Freedom brand has lacked the "brand awareness of long established brands like Signature, Haines Hunter and so on.

I believe that situation is going to change with the release of the new Freedom 620 Elite. This boat not only puts Freedom into the big boat league, but also gives it the status of a "proper" boat range.

Glen Grams is well aware that boats tend to sell better when they are part of a range, not just one-offs. The new 6.2m Elite offshore will certainly help the whole Freedom range in that regard.

The Elite will also allow Freedom dealers to trade existing Freedom owners up to a bigger, offshore boat. The Elite has the same styling of the other Freedoms and certainly the same very attractive price advantage.

In this case the boat comes standard with full-length bunks and a well-padded cockpit lounge. It also such nice cruising touches as upholstered side pockets Targa arch and rear swim-deck.

The boat also has a few standard fishing features like a rear live-bait well, and rod holders, but ultimately the big hook is the amazingly low price. The standard boat on trailer with motor starts at only \$36,600 ex-Sydney. That's remarkable value when you consider most fibreglass boats around this size start at least \$10,000 more in stock standard trim.

Even when you add the extra cost of a four-stroke Honda 130hp the standard price is still only \$39,600. This sort of pricing advantage puts the Freedom 620 Elite in same league as sheet tinnies, and well able to under-cut the more established fibreglass boats.

Whilst it mightn't have quite the top draw finish, or design pedigree of top players this boat really offers a really acceptable package with a very acceptable level of finish.

We recently tested one of the first Elite 620s at Southport on the Gold Coast. The boat was packaged with a Honda 130hp four-stroke and came with a few options like a Targa arch, Lowrance sounder, 27MHz radio, bimini top, hydraulic steering, nav and cockpit lights.



## DESIGN

The 620 Elite continues the same modern theme of the smaller Freedoms with fastback stern and the latest aero-deck styling. The rear transom deck and moulded Targa really help to give the impression of a contemporary styled boat, well suited to cruising or fishing.

The hull follows the modern theme of a deep Vee hull, which is very sharp at the bows, but softening slightly towards the transom. Deadrise works out to about 20 degrees at transom. In comparison the traditional deep Vee runs a constant deadrise angle from bow shoulders to transom.

The overall length of 6.2m includes a half pod that doesn't go quite full depth. The idea of keeping the pod slightly shorter creates a release point for the water at the transom. Glen says this helps the boat turn more easily, at the same time providing enough buoyancy for heavy engines.

The hull also features quite wide chine flats and several sharp bottom strakes to help get it onto the plane quickly. However, the hull doesn't feature a runner plank.

The topsides follow the modern theme with rounded transom corners and topside colour flash above the white rubbing strip. It's interesting to see the extra spray lip in the topsides. However, this extra ridge probably does more for looks than spray deflection.

As with many modern designs the Elite Freedom has a lot of deck build-up above the gunwales. This not only improves the level of freeboard; it allows the transom deck to be moulded as part of the deck mould.

The cabin roof is moulded as part of the foredeck so you don't get walk-around decks. While you'd call it for a cuddy it's really more like a true cabin inside with full-length bunks and room for a toilet.

For the above reasons the driving position is further back from the bows and provides more ride comfort. Some cockpit space is lost in this design, but you don't worry too much about when you've got a clear working space of 168cm long, by 177cm wide.

This is assuming you are removing the rear lounge. The lounge is designed so the backrest remains as padded leg bolsters for fishing. Meanwhile the base lifts up to reveal two moulded fibreglass bins, which can be used as drink coolers or fish boxes.

The split-fold nature of this lounge means you can use one half for seating and one half clear for fishing. That's quite handy if you've got an extra two or three people along for your fishing trip.

Seating is undoubtedly one of the big pluses in this new Freedom. You get two very comfortable pedestal seats along with the lounge. All told you could easily seat five adults comfortably in the cockpit. And afterwards four of you can down below for post-fishing drinks!

From a trailing point of view the Elite will comfortably fall within the range of popular mid to larger 4WDs. The dry weight is around 1540kg, or about 1650kg when fully loaded up with fuel and gear aboard.

This weight level would fall within the range of 4WDs like the Mitsubishi Pajero, which can tow up to 1800kg under the new trail laws. Other towing prospects would include the smaller Jeep Cherokee, Toyota LandCruiser, Nissan Patrol and any of the Land Rover models.

Either the Falcon or Commodores can tow this rig, provided they had their heavy-duty 2100kg tow packs fitted.

While obvious no lightweight, the beauty of the Elite is a rig that's not so massive you feel your running Desert Storm, every time you decide to go fishing.



This boat is big, but if you know what you're doing you can easily launch with the help of your wife, or fishing mate. Mind you it helps to know how to drive the boat on the trailer unless you want to do some hard work on the winch.

The size of the Elite is still within reasonable limits for home parking, though you need to look carefully at available space, and vehicle access.

## PERFORMANCE

There's no doubt the Elite is a boat you're going to feel relaxed about taking to sea for a fishing session.

At 6.2m overall with a beam of 2.3m the Elite has the capacity to go well offshore. Running out of Southport in a fairly windy, choppy day we sure had no trouble feeling comfortable in the Elite.

We sat back, relaxed and dry in the well-padded bucket seats well protection by curved windscreen and the overhead bimini cover.



There was a really sharp edge to the southerly wind, but we just powered along smoothly hardly feeling the chop except for the odd, dull thump coming through the hull.

You really appreciate a big deep Vee boat in these conditions. In fact, we would have no problem going offshore that day for a fish despite the weather being less than inviting.

I felt pretty comfortable behind the wheel, but the only annoyance was the way the throttle box sat so close to the wheel. This made it very easy to go knuckle to knuckle during a hard turn. Glen Grams has since moved the throttle position back so the driving position is much more comfortable.

I like the way curved instrument panel, which spreads the instruments out in front of you so they're easy to view at all times. In the middle of dash is a flush-mounted LCD sounder with a steering compass as well. A sports steering wheel falls easy to hand and is improved by the inclusion of hydraulic steering.

You can get quite comfortable behind the wheel thanks to the moulded footrest and the adjustable seat slide.

Obviously speed in any boat is limited by wave conditions, but in this test we had no trouble driving at full speed over choppy bay waters. In offshore conditions we'd have to back off a bit, but would still have been able to hold around 18 - 20 knots.

Handling at speed showed the hull is not overly sensitive to trim, and sits quite well with the Honda 130hp. Our speeds were as follows:

3500 rpm	18 knots
4000 rpm	28 knots
5500 rpm	39 knots

These speeds indicate the Elite has more than enough power with the Honda 130hp fitted on the stern. It certainly has the grunt to handle heavier loads.



At-rest stability was also quite acceptable and the boat sat well in a cross-sea condition with little motion.

On the handling front I'd rate the Elite as one of the driest boats in this class. We simply didn't get a more than a few spray drops on the windscreen for several hours of boating.

## POWER

Glen Gram is an unashamed fan of the Honda motors. In this case his enthusiasm is very justified because the big Honda 130hp was a beautiful match for this boat.

The big Honda was whisper quiet at low speeds so much so we had to check to see it was running! That's no exaggeration, at low RPMs the Honda is probably the king of quietness.

In overall performance I found the Honda gave us pretty much the same top end speed we would have got with a two-stroke. However, in typical four-stroke fashion the acceleration is slower and the motor tends to build up power towards the top end of power curve.

For long offshore trolling sessions, or slow cruising around inland waterways the Honda 130hp is going to be an excellent choice. These motors are very suitable for a lot of low speed work not only because they are quiet and thrifty, but also because they don't oil up the plugs.

Despite these benefits there's still some big cost savings in going for a two-stroke. For example, a Yamaha or Johnson 130hp two-stroke will save you four thousand dollars on the price.

Obviously you'll take a long time to win that back in fuel-savings, yet what you will get in a four-stroke is both more pleasant boating, and better range. In the latter score fishos will naturally go for the Honda.

The Elite's rather smallish fuel tankage of 120 litres is another reason why you might go for four-strokes. The alternative is carrying an extra portable fuel tank for offshore trips.

## DECK LAYOUT



Up for'ard there's a split stainless steel bow rail wrapping around the low fibreglass deck, which has a moulded bowsprit for the anchor.

There's also a Tee bollard and a separate self-draining locker for the anchor. Both the anchor and forehatch are flush-fitted with the deck so it presents a smooth aerodynamic look.

The deck is a bit slippery for walking around on, but I'd suggest you'd much smarter handling the anchor from the safety of the forehatch.

Frankly I'd like to see some non-skid patches on that glossy foredeck, but really you should board your passengers via the transom which provides a wide landing/swimming platform and grab rails.

The kids are going to love the swim platform, and there's a step within the rear deck make easier cockpit access.



The cabin has small window ports and is topped by the wrap-around windscreen. It is a very attractive looking cabin structure and includes navigation lights as standard.

Moving into the cockpit we find quite a wide helm area thanks to the cabins going right to sides. You've got quite a practical dash area with a recess area for small items. You also get a passenger grab rail and side stowage pocket.

The helm station provides room for a LCD sounder and a 27MHz radio alongside the helm. However a safer spot for the radio is under the dash.

The cut-away bulkhead gives quite good access into the cabin. Inside you've got a great shelter with comfortable backrests, side shelves and woven fabric upholstery.

The cabin also features a carpet head liner and lights.

Under bunk stowage and side pockets in the cockpit gives the Elite quite good stowage for a boat in this class. You've also got stowage pockets in the seat boxes.

Back aft there's extra stowage under the rear lounge, plus a raised battery shelf to take up to two batteries. It's a very good idea to have dual batteries and isolating switch when heading offshore.

## **FISHABILITY**

While not a full-blooded fishing rig you can see how the Elite can be converted to a pretty nice fishing platform. You start by leaving the lounge ashore, and opening up the back end of the cockpit for fishing.

The boat already comes with two stainless steel rod holders, and more rod-holders are available ex-factory.

A live-bait well is moulded into the stern rear quarter, and can be plumbed by the factory with an electric pump system.

The moulded fibreglass Targa can take a six-pack rod-rack, but might restrict overhead angling room. For that reason I see some sportfishos opting for a more upright stainless steel Targa, which gives them more space.

Another factory option to consider is the custom bait board that goes over the rear deck area. This is another factory option.

Overall the boat scores well in the fishability category despite not having the largest cockpit area in class.



## VERDICT

This new Freedom is sure to draw a lot of attention from both family boater and offshore fisherman. The styling is very up to date with current trends and price is very attractive.

The standard package is quite strong on comfort features like the rear lounge and fully upholstered cabin area, however you need to tote up a few extras to bring it up to offshore fishing standards.

The company has since our test added hydraulic steering as a standard feature. This will be another point that is going to make this boat very attractive along what else is on the market.

The bimini is also standard, but you need to order the optional Targa if you want to mount a rod holder rack and various electric antennas.

A chemical toilet in the cabin is another top idea for a boat this size, particularly when you're more likely to have a mixed male/female crew aboard. However, I wouldn't rate the optional galley unit as a must-have feature. Unless you are planning to do some overnight cruising in the boat you really don't need be cooking!

Construction and finish of the Elite is surprisingly good for a boat in this price range. In fact, the only drawback seems to be a few missing items such as a grab rail around the inside of windscreen.

Freedom will be following this model up with an even more cruising orientated version of this hull later this year, but I don't think that's going to hold that much interest for our keen fishing readers. In the meantime contact your nearest Freedom dealer for more details.

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