

Freedom 575 Baysport

Freedom by name and freedom by nature, this latest cuddy fibreglass rig really delivers on inshore or offshore fishing capacity as well as family-friendly cruising. Test report by James Hill, photos Baitbox.

The economic news might be sobering but the sun is shining and right now it's a good time to be out there on the water enjoying the outdoors and the fun of fishing.

Queensland manufacturer Freedom Boats has been doing its bit for the nation lately producing fibreglass boats that really are affordable.

Last year we looked at the Freedom 595 Offshore walkaround, but more recently we had the chance to hop aboard the even more affordable Freedom 575 Baysport.

As you might have gathered this Freedom is targeted more at bay fishing/cruising than offshore. However, it's still capable of a run out to the close coastal reefs to see what's happening.

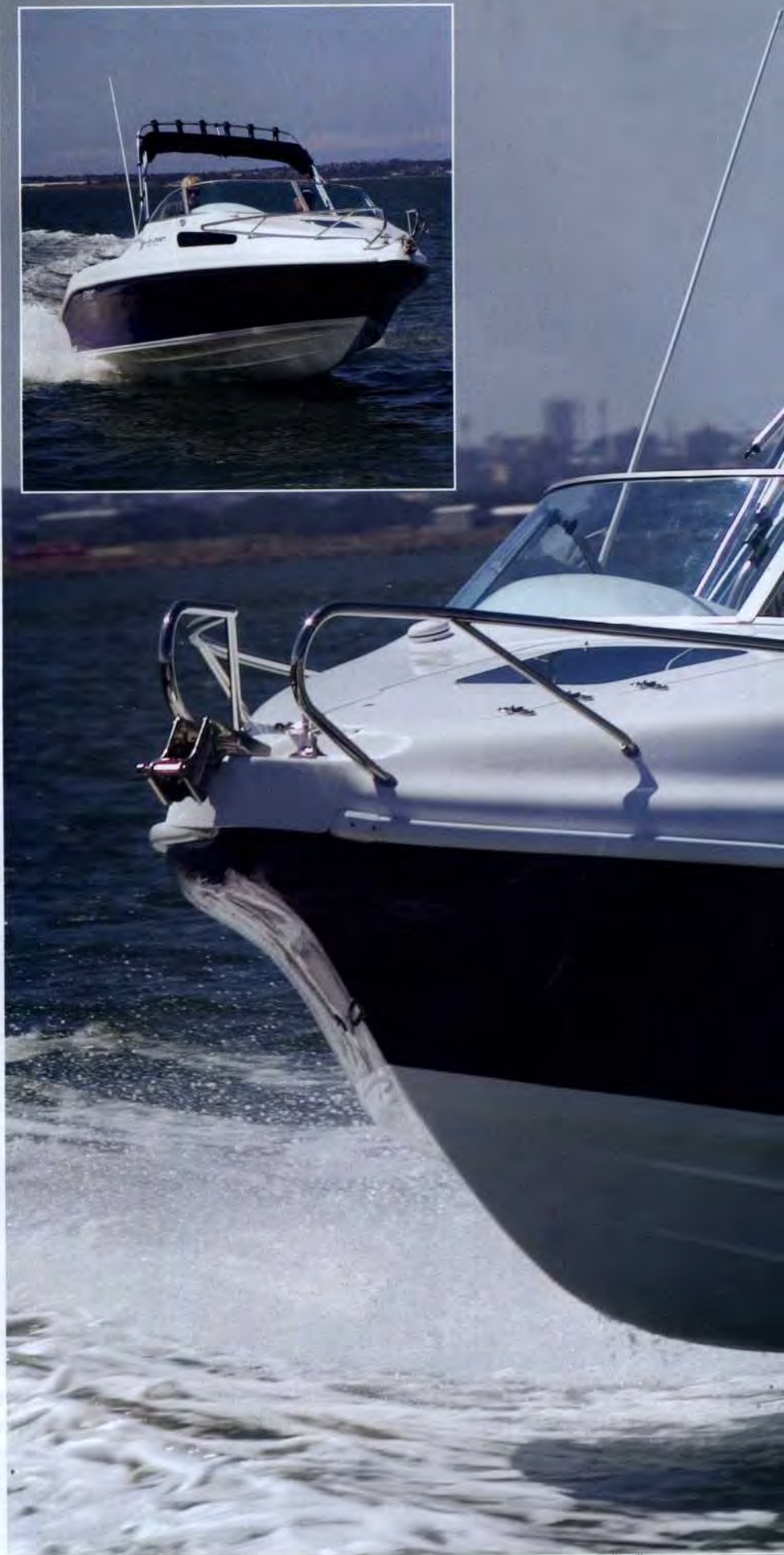
It's somewhat amazing how market tastes have shifted upwards to bigger boats. We would have called this a big boat 10 years ago but today it's really mid-sized compared to what else is on offer. However, the beauty of the 575 Baysport is you can easily park her in the suburban driveway or run it on an average income.

Our team were most impressed when we caught up with this latest Freedom. Sydney dealer, Alan Blake was absolutely effusive about the delights of this new Freedom and couldn't wait to show her off on the sunlit waters of Botany Bay.

Freedom has worked hard on this fibreglass model to deliver a base BMT (boat/motor/trailer) package that comes in just under \$40,000. That firmly puts the Freedom 575 Baysport in 'tinnie' territory and will make more than a few boat buyers take a second look.

And they should – this is a smart, nice-looking cuddy design that has a really quiet, smooth ride.

And that's not just rhetoric. Freedom's innovative 'tunnel' bottom design ensures the boat rides smooth and also quite economically for a boat of its weight.





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We first saw the tunnel feature on the Freedom Sport 640 but the concept has since been further refined in this smaller model.

Designer/builder Glen Grams has increased the lifting area of the central keel tunnel resulting in a craft that planes quickly and with little fuss. Best of all, it gets good water flow onto the propeller so you don't need to fiddle with the motor trim button.

In this respect it's a great choice for less experienced boaties and those who are learning to drive.

More about the handling qualities shortly. The Freedom 575 stacks up well in other respects like cockpit space for fishing and provision of seating.

Design: Freedom has continued the eye-catching dark topsides/white deck in this new cuddy design. It's a smart-looking rig and something you'd be proud to tow behind the family wagon.

Overall moulded length is 5.7m including moulded bowsprit and fastback transom. Matched with a generous 2.4m beam it provides quite good interior space and at-rest stability.

In typical Freedom style the bottom is a variable deep Vee of 21-degree deadrise with lifting strakes and a central hollow tunnel down the keel centre line. The latter tapers out under the bows.

The concept of the tunnel is simple – it gives you early lift for quicker acceleration but at the same time a soft ride due to its curved shape. Improved water flow also means the outboard accelerates better and can operate in shallower water more efficiently.

The tunnel makes the Freedom easier to drive and surprisingly easy to turn as well. It's especially suited to bay fishing because you can more easily cross shallow water areas like sand bars and mud shoals.

The tunnel also means you can throw the boat into a hard turn at speed without scaring your crew's pants off. At worst the boat just spins tightly and gradually slows down.

The interior provides clever use of mouldings. The coaming sides are deep and give the impression of a very clean interior. You also get carpeted floors and upholstered side pockets.

Whilst these boats are built to a price they do deliver on modern technology. For starters, you get a fully moulded fibreglass stringer system to ensure hull rigidity and no future problems with timber dry rot.

Apart from improving hull longevity this feature also helps reduce overall weight, which is a reasonable 820kg. The trail weight is approximately 1500kg. This puts in comfortably within the tow capacity of cars like the Holden Commodore, Falcon and Toyota Aurion. The latter, is the big V-6 version of



instrument dash is scalloped so you can see virtually all gauges at a glance.

The passenger gets a grab rail and tiered side pocket and there's stowage in the seat boxes.

At rest we found stability with all crew to one side pretty good and reassuring for bay or offshore fishing. There's sufficient internal freeboard so both the kids and you will be safe in open, bumpy waters.

Power: Rated to a maximum of 150hp, the Freedom 575 Baysport actually went extremely well with the new 130hp Evinrude E TEC we had on the transom.

Frankly, it would be hard to justify a bigger motor when performance was so



Toyota's current Camry and popular amongst company fleet buyers.

Obviously the Baysport will be suitable behind your mid-sized SUVs like the Ford Territory, or Nissan Pathfinder. And it should be OK for parking in the driveways of new housing estates.

Performance: We had a real taste of summer as we took the new Freedom for a spin on Botany Bay. Nothing quite lifts the spirits like a sparking north Easter and this day there was no way we'd be rushing back to office!

Heading up the bay we could see the first signs of the new desalination plant poking above the mangroves of Kurnell. We could also see how well the Freedom 575 slips onto the plane and ran in a comfortable fashion against a moderate wind chop.

Most pleasingly, the hull sits well at speed with a not too much bow up attitude. The tunnel effectively makes the trim automatic and therefore easy on the poor old driver.

A combination of sharp bottom strakes and down deflection chines also ensure spray is depressed and you get a reasonably dry ride. However, there's no doubt the 21-degree deadrise is the secret behind the smoother ride.

Like the bigger models we've tested, the Freedom 575 Baysport tracks quite nicely at speed and holds the steering line beautifully. The boat also tracks nicely running down sea and we had no problems cutting across the photo boat's wake at speed.

We had a lot of pleasure driving the Baysport at speed from the seated or standing position. Optional hydraulic steering is definitely worth having!

The latter keeps the steering loads quite light and should be mandatory for those times when you have the wife or kids learning to drive the boat.

The helm position is further enhanced by a well-padded bucket seat, moulded footrests and clear vision through the curved windscreen. Seat position is also adjustable and the

slick and quick. Mind you a lot can be attributed to the E TEC motor because it provides exceptional hole-shot to get the Freedom 575 on the plane quickly.

Certainly these two-stroke motors aren't as quiet as their four-stroke cousins, but are actually faster in the lower/mid-range revs and just as good on fuel.

The following speed results bear my argument out that 130hp is heaps for this boat:

3500rpm	18 knots
4500rpm	26 knots
5500rpm	33 knots
5600rpm	35 knots

Judging by these figures you could go for a 115hp motor. However, while in theory this would work I'd be worried about the performance falling away when the motor was under load. Basically that's because deep vee hulls require quite a bit more power to get out of the water and stay on the plane.



Overall, my guess is the Freedom 575 Baysport will be best matched to motors in the 130-140hp power band, in either four or clean two-stroke technology.

And speaking of performance, you can also expect a reasonable range out of the 145-litre under-floor fuel tank. Matched to a clean tech motor you're going to be getting some reasonable distance out of one tank of fuel.

And that brings me to another point about clean tech motors and E TEC in particular. Thanks to the Evinrude I Command system you have got fuel consumption information on a dash display. This means you know exactly how much fuel you've used and how far you can go on one tank.

Deck Layout: Freedom Boats has always believed in giving customers a complete package. In this case you're getting a moulded fibreglass bowsprit with bow roller and Tee bollard. The split stainless bow rail ensures easy anchoring from a retrieval system.

Moving aft you find the cabin pushed virtually to the gunwales so access aft is through the large fore hatch, which can also be used to handle the anchor from the safety of the cab.

The cuddy is a low-profile design with enough headroom below to sit comfortably over the vee berths. Indeed, two adults can sleep down there when the double berth in-fill is applied.

The cabin probably won't be used much over-nighting but will be great place to catch a nap, or keep the kids happy when they're tired from the sun.

Moving to the helm station it's pleasing to see the modern moulded dash with space for a Humingbird, flush-fitted sounder/plotter. There's also a slim-line throttle box, bank of water-proof switches and a GME VHF radio.

Further back you find a comfortable cockpit with raised side pockets for your fishing gear and boat hook. Meanwhile, flat-topped side decks ensure comfort for fishing and a place for the two rod holders supplied.

Back aft there's an upholstered lounge that can seat two adults with space either side to fish. Under this seat is a stowage bin, however, the whole thing comes out to give you space to fish the transom on those serious fishing missions.

Other features that score points include recessed quarter cleats,

navigation lights, stern steps recessed in the fastback transom and a folding rear ladder for easy access.

Added options on this boat included a stainless steel Targa arch with six-pack rocket launcher, bimini top, removable cutting board on the transom and the aforementioned electronics.

Summary: The market is going through some fundamental changes now so it's good to see a fibreglass manufacturer breaking the mould and providing real affordable boats.

For the local industry to survive it has to lift the value-for-money factor and I think boats like the Freedom 575 Baysport do exactly that. There are better finished boats, but this package presents well and doesn't bother with a lot of the frills you simply don't need.

It will be a good choice for those buying their first decent trailer boat, especially if they want to mix family boating with fishing.

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BOAT TEST ANALYSIS

Freedom 575 Offshore/Evinrude 130 ETec

Boat supplied with Evinrude 130hp, single-axle drive-on trailer, stainless steel Targa rocket-launcher, bimini, cabin cushions, and rear folding lounge, stern ladder, nav lights, stainless steel bow rails, solid coloured hull, 27MHz radio, Humingbird sounder/GPS chartplotter and offshore safety gear. Price as tested \$45,200. Further information from Blakes Marine ph (02) 4577 6699 or Freedom Boats ph (07) 5447 1655.

SPECIFICATION CHART

Model	Freedom 575	Cruise Craft 575	Signature 580	Streaker 5.85	Haines Hunter 580
Construction	GRP	GRP	GRP	GRP	GRP
Configuration	cuddy	cuddy	cuddy	cuddy	cuddy
Length overall	5.7m	5.7m	5.8m	5.8m	5.9m
Max. beam	2.4m	2.3m	2.3m	2.4m	2.2m
Deadrise	21°	20°	21°	20°	21°
Hull weight	820kg	n/a	800kg	1000kg	850kg
Weight on trailer	1500kg	1720kg	1600kg	1900kg	1600kg
Rated max. power	150hp	150hp	150hp	175hp	150hp
Power as tested	ETec150	Yamaha130	Suzuki140	Yamaha150	Honda130
Fuel capacity	145L	300L	720L	145L	160L

STAR RATING

Finish	★★★★	Helm Set-up	★★★★
Fitout	★★★★	Fishability	★★★★
Ride	★★★★★	Safety Features	★★★★
Dryness	★★★★	Value for Money	★★★★
Handling	★★★★		

*Data ESTIMATED by the TBF team when accurate information is unavailable. Maximum star rating 5 stars.