



The Voyager 625 Sports Fish . . .

Introducing a brand new contender in the increasingly competitive cat market - but this just isn't any ordinary cat. The brand spankin' Voyager 625 Sports Fish comes from one of the most experienced cat teams in the country; not only do they mean business, they know very well how to design it, mould it, build it, finish it beautifully - and make it go like the classic it is destined to become.





Voyager 625 Sports Fish

Derek Appleton is no stranger to powered catamaran design and construction and nor are readers of this magazine unfamiliar with his cats. Back in issue #100 we did a comprehensive study of his beautiful Voyager 1040 cat cruiser, which was preceded by the Voyager 930 cat, a craft that held our cruiser speed record for years.

Appleton has now been building cats for some time and amassed considerable experience and knowledge on the subject, so when we heard he was building a 6.0m cat, we sat up and took notice – and as events transpired, for very good reason.

The Voyager 625 is a refreshingly new trailerable cat in a market that has tended to go bigger rather than smaller, although in very recent months, there are now signs that several smaller cats in the 5.0m class are coming forward as well, from other manufacturers.

Derek Appleton's research into the Australian powered cat market was comprehensive and thorough. His analysis revealed that there was a gap in the line-up of boats between the Dominator 560 and 700 (let alone the new 8500) and also, between the Noosacat 1850 and the evergreen NC 6700. Similarly with Kevlacat, there is the classic 2100 (derived from the original 5.2) but then it jumps through to the 2400 which was probably closer to this model originally, but it too

has grown over the years. The WA Leisurecat range had got the most obvious direct competition for Voyager in this class, with the very highly regarded Islander 6000 series being similar in many ways to Appleton's craft, but it is penalised in the East by a very hefty freight bill.

It's interesting to note that such a wide range of cats in the 5.0-7.0m class exist in this day and age of competition from imports and secondhand boats, but in truth, the cat market is one of the strongest in Australia and Appleton knew the demand would continue strongly in the future, given the increasing maturity and wealth of the top end of the trailerboat market.

His model targeting is really clever. All up, this rig crosses the weighbridge at 2.1 tonnes, on a galvanised steel trailer (no liquids, of course) and off the drawbar, too.

So it is well within the notional 3 tonne de-facto towing limit that exists these days not so much through legislation, but by the advent of the whole raft of 3 tonne class 4WD's introduced by the automotive world in the last two or three years.

Appleton knew this, and very carefully crafted this whole BMT package to easily fit within the capability of all these new 4WD's, and even some of the larger SUV's of the "soft roader" kind.

That said, he also didn't hold back in building a boat of considerable strength and very good tunnel design. Regular

readers will know the writer is passionate about the need to keep the ends of these craft light, and the tunnel as high as possible out of the water, with a mid-throat nacelle or wave breaker at the entrance to the tunnel or mouth of the cat.

Appleton has targeted these issues very effectively, and developed a beautiful set of moulds with an extremely high standard of tooling from stems to sterns.

The upshot is a very modern looking cat with nicely rounded, even soft lines from some quarters, that the writer believes is arguably the best looking 6.0-7.0m cat on the market.

So how does it go? Is it as good as Bushels? Well, there was only one way to find out, so the F&B team volunteered for the duty – somebody had to do it, and with a nice 15 knotter blowing offshore "slight seas on a low to moderate swell" and full tanks of go-juice aboard, we took off for the Seaway entrance . . .

Before we get there though, let's step back and have a good look at the boat's basic design.

Design Notes

The Voyage 625 is a classic cuddy in the sense that there is a formal cabin up front in the first third of the boat, with two surprisingly big berths that have a bit more headroom than is usually found in cats of this kind. Derek's very proud of this feature; he worked hard to get every inch of headroom in there, and it certainly did pay off.



Above: The Voyager 625 uses conventional fibreglass technology in a beautifully built set of moulds, to achieve an unusually high standard of inherent, 'off the gun' finish. Build time is usually 6-8 weeks from order.

Below: Voyager CEO, Derek Appleton, is deservedly proud of his new V-625.



In raw statistics, the berths themselves are actually 1800mm long (fore and aft) and both berths are 780mm wide – a very comfortable figure. If the infill cushion is installed between the berths, a veritable 'playroom' is created no less than 1940 wide across the cat, by the same 1800 deep – so two adults and at least one child could easily sleep here very comfortably.

In theory three adults could sleep there too, with the infill cushion in place, but given the option of sleeping with two whisky blokes snoring all night, I'd take the back deck under the stars!

Of note too, under the port side berth is one of the best toilet installations we've encountered in a cat (or any trailerboat for that matter) and suggest readers study the photograph on Page 53 carefully to see how well this has been done, by installing the toilet down inside the hull, under the berth cushion to port.

Privacy to the cabin area is up to the owner and his thoughts on the cabin structure. Some people really like to keep the whole cabin open (as shown here), with just a draw curtain pulled across for privacy for the toilet. Others might prefer the 3/4 bulkhead and drop down vinyl door, whilst for some, the ultimate option is a fully enclosed bulkhead with lockable security door.

Sitting headroom in the cabin is quite comfortable at 800mm towards the after edge, so that a couple of blokes could easily sit inside the cabin in bad weather.

Outside in the cockpit, the whole rig has

a feeling of spaciousness, security (from its deep sides) and practicality from the huge freeing port in the middle, under the tailboard.

This is a terrific cockpit for fishos, that's for sure. It measures 2.77m from the cabin bulkhead to the inside of the stern transom moulding, and it's 1700mm across between the hip bolsters, although it's 2200 in width between the outside edges of the coamings ie, each side has a 250mm sit-able flat surface.

The coaming flats are also perfect to place whatever rod holder configuration takes your fancy. Full marks for this – sportfishermen will love it, because of the freedom of location of vital equipment such as rod holders, downrigger(s), baitboard, outrigger cleats (etc), are required and there is terrific flexibility in where all of these elements can be positioned.

But the good news doesn't stop there. On both port and starboard sides leading down into the hulls, Voyager have positioned two terrific fish boxes/kill tanks that measure an average 1040mm long x 520 wide and an extremely useful 380 deep – and there are two of these, one on each side. It didn't take much imagination to see one being set up as an in-floor ice chest for the catch, whilst the other would be plumbed and drained as a wet box with its own pump to keep the saltwater flushing through the well.

In a similar vein, observe there is not one but two lockers built into the transom moulding, one or both of which could easily be developed for a really good live bait tank, although I'd probably want to see one of them deepened to create a greater capacity - but it's in that "probably right" range that would get down to very personal preferences and the type of fishery envisaged.

Fact is, there are two tanks on either side of the walkway that lend themselves to even further development. As it stands, the LBT's measure 415mm wide x 240 high x 235 long for a total of approximately 23.5L up to the adjustable overflow.

That's okay for yakkas but could be a bit too small for some of the more active bait species – but making the tank bigger, wouldn't be that hard to do.

Other important issues include noting the floor uses a particularly good grippy non skid, and we were impressed with the hardware fitted to the standard craft – this included the built-in hand rails on the coamings to port and starboard, plus really clever fold-down stern cleats that allow a flush surface to be presented to a taut



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fishing line sweeping around the cockpit – *excellent thinking, Mr Voyager!*

Just to complete the stats, note there is 1820mm behind the seats shown in the photos back to the inner transom wall and a particularly pleasing 735mm of internal freeboard hard up against the transom – this is unusually deep and safe. Full marks again.

The only other statistic of note concerns the fuel tanks – the Voyager has two 180L tanks, and on the basis of the fuel consumption of the Honda 90's bolted on here, this suggests a range at a cruising speed of around 20-22 knots of up to 250 nautical miles – and that's going to please an awful lot of fishos.

Engine Room

The Voyager 625 was powered by the new Honda BF90 DKO series outboards of 1497cc capacity in a 4 cylinder, 4-stroke fuel injected unit that weighs in at 163kg on each corner.

These are Three Star engines on the F&B emission's scale, with a very impressive 44 amp alternator capacity, and the patented "BLAST" technology that is one of the important technical features of the latest Honda motors.

As we've demonstrated in the various tests over the last year or two since the 'BLAST' technology first surfaced, there's no doubt this adds a significant boost to the performance of the engine.

It works by the basically simple

expedient of adding more oxygen to the fuel : air mix, and maximising the "bang" created from the fuel as it explodes in each cylinder. Whilst that's a very crude simplification of what happens, it is nevertheless reasonably accurate, and it was very evident here - especially when the loud pedal was pushed down to the firewall.

If you study the performance data carefully, you can actually see where the BLAST technology kicks in around the 4,500rpm area, acting more like a natural turbo charging affect and really kicking the boat in the bum right through the last 1,500 revs. It's not subtle, it's easily detected and bloody good fun if you're in a circumstance where you can use it to the max.

However, given that this is a pretty serious fishing boat, we were aware that most readers are more concerned about its mid-range economy and in that sense, the results here are outstanding. Study the fuel chart carefully for a few moments, and you'll see the sweet spot coming in an unusually low 3,000-3,500 revs, and further, note the big jump in fuel usage when the throttle is pushed right down and the BLAST cuts in at around 4,500-4750. This suggests a cautious skipper will keep a close eye on his performance parameters to maximise the Hondas' fuel usage during the day.

This Voyager 625, married to the twin Honda 90's was just about a perfect

combination in the writer's opinion. No way would I put more weight on the transom, nor would you need anymore power.

The amount of oomph at 4,500-5,000 is brilliant, easily enough for bar work, and pretty serious rough stuff at that.

With the two wheels biting in what can sometimes be frothy or aerated water, this boat did not lack for any grunt in the critical phases of the take off or boggy areas when you're coming in between the sets.

Truly an outstanding performance and very much due to the fact that these light Hondas have not weighed down the arse of the Voyager to the extent it's lost its stern lightness and buoyancy – all of which means the tunnel hasn't been squashed into the water.

People coming into cats for the first time never really appreciate how important it is for that tunnel to exhaust through cleanly, quickly and efficiently - and this boat does it superbly.

Offshore

I have to say upfront that this was one of the most enjoyable runs the writer has had in the blue stuff for quite a long time – in fact, since we hurtled round the ocean in a Noosacat 3300 with a 250hp Yammy on each stern corner. If that was a hoot, this cat is a screamer!

The writer just loves small cats with the right power : weight ratio, the right buoyancy in the ends, tunnel height with good clearance and the sort of sea that allows you to crank it up, running beam-to, so that you can walk the boat over the swells, down the other side into the trench, before pulling back up and running along the wall of water, straddling the swell tops with the tunnel, coming forward.

Driving a really good cat offshore is always a thrilling experience, and this was one of the best combos we've tried in many years.

I can't stress too much, how important it is not to kill this type of boat with super heavy engines on the bum – it's critical that it stays light and cork-like, with maximum airflow allowed to flow down through the tunnel to provide that classic ride cushioning that only starts to happen when you get up into the 30 knot zone.

Bringing this boat round in the writer's favourite test (huge 360 degree circles over a couple of mile radius) puts the boat through every degree of the compass, but it didn't really make a hell of a lot of difference because the conditions were just right to allow us to keep the pace up in the



Fisherman & BOATOWNER Test Evaluation

| Boat/Model | Voyager 625 Sports Fish | | Test Date | July / 11 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|-----------|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Rating | Poor Excellent | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Design / Styling | | | | | | | | | | | |
| General Handling | | | | | | | | | | | |
| "Downhill" Handling | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ride Softness | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dryness | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Helm Comfort | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fishability | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Stability At Rest | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Seaworthiness | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Inherent Safety | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Finish & Fit-out | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Value For Money | | | | | | | | | | | |

What You Get In The Standard Boat

| Feature | N/a | Std | Opt |
|------------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|
| Bow Sprit | | ✓ | |
| Berth Cushions | | ✓ | |
| Cabin Shelf | | ✓ | |
| Cockpit Carpet | | ✓ | |
| Two Colour Hull | | ✓ | |
| Two Tone Deck | | | ✓ |
| Anchor Locker | | ✓ | |
| With Hatch | | ✓ | |
| Underfloor Fuel Tanks & Gauge | | ✓ | |
| Cabin Light | | ✓ | |
| Navigation Lights | | ✓ | |
| Cabin Windows | | ✓ | |
| Mech. Steering | ■ | | |
| Hydraulic Steering | | ✓ | |
| Enclosed, off-floor Battery locker | | ✓ | |
| Unsinkable | | | |
| Rating | | ✓ | |
| Canopy | | | ✓ |
| Hardtop | | | ✓ |
| Toughened Glass Windscreen | | ✓ | |
| Swim Board | | | ✓ |
| Boarding Ladder | | | ✓ |
| Foam Insulated Ice Chest | | | ✓ |
| Live Bait Tank | | ✓ | |
| Live Bait Tank Plumbing | | | ✓ |
| U/FloorKill Tank | | ✓ (2) | |
| O/Head Targa or Rod Rack | | | ✓ |
| Std. Rod Holders | | ✓ (4) | |
| Cockpit Side Storage (length) | | ✓ | |
| Switch Panel | | ✓ | |
| Bilge Pumps (2) | | ✓ | |
| Float Switch | | | ✓ |
| Deck Wash | | | ✓ |
| Pre-Rigging | | | ✓ |

SPECIFICATIONS

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Model . . . | Voyager 625 Sports | Fixed Std Seats | Two |
| Construction | Fibreglass | Hull Weight (dry) | 1140 kg |
| Configuration | Cuddy | Weight On Trailer | 2100kg |
| Centreline Length | 6.1m | Maximum Power: | |
| Length Overall | 7.0m | - Outboard | 2 x 115hp |
| Max Beam | 2.3m | - Sterndrive | n/a |
| Deadrise | (Cat) | Fuel Capacity | 2 x 180 L |
| Berths | Two + 1 | Water Capacity | opt |
| | | Price (See Report) | From \$80K |

Voyager 625 Sports Fisher / 2 x 90hp Hondas

| R/Min | L/ph | G/ph | N.m/litre | Knots | Km | Range* |
|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|------|----------|
| | Combined | Combined | Combined | 5.0 | 9.2 | Combined |
| 1,500 | 5.90 | 1.3 | 0.98 | 5.8 | 10.7 | 289 |
| 2,000 | 10.91 | 2.4 | 0.68 | 7.5 | 13.9 | 235 |
| 2,500 | 15.45 | 3.4 | 0.60 | 9.4 | 17.4 | 208 |
| 3,000 | 16.36 | 3.6 | 0.85 | 14.0 | 25.9 | 292 |
| 3,500 | 21.30 | 4.7 | 0.81 | 17.3 | 32.0 | 277 |
| 4,000 | 30.00 | 6.6 | 0.71 | 21.3 | 39.4 | 242 |
| 4250 | 35.00 | 7.7 | 0.65 | 22.9 | 42.4 | 223 |
| 4,500 | 39.09 | 8.6 | 0.64 | 24.9 | 46.1 | 217 |
| 5,000 | 53.18 | 11.7 | 0.52 | 27.8 | 51.5 | 178 |
| 5,500 | 64.09 | 14.1 | 0.47 | 30.3 | 56.1 | 161 |
| 6,100 wot | 90.0 | 19.8 | 0.36 | 33.20 | 61.5 | 126 |

F&B's Performance Graph

*Nautical miles, based on 95% of the combined 2 x 180L tanks, ie 342 litres

The information shown here was correct at the time of going to press insofar as SEA Media can check; always obtain the latest prices and specifications from the factory or dealer before making a purchase decision.

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Clockwise, from the top left: Std tackle drawers. Live bait tank is an ideal position but could be deeper. Hydrive steering is superb; silky smooth and can be set and left, lovely touch and feel, too. Dash is beaut - note space for 10" combos dead centre. Throttles are best in class - exc set-up. It would be nice to synch the trim, though. Transom is a work in progress - it's about to get a walk-out ledge as an option, or the ss gate shown below right. Check tunnel height and big scupper. We'd move the filter(s) inside though - these are hopeless out in the salt spray, and too easily NOT seen when they should be. **Left:** RC shows how the std seats work, up and down as req'd. Then we've got the superb, Muir drum winch set-up - observe the excellent ss roller frame to keep the chain from rattling across the deck. Full marks. **Right:** Terrific 'head' set-up undeneath the port berth. Once you're down there, it is surprisingly comfortable - great place to read F&B on your new iPad! The cream moulding is a first glimpse of a new helmsman and passenger back to back seat moulding in lieu of the ss bars in the test boat. Underneath that is the optional transom gate, a view of the roomy cabin - and lower left, looking aft as we pull away from the Seaway Entrance.





high 20's for most of the circle, only pulling down to 25-26 when we ran straight into the oncoming swell. And even then, the only reason we slowed down was to discourage the boat from acting like a Cessna, and forgetting it was a boat!

Cats like this should be kept in the water, and coming out of the wave more than about mid-way along the hull is to deny the crew and the skipper the benefit of the diagonal waterline - this is the critical bit: the boat's much greatly increased waterline length over conventional monohulls.

Could we fault it? Not really, apart from scaring the bejesus out of a very patient Derek, who, on several points of the compass, was looking decidedly pale, so we finally and reluctantly decided it was time to go home and worked back through the northeast break to maximise the swells and the vertical edges of them, before breasting the Seaway Entrance bar proper, down near the rock walls.

Fair dinkum, it just takes boating to another place in bar work when you've got a boat like this, and again I'm reminded that it's very, very rare that you'll find a mono that can hack the pace as well as a really good cat, under these circumstances.

Inshore Work

Back inside for the run down to Runaway Bay through the Broadwater, was all a bit of an anticlimax.

It was more a case of picking the speed : economy that was most desirable for the

run, and relaxing at the helm for the trip back home.

If you turn the Voyager sharply, it leans outboard like most cats do, but the writer has never subscribed to the theory that doing figure of eights and whirligigs has any real relevance to cat performance and handling in flat water because that's not what anybody buys a cat to do. Nevertheless, it does all of those mechanical things perfectly satisfactorily as you would expect, and left no doubt that this would be a very safe boat even in a complete novice's hands.

That said, I still wouldn't like the novice to go out into the wrong sort of sea until they've had time to get an understanding of how cats work, how the boat handles, how quickly it responds to the helm, and all of those critical issues that add up to word "experience".

Again, as I've written so many times over the years, don't ever think that just because you've got a cat, it's bulletproof under any circumstances. That's rubbish - like any boat on the planet, it has to be driven properly to achieve its potential, but what happens here with a boat like this, is that it's so inherently stable and safe, it will be very forgiving, even with a rookie cat skipper starting from the very beginning of his cat experience.

Other Matters Of Interest

One of the top features of the Voyager 625 which deserves mention is to deal with the issue of stability, because it's often

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Well, this is the proof of the pudding, hey! The w'end after F&B tested the Voyager 625, the owner and a couple of mates went out wide to chase some winter mackerel and pulled a very nice 24kg mack - just so we could check the kill tank size - and advise Voyager it needs to be bigger! (Sigh!)

taken for granted and we overlook just how magnificently stable a cat like this is underfoot out at sea, let alone back in the flat inshore waters.

This is where cats do make fantastic family boats; they can be set-up to be so comfortable for Mum and the kids that everybody will have an absolute ball on the water.

One of the early sales arising from Sanctuary Cove Boat Show in fact, is for a Voyager 625 with full length seats on either side, as the owner is planning to use the boat entirely as a cruising day boat exploring southern Queensland's marvellous waterways. And frankly, what a terrific boat to do it – for a family set-up, with typical Qld or WA camper covers, it will be a very safe, comfortable craft for the job.

However, from the writer's perspective, it is first and foremost an exceptional bluewater fishing platform.

We haven't seen a boat with such application to sportfishing – all shades of fishing, for that matter – as good as this for a long, long time.

I don't think there's a fisherman in Australia who could resist the cockpit set-up and who wouldn't get excited by its potential and how it can be fitted out. The mind boggles at the possibilities, and I would just love to be given that chance!

Trailing

With a weighbridge certificate of 2.1 tonnes BMT (dry), and a separate weight of 640kg for the trailer, we can see that the basic hull with these two Hondas (it was this boat that was weighed) comes in at 1460kg.

This is a colossal achievement, and a very exciting figure for all the powered cat fans who would love to have all the advantages of cat performance and handling, but are often put off by their much greater bulk and weight than conventional monohulls.

Not so here – by using quite sophisticated building techniques, Appleton has kept the dead weight out of the craft to very good effect. With an all up weight of 2.1 tonnes dry, even allowing for fuel, fishing equipment, personal affects etc, it's going to be possible to keep this boat well and truly under the 3 tonne limit; most likely it will sit around 2.5-2.7 tonne as a working BMT weight in the future.

That's a fantastic figure because it means all the current 3 tonne 4WDs can easily handle this BMT package.

Conclusion

Well, blind Freddy can see we were quite taken with this boat, and thoroughly enjoyed the test of an immaculately

prepared craft that was correctly propped, set-up with all the requisite safety equipment - and we had the time to go out and explore its potential in a very meaningful way.

F&B has been quite critical of the industry's lack of forward progress in recent months, castigating many boat builders who are treading water in terms of their boats' design, performance and handling.

Derek Appleton's Voyager cats have shown that with a typical BMT price of \$90-\$100K, it is possible to build an exceptionally good, high performance sportfishing craft that is the equal of anything in the world in the 6.0-7.0m class.

It's taken vision to recognise the demand, courage to fund the tooling and a commitment to quality which is refreshing, to say the least.

Appleton's Voyager cats are leading by example; they are showing the way forward for the Australian GRP manufacturing sector whether they are building cats or monos.

The Voyager 625 is simply outstanding and deserves the soubriquet as "Best In Class" like no other.

F&B