

The sun's finally gotten to Angelo San Giorgio — he reckons he's found a sexy Stabicraft. Call the loony bin...

# SAFE SEX



**WEATHER  
CONDITIONS**

Wind: 20-25kts SSW  
Sea: 1-1.5m and messy



**B**uilt to honour the physical proportions of your average Maori rugby player, the trademark broad stance and tough, take-no-crap demeanour of Stabicraft's products have earned the Kiwi builder an enviable reputation and a full-to-bursting trophy cabinet.

Its fire-engine-red 2150 Supercab claimed the silverware at Australia's Greatest Boats 2011, while in AGB 2012, the 2570 Supercab Plus — loaded to the gills with all the gear — proved an incredible ambassador for the brand.

The largest boatbuilder in the Land Of The Long White Cloud, Stabicraft has found favour far beyond its native shores and is the boat of choice for government departments not just in NZ, but also across Australia. Stabicraft boats are sought after by operators from as far afield as the US and Canada, and the firm recently delivered nine 659 Wheelhouse variants commissioned for fisheries and game-monitoring duties in Alaska.

Despite its success and the undeniable functionality of its products, Stabicraft has copped an unfortunate rap since first unleashing its unusual designs upon an unsuspecting boating public in 1987. Inspired by the unrivalled stability and buoyancy of a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat), Stabicraft reinterpreted the architecture in puncture-resistant aluminium, resulting in a hull that was at once tough, stable... and rather ugly.

- On the plane...*
- ✓ Compact hardtop works a treat
  - ✓ Cabin great for storage and small kids
  - ✓ Wide and deep cockpit for a 5.6m boat
  - ✓ Glass windscreen delivers panoramic view and isolates you from elements
  - ✓ Clever folding rear quarter seats
  - ✓ Standard anchor winch a nice touch
- Dragging the chain...*
- ✗ Can't use the old "ugly" jokes with this one
  - ✗ Transom door would be nice
  - ✗ Isolates you from the elements so it makes you drive harder
  - ✗ The mates who can't fit under the hardtop will hate you

“Sure, it’s no Halle Berry, rather Nicki Minaj — in full body armour”

**PRIDE IN PREJUDICE**

When I rolled up to Melbourne Stabicraft dealer M.Y. Marine, I was immediately taken aback by the 1850 Supercab. Truth be told, I already had half the test written in my head, and it was going to go along familiar Stabicraft lines: I'd mention safety, reliability, strength of construction and the usual blah, blah, blah about it being the ugly duckling, or the fact that looks aren't everything.

It's okay to admit it — even Stabicraft will concede it's not in the game to win beauty contests. That hasn't really done the company any harm, either, since Aussies have a habit of adopting odd-looking Kiwis as their own. Russell Crowe was another Kiwi with a rough head who people flocked to once they appreciated his talents (music, unfortunately, not being one of them).

I don't know if it was divine intervention or just a fortunate by-product of Stabi's form-follows-function design philosophy, but this one's broken the mould and is actually a looker. Or at least it is to my eye. With its short, aggressively raked cabin and pointy snout, the 1850 Supercab does a passable impression of a helicopter gunship, air-to-ground missiles and M23 chain gun optional. It's sleek, tough and full bodied, yet with an unusually (for a Stabicraft) slinky line. Sure, it's no Halle Berry, rather Nicki Minaj — in full body armour.

**SAME, BUT DIFFERENT**

Not to be confused with its existing 1850 Fish'r, which shares a size designation and nothing else, this 1850 Supercab is an altogether new hull that showcases Stabicraft's commitment to innovation.

Deeper, taller and wider by 160mm, the 1850 is a well-executed boat with loads of well-conceived ideas at work. It seems like the creative department

has also been busy dreaming up new and evocative catchphrases to sum up the improvements: “Arrow Hull” and “Game Chaser Transom” among their contributions. Sounds cool, but does it stack up? I was keen to find out...

To get the full experience, I towed the rig behind my Ford G6 Falcon sedan to Mount Martha Boat Ramp on Port Phillip Bay's eastern shore, where I reluctantly relieved my wallet of \$20 for the privilege of a two-minute launch. Stabicrafts are traditionally quite light for their size and the 1850 Supercab is no exception. Weighing in at around 1300kg with 50L of fuel and perched on a single-axle Dunbier trailer, towing is easy and fuss free. The 20 bucks still sticks in my craw, though.

I took time to wander around the rig before getting it wet, taking in the host of changes the factory debuted on the 1850 Supercab. It's been said that welding is ingrained in Kiwi DNA, and this Stabicraft does nothing to dispel that rumour. Every weld is a thing of beauty; together they are a study in consistency and attention to detail.

Revisions to the hull were subtle, but still evident. Most noticeable is that aforementioned Game Chaser Transom, which sees Stabi ditching its traditional engine pod, with welded boarding platforms either side, in favour of extending the side and hull sheets and fairing them in, thereby creating more volume and potentially more lift when running and extra buoyancy at rest. It looks far more integrated than previous models, not to mention larger.

The side sponson, or life ring, was redesigned to address the one complaint common to most Stabicraft hulls: they're potentially hard ride in short, sharp chop. This particular day was ideal to put that claim to the test, with Port Phillip Bay its usual moody self. A 20kt south-southwesterly left it a washing machine of messy whitecaps.



Clockwise from above: Even the speakers for the Fusion IP700 stereo system look intimidating; the Ocean Bolster helm and passenger seats are nice, but would benefit from some extra travel on the rear slides; southern boaties in particular will appreciate the protection afforded by the hardtop and expansive windscreen; the helm adopts a minimalist ethos — the essential tools to get the job done.





**TRAILERBOAT RATES THE STABICRAFT 1850 SUPERCAB**

1 Fun factor	★★★★
2 Innovation	★★★★
3 Design and layout	★★★★
4 Quality of finish	★★★★
5 Handling and ride	★★★★
6 Stability at rest	★★★★
7 Ergonomics	★★★★
8 Standard equipment	★★★★
9 Value for money	★★★★
10 X-Factor	★★★★
<b>OVERALL</b>	★★★★

We have lift-off! Stabicraft boats are built to take some serious abuse, and the 1850 Supercab is no exception.

### HARD ON TOP

Enclosed hardtops are nothing new for Stabicraft, which has been perfecting the art of keeping boat owners and their crew dry in the most inclement of conditions for a couple of decades now. The wide, panoramic view afforded by a well-designed and distortion-free glasshouse isolates you from the elements and provides a commanding “bridge deck” from which to wage battle on finned foe. I’m also a fan of the optional wide-span windscreen wipers — wind and waves generate spray, no matter how inherently dry your boat. I wouldn’t have an enclosed hardtop without at least one.

Clever and thoughtful design abounds, like the flat panel that runs the full width of the hardtop’s trailing edge to capture spray and direct it away from passengers in the cockpit. Oh, and I didn’t forget the handrails that skirt the perimeter.

But there’s a rub. Crafting an enclosed hardtop onto a small hull sounds great in theory because it addresses two of the most commonly voiced concerns fishermen have about every boat on their radar: safety and comfort. On the flip-side, however, concerns regarding the higher centre of gravity and creating a tippy mess must also be a consideration — although to be fair this wasn’t evident during my time aboard the 1850 Supercab.

### INTERIOR DESIGN

In standard issue, the 1850’s cabin is deliberately Spartan; it’s nothing but an open void aptly referred to as a “dump zone”. Our demonstrator sported the optional bunk infills, which afford marginal seating for adults but form a perfect hidey-hole for smaller kids.

Like many Kiwi-designed rigs, there’s a certain elegant minimalism to Stabicraft’s helm areas and this was another prime example. Simple flat dash panels with carpeted brows and tapered panels finished in a matte(ish) black for mounting single or twin head units work well, but won’t win any design awards. The brow accommodates a sweep of Honda analogue gauges separated by a compact compass directly in the driver’s field of vision.

A Fusion IP700 stereo with iPod integration and a Garmin VHF radio resides to port. A lone flush-mounted 7in Garmin GPSMAP 750S looks marooned on its big black podium, but functions well. I’m all for filling up every available millimetre with pixels, but then I’m also spoilt and broke.

Our 1850 Supercab was fitted with mechanical non-feedback cable steering which performed adequately, but I would stump up the grand or so for the convenience of hydraulic assistance. Being a short-arse, I found the helm

position quite comfortable while seated or standing — the latter my preferred driving stance — and I appreciated the integrated helm and passenger steps finished in non-skid rubber panels.

The upgraded Ocean Bolster seats with flip-up bum-rest work well, although a bit of extra rear travel on the seat slides would be welcome. The cantilevered seat bases welded to the inner sponson walls provide a handy receptacle for tools or boxes of tackle and are in keeping with the boat’s overall functionality.

Taller drivers take note: a decent seat slide is a must to keep your nose off the steeply raked toughened-glass windscreen in rough and tumble offshore conditions.

Stabicraft is one of only a handful of boat companies that actually listens to what its market is saying, and it consequently redesigned its coamings to provide a functional footrail with neat upturned edges to the trailing ends. This was in response to testers and customers alike requesting better access forward.

The end result, while elegantly functional as a toe-hold, has the added benefit of acting as a substantial spray deflector, ensuring a relatively dry ride. But here’s the thing, since the anchor winch is standard and accessible via both a cabin and internal hatch, there’s no real need.



Stabicrafts are usually fairly minimalist affairs, but everything is here to meet the hardcore fisho brigade’s needs, and there’s a heap of workable space in the cockpit.

### FISHERMAN’S FRIEND

I had coerced *TrailerBoat* lovechild and blogger extraordinaire, Jack Murphy, aboard as my fishing sidekick.

Given we are both console nuts, exposure to the elements is an accepted part of the gig. However, our recent exposure to a bevy of enclosed hardtops is causing us to re-evaluate our sanity. More than 20kts of breeze a wind against tide made drifting and flicking soft plastics a challenge, so we dropped anchor courtesy of the standard Maxwell RC6 winch just for fun, and it held us firmly, nose into the breeze. The tall cabin provided an excellent windbreak and my fears regarding additional windage proved unfounded.

Simulating a hot bite by running around the cockpit resulted in minimal disturbance and with both young Jack and I leaning to port, hull movement was typically Stabicraft: a gentle list then a firm lock-up as the side sponsons bit home. The optional Tubemat flooring felt secure underfoot and gripped snugly to the checkerplate floor, despite our shenanigans.

There is ample space for three or four anglers. While there are no toe rails as such, I found the stability of the hull reassuring and didn’t miss them in these conditions. The cockpit’s beam is welcome, and at 2.48m still preserved a huge fishing platform for a rig of this size.

Stabicraft has even managed to address my pet peeve, rod storage... sort of. Apart from four well-spaced holders on the hardtop, it’s also supplied four angled plastic spaces in the coamings — these should by rights be alloy considering the intent of this boat. Two more rod holders take up residence either side of the baitboard and, surprise surprise, the standard extra-long and deep side pockets below the coamings swallowed my quiver of six 7ft 6in spin sticks — three a side. These pockets were lined with rubber matting and kept my outfits dry and tangle free, despite my enthusiastic driving.

And then there’s that 65L livebait tank with viewing window — Fish TV — situated in the centre of the transom, where it has negligible impact on lateral trim.





This bluewater battle tank is as tough as it looks, and it's got the performance and functionality to please the fussiest of offshore anglers.

Speaking of access, while a step-through transom with a door of some description would've been nice, the height of the new Game Chaser Transom and the nifty folding rear seat / step ensures entry and exit don't become too much of a chore.

### RIDE 'EM, COWBOYS

On our test day we had to contend with short, sharp chop with the occasional pothole thrown in for good measure. Wind against tide and a stiff 20kt southerly made for some interesting driving / flying and, rather typically of Port Phillip Bay, hiding was out of the question.

Acceleration courtesy of Honda's big 115hp four-stroke was brisk. Flooring the throttle and engaging BLAST pops the boat on the plane in three seconds with stuff-all bow lift and it was eager

throughout the rev range. We ran into the slop, then beam onto it, then threw it into tight turns trimmed all the way down. We threw up plenty of spray, but in the prevailing conditions we threw less than we expected. A comfortable cruise was maintained at 4000rpm and the GPS indicated we were sitting on 25kts (47kmh).

Pushing harder and scooting along, we copped the occasional bang, but nothing frantic. The short, rattly chop the Arrow Hull was conceived for was living up to expectations and it was reduced to the slightest of vibrations. Interestingly, it was only when we glanced at the GPS that we appreciated we were nudging 36kts (67kmh), and the Honda wasn't fully wound out yet.

Attempting this pace in a conventional pressed-alloy hull with bimini and front and side clears would've been unwise and

unpleasant. That is the true value of an enclosed hardtop: despite the Supercab's compact footprint, it feels like a larger rig. The isolation from the elements can also encourage you to drive the boat a little harder than you need to — whether you do or not is your call and should be governed by the prevailing conditions and your experience.

### THE WRAP

If it seems like I developed a thing for this Stabi, it's a case of "guilty as charged". The 1850 Supercab ticks a helluva lot of boxes. It's compact, spacious, practical and does what it damn well sets out to do. It's easy to tow and pretty affordable considering its scope.

I might be going a bit soft in my old age, but I reckon I could be tempted to relinquish my love affair with centre consoles for a hardtop like this. 🍷

## STABICRAFT 1850 SUPERCAB

### HOW MUCH?

- Price as tested: \$67,980
- Options Fitted: Tube floor matting, rear T-bar 2-step ladder, gunwale handrails, windscreen wiper, upholstered Ocean seats with flip-up bolster, metallic paint, windscreen wiper, V berth squabs, battery

compartment hatch, Fusion IP700 Stereo, Garmin VHF radio, SARCA anchor, Garmin GPS Map 750S and stainless prop.  
Base Price: From \$48,990 incl 90 Honda 4-stroke

### GENERAL

Type: Compact Fishing Hard Top

Material: Aluminium  
Length: 5.60m  
Beam: 2.40m  
Weight: 1300kg (approx. BMT)  
Deadrise: 17.5°

### CAPACITIES

People: 6  
HP Rating: 135hp

Fuel: 120L

### ENGINE

Make/model: Honda BF 115  
Type: EFI four-stroke w/ BLAST  
Weight: 220kg  
Displacement: 2354cc  
Gear ratio: 2.14:1  
Propeller: 18" x 141/4 S/S

### MANUFACTURED BY

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