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

SAFE
SEX
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 Stab’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’s, 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 Stab 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 mates who can’t fit under the hardtop will hate you

Clockwise from above: Even the speakers for the Fusion IP700 stereo system look intimidating; the Ocean Bolter 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.
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 fanned 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 one 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 afforded marginal searing 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 7” 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 stamp 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 Rotor 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 windscreens 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.
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

Stabicraft
345 Bluff Rd
Invercargill, Southland, NZ
Freephone Australia: 1800 - 178 224

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 coped 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.