

BOATS OF INTEREST

By Sam Mossman

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The Senator 400 Inshore is a pretty useful craft with high level of stability, load-carrying and reserve buoyancy.

Senator Inshore 400 – a big little boat

Earlier this year, Napier boat builder Senator Boats released a new model, a 4.10m pontoon boat.

To them it seemed unremarkable, more or less a 'dinghy', and they made no fuss about it. But for many inshore fishermen it is a pretty useful

craft, due to its high level of stability, load-carrying and reserve buoyancy. Then Senator agent, Auckland Marine, came up with a nifty centre-console conversion that turned this all-rounder into a pretty useful inshore sportfisher. They left one

sitting outside the main pavilion at the last Auckland Boat Show, where it proved to be a bit of a traffic stopper.

On a chilly mid-winter day, Auckland Marine's Gary Hatton and some of the *Fishing News* team took the opportunity to test and compare the two versions of the Senator 400 on the West Coast's Kaipara Harbour.

The Senator 400 has 3mm-thick bottoms and pontoons, with a 4mm sealed chequerplate deck and 18° deadrise at the transom. Pontoon designs have grown sleeker and more user-friendly over the years, with flat inside faces and tops providing more working space internally. The external beam of the hull is 1.82m and the inside 1.32m. The overall hull length is 4.1m and the boat looks nicely proportioned, while retaining pontoon characteristics of stability and high load-carrying ability. The reserve buoyancy for this boat is given as about 530kg in three separate pontoon chambers and under the sealed deck. Half a tonne – not bad for a 'dinghy'!

The Senator 400 is carried on a single-axle Voyager trailer with zinc-

protected leaf-spring suspension, submersible lights, manual winch and jockey wheel. Tow weight is a modest 450kg (approximately) for the Dory and about 500kg for the Centre-console – easily handled by an average family car.

The Dory story

The basic open-dory version is supplied with two removable and movable thwart seats that clip over the side-shelf edges. These can be shifted around to allow for traveling, fishing and the number of the crew. An open anchor locker in the bow has heaps of capacity, while full-length storage shelves along the sides can take seven-foot (2.13m) rods, oars, tackle or whatever. The sealed deck is drained by two screw-in duckbill scuppers.

The simplicity and low cost of the Dory version was complemented by its powerplant – a pull-start tiller steer, two-stroke 30hp Mercury with a tote tank – no remotes or electrical system to buy, install or maintain.

Fishing News advertising rep, Peter Francis, had his dad Lindsay visiting, and took the opportunity to take

The centre-console was pushed by the Mercury 30hp EFI four-stroke to around 23 knots.



him for a run on the Kaipara in the Dory model with a bit of fishing thrown in.

These are his comments:

The Senator 400 inshore dory hardly noticed our shifting weight inside the boat, as we found out when the two of us were sitting on a side pontoon to deal with a school shark. The bench seats can be slid forward and back to suit our differing needs when travelling or fishing. Anchoring was a breeze, as a boat this size does not need heavy ground tackle. You can stand directly above the anchor well and pull with minimal effort. The floor space was completely clear and clean, and would be ideal for fly-fishing.

The 30hp Mercury tiller-steer provided all the power we needed to jump up onto the plane. I found the tiller ideal for this sized boat, and by moving the bench seat into a comfortable position I had an unencumbered view of the bow while underway. The boat responds well when cornering, with the pontoons again keeping the boat very steady and stable. The entry was fine enough for us to fly through a light chop at over 20 knots yet remain relatively dry.

Centre-console conversion

Auckland Marine's centre-console conversion makes this into a different boat altogether. The console unit houses a 25-litre tote tank and a battery, opening up the transom area. With the console and electrical system comes all sorts of mod-cons: hydraulic tilt-trim; remotes; electric start; and GPS-plotter and sounder (an upmarket Lowrance HDS5 model).

Add the tube-mat decking, a padded seat with back-rest in front of the console, and an 82-litre Icey-Tek bin with padded-seat top behind, and this useful utility boat becomes a cool little inshore sportfisher.

Although Senator does not currently offer the centre-console conversion as a factory option, a number of other Senator dealers have had them done through Auckland Marine.

The centre-console version that Gary Hatton and I ran was also pushed by a Mercury 30hp outboard – the EFI four-stroke version this time. Gary is an ex-professional rugby player and neither of us are Tinkerbellies, but the 30hp Merc pushed the rig to around 23 knots



Clockwise from top left: the console and electrical system allow hydraulic tilt-trim; remotes; electric start; and GPS-plotter and sounder to be fitted.

Tube-mat decking, a padded seat with back-rest in front of the console, and an 82-litre Icey-Tek bin with padded-seat top behind make the centre console a cool little inshore sportfisher.

The dory's floor space was completely clear and clean, and should be ideal for fly-fishing.

The basic open-dory version features two removable and movable thwart seats that clip over the side-shelf edges.

(42.6kph) – plenty for what is essentially a small boat (although it is easy to start getting delusions of grandeur in the centre-console version).

The hull is a nice soft traveller, comes onto the plane easily and proved to be reasonably dry for a centre-console of this size. In areas there was a modest chop of up to half a metre and 10-12 knots of SW breeze. Even with this on the quarter we took only a little spray. A clear panel mounted on the console top helps protect the electronics and the helmsman.

We took the opportunity to anchor and knock over a feed of gurnard, with kahawai and various ground sharks as by-catch. The stability of the hull made it easy to stand and move around without inducing any notable list. The console is narrow enough to easily move past, and the flat gunwale tops with Deck Tread panels were comfortable to sit on and fish from.

There was plenty of stowage in the long side shelves, as well as in the Icey Tek bin for the catch. Personally, I would add a few more rod holders (and this is easily done), but the basics of safety, stability, perfor-

Specifications	
Material:	Aluminium
Configuration:	pontoon
LOA:	4.10m
External beam:	1.82m
Internal beam:	1.32m
Bottom:	3mm
Pontoons:	3mm
Deck:	4mm
Reserve Buoyancy:	Dory 530kg approx Centre Console 480kg approx
Tow weight:	Dory 450kg approx Centre console 500kg approx
Power:	Mercury 30hp (4-stroke/2-stroke)
Trailer:	Voyager single axle
Hull and trailer:	\$9,860
Dory as tested:	\$14,990
Centre-console as tested:	\$24,990
Test boats courtesy Auckland Marine.	

mance and work space are all there for a useful two-man inshore and freshwater sportfisher – especially for tasks where casting is involved, such as fly-fishing or soft-baiting. A big little boat.



The console is narrow enough to easily move past.

