

# Senator RC 440



The coastal reaches to the north and south of Hawkes Bay feature a series of niche beach communities where surf launching is the order of the day.

Without formal launching facilities, conditions limit the size of boats that can be put in on these coasts and also make the buoyancy and stability of pontoon designs very desirable. These circumstances are mirrored in many parts of the country.

The Senator RC 440 Family Series hull, the smallest of their range of pontoon and plate hulls, fits this bill admirably and is a popular model for the Napier company situated right in the heart of this territory. Senator Boats has been in business for 14 years, with principal Wayne Mckinley having a 20-year history in alloy boat manufacturing.

The RC 440 Family Series hull was initially designed as an entry-level hull for the first-time boatie, but has proven to be a versatile all-rounder, suited to fishing, diving and family fun. Billfish have even been caught from them, although they are obviously a bit small for hard-core gamefishing.

During a recent visit to Napier I took the opportunity to take a 440 for a run out of Port Ahuriri.

## Construction

This 440 features 4mm bottoms, which is thick for the hull length and a desirable feature to take the wear of beach launching, as well as providing a little extra weight, so there's more stability and a better ride. Pontoons and topsides are constructed from 2.5mm alloy, with a 4mm chequerplate deck. Despite the comparatively heavy material used in the bottoms, the dry hull weight is only around 260kg, making for relatively easy launching (you could tow it with a quad bike on the beach) and handling.

Construction features two full-length bearers (plus the pontoons), giving longitudinal support and three lateral frames. The bottoms are butted up at the keel line and seam-welded inside and out. Where the bottoms join the pontoons they are seam-welded outside and stitch-welded inside. Fully-sealed decks are seam-welded inside, creating a buoyancy chamber underneath. This, along with the pontoon structure, create a large amount of reserve buoyancy – around 500kg – a huge amount for a boat of this size and a nice feature to have in a boat that may be called on to launch and land through the surf.



For its size, there is a lot of cockpit space in the 440.



The bow rails constrain the anchor warp in the fairlead and it is easy to flip it in from the helm position.

### Power and performance

This hull has a recommended horsepower rating of 40-60hp; the test boat was pushed by a Mercury two-stroke 60hp outboard with a 16-inch pitch propeller. Fuel was carried in a pair of tote tanks which fit under the transom.

This engine produced 64kph (35 knots) at 5400rpm (by the dash gauges) in a calm-water run with two adults aboard. Book top-end revs are 5500 for this engine, so the prop is about right for the rig. The hull cruised nicely at 3200rpm and 40kph (22 knots).

With young Lee Cummings from Senator aboard, I ran the 440 from Ahuriri, out around Napier Port, and

down the coast to East Clive. It was fairly calm initially, with just a lazy open swell – one of those days just made for boating – and we had a pleasant run.

By the time we got around to the return journey, a northeast sea breeze had come up, putting a half-metre chop on top of the swell. Although we took a bit of spray quartering the wind and chop, the boat proved to be a reasonably soft rider for its size and the conditions. A canopy is an optional feature for those wanting a bit of shelter.

All-round visibility is good, however, having got used to the joys of modern fly-by-wire shifts, I found the old-fashioned cable unit sticky

and indistinct by comparison.

### Anchoring

This modest-sized hull is designed for inshore coastal (and lake) work, and as such, provision for deep anchoring is not really required. Probably the best option is to stow the ground-tackle in a bin, which can sit up forward behind the restraint bar until required and then moved back into the cockpit. Large split bow rails come down hard on each side of the fairlead, making it easy to flip and constrain the warp in the fairlead without the need for a locking pin.

The tie-off bollard is an easy reach from the helm position, so the whole anchoring operation can be controlled

from the cockpit without any need for building hatches into the foredeck. Those who wish to lift anchors from deeper water can use an anchor float without recourse to electric winches.

### Layout

As a small-ish day boat, space in the bow has all been devoted to stowage, freeing up cockpit work-space. A structural half-height bulkhead provides a stowage nook, right up in the 'pointy end'. An optional cargo net provides a spot for life-jackets where they can be accessed quickly and easily, while two optional pipe rails prevent fish bins, chilly bins, tackle boxes and the like from sliding around when underway.

The alloy dodger has turn-backs on the top to stop spray and act as a wind baffle. Black vinyl panels on the outside give the look of windscreens – purely cosmetic, as far as I can see. A console on the driver's side accommodates steering and instruments, as well as providing some dash stowage and a modest space for mounting electronics.

The helm and passenger seats are swivelling, upholstered (an option) bucket models with stowage space inside their aluminium box pedestals. The cockpit has a lot of work room, considering the size of the boat. The sealed chequerplate deck drains to a sump under the transom, from where any water is drained via a 500gph bilge pump.

Side shelves are built right around the sides and transom on top of the pontoons. This is an optional extra and has the dual benefits of providing stowage and raising the height of the sides.

Two tote tanks fit under the transom to each side of the battery,



Rails constrain gear stored in bins in the bow.



which is housed in a box with an isolation switch, on a stand raised a little above the deck. While accessible, this position is not particularly well protected from swamping, a possibility with beach launching; some

sort of locker built into the transom might be preferable.

Over the transom, an optional chequerplate boarding platform with fold-down "T" boarding ladder and grab rail is built on the passenger

side. A bracket for mounting a transducer is attached to the stern.

A good use of space, and with some reservations about the battery position, a good, practical layout.

#### Fishability

An entry-level boat like this needs to turn its hand to a range of activities. Bottom fishing and diving would be the foremost, but the ability to tow the kids on a sea biscuit helps to sell the concept to the family as a whole. Although coastal bottom bouncing at anchor or on the drift, with a bit of light trolling thrown in, would account for most of the fishing tasks, Senator sales manager Murray Thompson told me of at least one occasion when a marlin was caught from a 440, run in conjunction with a mothership.

Four aluminium through-gunwale rodholders are set across the transom; the two in the transom corners are angled out, while the centre pair run astern and can also be used to mount a bait-station. Through-gunwale rodholders along the sides are not feasible, as they would interfere with the pontoon integrity, but turret-mount adjustable holders, such as those made by Scotty, could easily be fitted if required.

The chequerplate deck gives secure footing, and the pontoon design offers stability. The extended height on the sides – produced by building a second level on top of



*The boat is easily loaded on the trailer and can be towed by an average family car.*

the pontoons – is an option, but it is pretty much a no-brainer to take advantage of if you intend to fish out of it, especially if kids are involved.

Keeping it simple, it would be possible to build a small live-bait tank into the outboard pod if you wanted one; an after-market ice box will store the catch and bait; and a sounder/GPS unit could be fitted on the dash. For divers, as mentioned, an optional chequerplate boarding platform with grab rail and fold-down ladder aids boarding.

#### Trailer

One of the advantages of a small boat like this is that, with a tow weight of around 680kg, it can be pulled by an average car – or even a quad bike on the beach. Uncoupling it from the car and pushing it over the beach to launch is also an option, as is retrieving over softer sand using



A separate transducer mounting plate removes the need to drill holes in the transom.




Boarding ladder and fold-down ladder are diver-friendly.

a snatch rope and a vehicle up on firmer ground. These options allow launching in places where you could never get a larger, heavier craft in the water.

The RC440 is carried on a DMW Premier trailer, a cradle A-frame, single-axle model with zinc-protected leaf-spring suspension, submersible lights, a dual-ratio manual winch and jockey wheel. Two keel rollers aid loading and there are two pairs of wobble rollers per side.

### All in all

The stability and considerable reserve buoyancy of this hull, coupled with its modest weight (despite tough, 4mm bottoms) and size, make this a particularly useful utility craft of the 'beach and back' variety, well-suited to basic fish and dive tasks, along with providing fun for the family. 

### Specifications

Material:	aluminium
Configuration:	pontoon cuddy
LOA:	4.49m
Beam (external):	1.8m
Beam (internal):	1.3m
Deadrise:	16°
Pontoons:	2.5mm
Bottoms:	4mm
Deck:	4mm
Hull-only weight:	260kg approx
Tow weight:	680kg approx
Recommended HP:	40-60hp
Test engine:	Mercury 60hp two-stroke
Prop:	16" pitch
Trailer:	DMW Premier
Standard hull only:	\$10,950
Basic key-turn package:	from \$22,500 (40hp two-stroke)
As tested:	\$27,330 (includes lifejackets, anchor pack, tote tanks and reg/WOF)
Test boat courtesy of Senator Boats.	