



Senator for satisfaction

WHEN A COMMERCIAL SKIPPER WENT LOOKING FOR A CUSTOM SPORTS FISHING MACHINE FOR HER CHARTER BUSINESS SHE CHOSE A SENATOR. WHY? WE SENT MATTHEW JONES TO WHITIANGA, NZ, TO FIND OUT.

There aren't too many big burly blokes who can say they've successfully landed a 100kg plus Bluefin Tuna. And there are even fewer ladies who would entertain the idea of attempting such a feat. However, Leanne Dixon has not only landed a whopping 294.5kg Bluefin Tuna but also potentially smashed a world record for a woman using 60kg tackle in the process. That's pretty impressive in anyone's book, but more so, when you

consider that Dixon doesn't even weigh 60kg herself!

So what's next for this fishing high-achiever and commercial skipper? More fishing of course, plus running guided trips and taking fishing charters from the Bay of Plenty to Northland. But to achieve all this, Dixon requires a very special kind of boat—one that's stable, comfortable, offshore capable, has a toilet, an abundance of storage, is built to survey, fits on a trailer and of course, has to catch big

game fish. Faced with this long list of requirements, who does a fanatical fisho trust to custom-build their dream weapon? Senator Boats' RH770 fitted the bill.

"I was looking for a stable fishing platform so I definitely wanted a pontoon boat," explained Dixon. Taking into account her past experiences working onboard Senators in the commercial sector made for an easy decision. Dixon then sat down with Senator dealer and custom guru



Leanne Dixon had a very specific set of criteria in mind when purchasing *Reel Angel* and Senator delivered the boat of her dreams — an absolute sportsfishing weapon.

“Reel Angel’s business end will be the subject of many fisho’s wet dreams”

ABOVE Distant horizons are quickly gobbled up by the efficient Yamaha four-stroke and overnighting is also an option inside that huge lockable cabin.

BELOW At almost 8m LOA, *Reel Angel* looks impressively sleek in profile, but check out the acres of space on that massive aft deck — plenty of room for customers to wrangle hefty gamefish.



Gary Hatton of Auckland Marine Centre to turn her vision into reality.

“I wanted an all-purpose boat that was going to tick all the boxes, with the flexibility to go game fishing without making any sacrifices,” she said

“And I’m pleased to say I haven’t had to make any as Senator and Auckland Marine Centre were absolutely amazing and everything’s managed to work together nicely.”

EXTENDED ADVENTURES

Onboard the aptly-named *Reel Angel*, one day’s fishing is never enough, so the boat’s been set up to extend the

adventure by comfortably overnighting three anglers within the large lockable hardtop. An infill converts the 1.9m long bunks in the front cabin into a large double, while in the main cabin the table and seat backrest drop down to create a third single berth.

Lifting up the squabs on the lure-watching seat in the cockpit reveals a twin burner gas cooker for hot coffee and cooked meals. The adjacent sink (with a pull-out showerhead) will allow the dishes (or the crew) to be given a good scrub before bed and a Calfont system is optional for a hot shower.

An abundance of shelves and

compartments cater for commercial safety equipment, along with plenty of room to cater for over-packed guests. “The space and storage is a pretty big feature for me,” said Dixon. “Being a chick I probably bring twice as much gear as everyone else.”

MARLIN MAGNET

Reel Angel’s business end will be the subject of many fisho’s wet dreams. The large self-draining baitboard features a food grade cutting surface, and its lack of a front lip and good height make baiting up a breeze. Additional mounts allow the baitboard



How does it rate?

Senator RH 770

1	SUITABILITY FOR PURPOSE	★★★★★★★★★★★★
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	★★★★★★★★★★★★

Average ★★★★★★★★★★



PHOTOS LEFT Widescreen electronics, uncluttered dash, carpeted helm area, enormous windows, plush bed to hand – if only home was this comfortable!

ABOVE: Livebait tanks have more than one application – they're also great for keeping your lunch of scallops fresh.

“If the weather plays up, the sheltered cabin can comfortably seat four crew, plus the skipper”

to be moved to the port gunwale or even completely removed during a hook-up. This allows unrestricted access to the large live bait tank and twin tuna tubes below.

To solve the issue of toe holds lacking in most pontoon boats, Senator have cleverly designed a hard wearing rubber padding which is fitted to the upper gunwales. It's comfortable to sit and lean against and wide enough to allow anglers to stand bolt upright with their feet against the gunwales and their thighs supported. With four heavy duty rod holders (with locking rings) per gunwale, a further nine rod holders in the rocket launcher and four on the bait board an arsenal of rods can be at the ready.

While trolling at of 8kts *Reel Angel* uses around 9L/h with a 310L capacity allowing multiple days to be fished between fills. If the weather plays up, the sheltered cabin can comfortably seat four crew plus the skipper, while the lockable sliding door also provides a safe haven for expensive fishing gear

while on the dock. The game poles are telescopic, so they can also be safely secured in the cabin for towing or self-preservation. Being trailerable also means *Reel Angel* can move to where the fish are. She tips the scales at around 2400kg and just squeezes under the maximum road legal 2.5m beam on her braked Voyager tandem axle trailer which Dixon says “tows really well” with her Toyota Landcruiser.

While enjoying my time onboard I scribbled in my little black book that “... gamefish would be wise to steer well clear of *Reel Angel's* capable cockpit”. Luckily marlin can't read, as just after our test, *Reel Angel* saw out 2013 in style landing a 110kg striped marlin on 24kg line. They very nearly saw 2014 in with style too, hooking a blue marlin on New Year's Day which unfortunately got away.

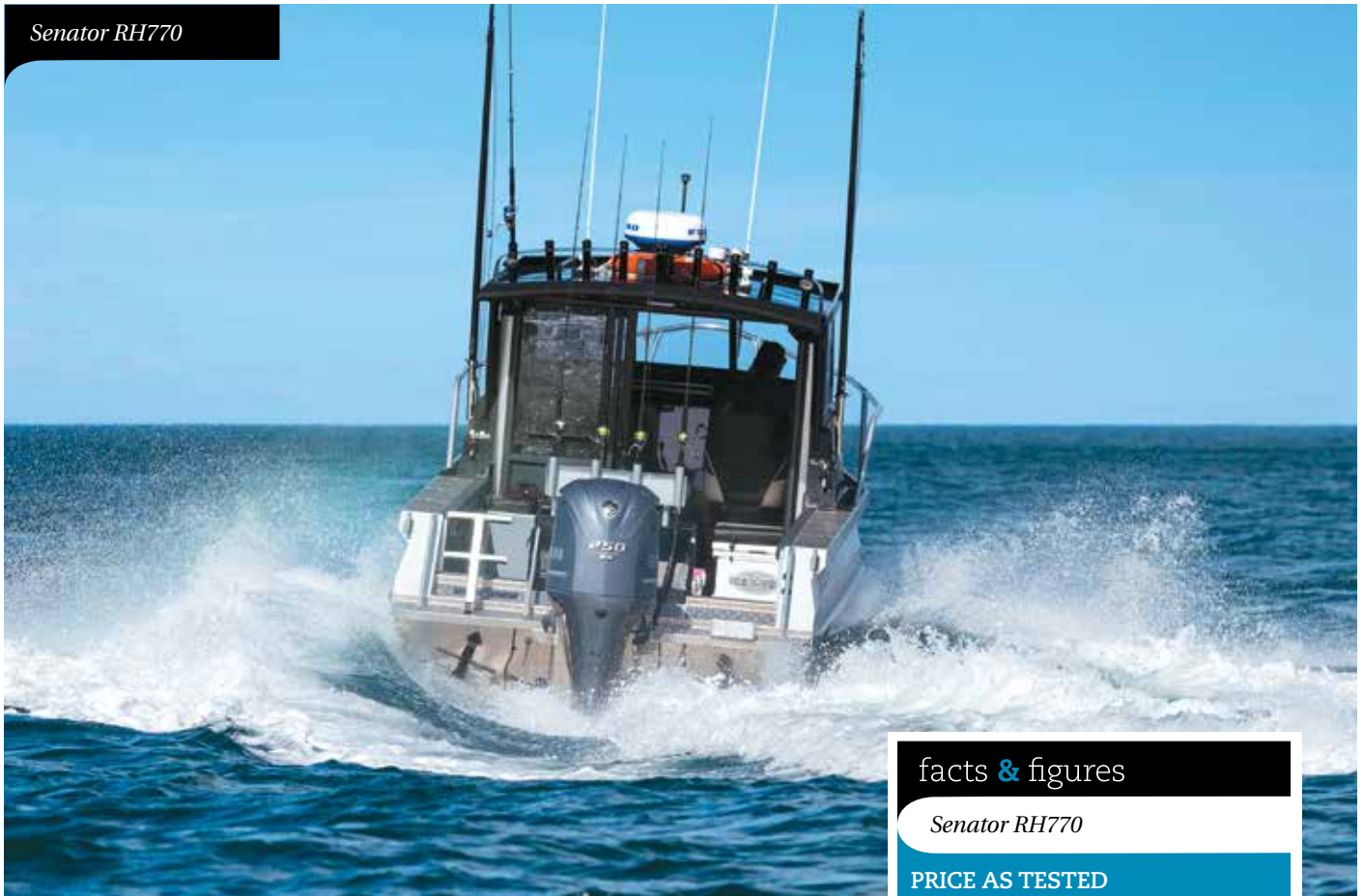
SCALLOPS AND SCENERY

Reel Angel is based in the scenic saltwater paradise that is Mercury Bay, so when a scallop dive was offered

up, I didn't need much prodding from the editor to venture on a road trip. However, once the kids, camera equipment and fishing gear was loaded into the car, there was no room for dive gear as well. Luckily with two professional skippers on board we had more fishing rods and gear than many tackle stores, so we went fishing instead. Unfortunately no matter how much burley, smelly bait and soft baits were thrown over the side, the fish simply weren't biting.

With fresh fish taken off the menu, we let the Maxwell capstan do the hard work pulling anchor and headed around the corner to find some scallops. It was at that point we realised the scallop dredge wasn't in the large underfloor compartment either. But with a stroke of luck, we stumbled across a friendly diver who kindly donated some of his quota to test out the livebait tank. Seafood fix finally sorted, we plotted a course for Cathedral Cove to shoot the photos before Dixon kindly handed over the





Highs

- Comfortable, capable and customisable sport fisher
- Tough and dependable
- A nice blend of stability and ride
- Versatile and functional
- Loads of storage

Lows

- Outside cooking facilities could limit all-weather capability
- Too good a boat to find anything else to complain about

facts & figures

Senator RH770

PRICE AS TESTED
POA

OPTIONS FITTED

As this was a fully-custom design to meet a specific commercial charter application, there are too many options to list!

STANDARD FEATURES

Three-year hull warranty, marine-grade alloy, fairlead and roller, foredeck bowrail, anchor hatch, acrylic cabin hatch, forward cabin squabs, fully carpeted cabin, clear safety glass windows, king and queen seats, hydraulic steering, switch panel and wiring loom, non-skid walkaround, port and starboard LED navigation lights, LED mast light, bollards and cleats, four rodholders, nine rocket launcher rod racks, variety of grabrails, underfloor fuel tank, two underfloor fishbins, second shelf in pontoons, enclosed rear transom with two hatches, bilge pump, ladder with grabrails, transducer mount plate, twin duckboards

PRICED FROM

\$135,000 inc GST (standard production boat with Mercury Verado 250XL outboard)

GENERAL

TYPE Aluminium pontoon
MATERIAL Plate aluminium
LENGTH 7.93m overall
BEAM 2.49m external
WEIGHT Approx 2400kg (dry)
DEADRISE 18°

CAPACITIES

PEOPLE 5
REC HP 150 to 250hp
MAX HP 250hp
FUEL 310lt
WATER 100lt

For more information on the Senator RH770 contact Gary Hatton or Matt Keys at Auckland Marine Centre, via email: sales@aucklandmarine.co.nz or visit aucklandmarine.co.nz

helm for the run home.

It was during my time at the helm that Dixon's paint colour choice made perfect sense. Just like our own champion All-Black rugby team, the staunch 6mm hull quite simply out-muscled any opposition in its path. The pontoons also provided lift and fended any spray for a dry, comfortable and match-winning ride. Commendable ergonomics, a comfortable bolster seat and large expansive views made for a comfortable and rewarding drive. There was even a clever kick-down footrest to save your shins whilst standing at the helm — genius.

Yamaha's brilliant 250hp four-stroke proved a great match for the hull and with drive-by-wire was also super-smooth. It still had the showroom shine so I played nice, but to give you an idea — in choppy conditions *Reel*

Angel cruised comfortably at 21 knots at 3500rpm using 31L/h. At 4500rpm we hit 29kts using 56L/h.

THE LAST WORD

Senator's RH 770 strikes a pleasing balance between a capable cockpit, all-weather protection and overnight accommodation for three in a versatile, comfortable and trailerable sportfisher. Ride quality becomes all the more important when playing offshore and the RH 770 combines good all-round stability with one of the best rides I've encountered on an aluminium pontoon boat. Incorporating so many features into a trailerboat that functions is no mean feat, so it comes as no surprise that many professionals put their faith in a Senator. The unwary marlin seem to approve as well. ■