

BOAT TEST
SENATOR RH800 JET

TWICE THE PUNCH



***A serious boat, needs
a serious tow vehicle!***

From the outside this Senator RH800 looks like any other big aluminum pontoon hardtop. But far from it, this big beast boasts two Mercury Optimax Sport Jets. Yes, two! We sent Freddy Foote to the Hawkes Bay to investigate.

This RH800 was built for a Hawkes Bay owner and was designed to suit his requirements. Firstly, he wanted a 7-8m boat that he could launch off Waimarama beach, on the coast out from Havelock North. It also had to have a jet drive, to aid in quick launching through the surf. Now jet drives in alloy trailer boats aren't uncommon, but what is different about this build, is that it was specified to have two jet units for extra performance and reliability.

No easy task for Senator Boats, says Wayne McKinley (Senator Boats owner). No one had done a twin Sport Jet configuration in an alloy trailer boat in New Zealand. That was until now.

"It was a reasonably long build, as we've never done a boat like this before, so there was a certain amount of engineering and customisation we had to do as the build progressed. We had to engineer it as we went along." says McKinley.

'The most complex part of the build was how we would position the engines and jet units, to get the best performance, so we mounted them slightly to the sides and at an angle.

"We're quite pleased with how it all turned out. It performs very well on the water and the owner cannot be happier."

CUSTOM CONFIGURATION

While the RH800 is essentially a lengthened RH 770, it is largely a custom boat, so it has a lot of extra features added at the owner's request. This is his sixth Senator and he also has a smaller 6m Sport Jet model on the drawing board.

The RH800 is designed as an all-rounder with all the amenities to be





▲ *Powered by twin Mercury 200hp Optimax Sport Jets, the RH800 will do 40 knots.*



▲ *The helm has a very tidy and uncluttered finish.*



▲ *The cabin is light and airy, and features a drop down dinette table to port.*

a very comfortable day boat. From the outside, it is well balanced visually, with a good split between cockpit and cabin size compared to its overall length.

Access in and out is via two points; either the drop down ladder built into the bow rail or via a drop down ladder in the centre of the transom that doubles as the transom guard railing. A good option considering this vessel is always beach launched so depending on conditions, you always have a safe and easy option for embarking and disembarking passengers.

At the helm, everything is well appointed and positioned for easy viewing or access. The helm seat is elevated and gives you excellent viewing forward when helming. The seat has a built-in bolster, which can lift up, allowing you to stand and helm should you wish. Sliding windows on both sides is a great feature, particular keeping the helm area ventilated, especially when we were re-baiting the cray pots. With all the windows and doors open, it is a nice airy and cool environment on those hot summer days.

Access to the main saloon area is via a large slide away aluminum door, which tucks away nicely to port. Forward in the very large

cabin, there is the traditional vee berth and with the addition of an in-fill converts to a very largely and comfortable double.

There is plenty of storage underneath, and also a toilet under the squab forward of the helm bulkhead. For added privacy, another sliding door can close off the cabin entirely.

To the port side of the main saloon area is an L-shaped dinette. This table can drop down, and with the addition of an infill, forms another bunk for sleeping accommodation.

Opposite under the helm seat, there is a small kitchenette with a sink and gas burner stove - this is all accessed by lifting the helm seat up. There is further storage available underneath this unit, which can be accessed by two hatches.

ROOMY COCKPIT

Stepping out into the cockpit through the sliding door, you are greeted by a very open and roomy work area. There is one large hatch covering both engines, with a walk between them and step up to the transom. Very comfortable forward facing seating is built into the engine covers.

The new Senator RH800 off the coast of Hawkes Bay.



▲ *The sport jets are mounted to the side instead of centre.*



▲ *The hearts of the operation, the two Mercury 200hp Optimax Sport Jets.*

The spacious cockpit has high gunwales that give you a safe feeling when moving around. Very large cockpit shelving takes care of storage for rods and other items on both sides, while a rocket launcher is above. A pot hauler is located in the forward starboard corner of the cockpit, and with the maneuverability of the jet units, quickly allowed us to motor up to the pot lines and pull them up.

What was very evident was the sheer stability of the RH800. When at rest and pulling up the pots, in quite choppy conditions, the boat felt rock solid at all times. A true testament to Senators aluminium pontoon design.

There is a wash-down hose in the aft starboard corner of the cockpit, while in the forward port corner is a storage locker and housing for the califont (fed by the 100L onboard water tank) and storage for the LPG gas bottle opposite. A drop down seat resides on the other side and is completely movable to wherever you want to position it in the cockpit.

TWIN JET PERFORMANCE

Nestled into the aft corners of the RH800 are two Mercury 200hp Optimax Sport Jets. The Optimax Sport Jets were chosen largely



▲ *Access to the full width-boarding platform is via a built in step as part of the engines cover.*

because they are the only product on the market capable for such a project. They also provided a very compact configuration and take up minimal cockpit space.

As this engine configuration had never been done before, there was quite a lot of extra engineering work to go into the setup, such as a custom designed steering system and some extra alloy deflection plates to aid with reversing.

Underway and on full power the RH800 will hit 40 knots. We didn't achieve that on our test day; sea conditions did chop up pretty well, and with a seven adult passengers and a child onboard there was no real point in pushing the boat that hard.

4000rpm saw the RH800 cruise at 27.8knots with the Optimax engines using 22.7lph each. For a boat of its size, it performed very well with the twin 200hp Optimax sport jets, especially considering we were fully loaded with fuel (480L) and water (100L). Trailerable weight is over 3500kg.

The engines were responsive, albeit a bit noisy, but once the doors to the saloon area are closed, the noise is much less obtrusive.

As can be seen, in the photos we launched the RH800 straight into the light surf at Waimarama Beach, which was quite an easy process. Essentially, get all of you passengers onboard, back it into the water with the most impressive tow vehicle I have seen for some time. Once enough water is underneath the hull and in-between waves, reverse off the trailer, then using the jets, quickly rotate the boat 180 degrees so that you're facing into the waves and off you go.

The retrieval process was just as simple; the trailer is backed into the water, and the boat is driven on.

The RH800 delivers that superb rough water performance that the brand is known for and felt like a very confidence-building hull. Overall, a fantastic bit of kit, beautifully finished and appointed on the inside, with some great engineering.

Speaking with the owner at the end of the day, I asked if there was anything he would change. The answer was "Nope, not a thing." I'd say that is a resounding job well done for Senator Boats. ↴

SPECIFICATIONS

<i>Model:</i>	Senator RH800 Jet
<i>Priced from:</i>	\$185,000 [twin outboards] or \$200,000 [twin Mercury Sport-Jets]
<i>Price as tested:</i>	\$NZ265,000
<i>Type:</i>	Pontoon Hardtop
<i>Construction:</i>	6mm/3mm Aluminium
<i>LOA:</i>	8.0m
<i>Beam:</i>	2.5m
<i>Deadrise:</i>	18 degrees
<i>Power:</i>	2 x Mercury 200hp Optimax Sport Jets
<i>Propeller:</i>	Jet
<i>Power options:</i>	Single/Twin outboard/Single Jet/ Twin Jet
<i>Fuel capacity:</i>	480L
<i>Trailer:</i>	Custom Alloy Dual Axle

This boat could be protected against the effects of corrosion, oxidation and discolouration.

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Notable Standard Features:

Fully Carpeted Cabin, Clear Safety Glass Windows, Hydraulic Steering, Switch Panel & Wiring Loom, Port & Starboard LED Navigation Lights, LED Mast Light, Under Floor Fish Bin x 2, Second Shelf in Pontoons.

Notable Options on Test Boat

Twin Sport-Jet drives with twin independent battery charging systems, Locking wheelhouse, Fresh water system with caliphont and shower, Pot hauler setup with pontoon protector plate, Full bowrail with front boarding ladder, Luxury cabin seating with drop-down table.

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Despite the large engine hatch and built in seats, the cockpit is very roomy.



Bringing up some crays with the pot hauler.