



Napier aluminium boatbuilder Senator Boats is happy to customise any model in its extensive range to meet the specific needs of its customers.

On a sparkling Nelson day with snow on the mountains and nary a breath of wind, a Senator RH770 named *Savage* seemed restless. D'Urville Island was on the horizon, just a millpond away, and it's a place where *Savage's* owners, Vaughan and Suzanne Savage, regularly go for a weekend's fishing and diving.

Even in dirty conditions, Vaughan says, he can be at D'Urville Island in two hours. His favourite cruising mode when fully loaded with four adults and dive and fishing gear is 45kph at 3500rpm. A typical trip to the top of D'Urville Island with visit to Port Hardy and general exploring is usually eight to nine hours' engine time,

using 210 – 220 litres of fuel and covers around 230 – 240km. That puts average fuel use at around 24.5 litres per hour.

But there are many other reasons why the Savages are so happy with their new boat. It's customised just for them with plenty of advice from Andrew Winstanley of Haven Pleasureboats Nelson Ltd. Andrew founded the dealership with two partners in 1999. The trio still owns the company with Andrew as the front man.

He's also handy with a pencil. "We drew up what Vaughan and Suzanne wanted on graph paper and transferred the details to scale drawings of the Senator RH 770 from the factory using a scale ruler," Andrew says. "That included the front elevations and side elevation,



ELECTING THE SENATOR

Words by **Rebecca Hayter** Photos by **Andre Ismael**

where we wanted the appliances, distribution of room and deck space so they could see exactly how it would work.”

As the work progressed on the boat in Senator’s Napier factory, the foreman sent Andrew photos and measurements. Fine-tuning included details such as where to run pipes for the califont and shower-drain outlets and ensuring that the helm seat would be upholstered in a way that was comfortable, look good and allow the seat to fold down flat when not required.

“We made sure it is two-hundred per cent right,” Andrew says.

Even before *Savage* was finished, a prospective customer saw it on the work shop floor and ordered one for himself.

Haven Pleasureboats Nelson has sold the Senator range for more than seven years so Andrew thoroughly understands the concept of the hull, which he describes as a planing displacement boat. Yes, he knows that sounds like a contradiction in terms, but

he is referring to its ability to pierce through the waves – large or small – while staying on the plane.

He credits this ability to the distinctive hull shape under the waterline. “This particular hull rides naturally trimmed up, even in the flat,” he says. “It maintains that bow-up attitude even with all the weight of full water tanks and fuel tanks, so you’re not using all that power of the engine to trim the bow.

“You know that annoying two-foot chop where on some boats you tend to go bang-bang-bang?” Andrew says. “You don’t get that on the Senator because the front of the bow is piercing the waves and the back of the boat just follows through the gap. You’re not getting that dit-dit-dit.”

The bow has a fine entry and a deep vee of 28 degrees. About one-third of the length back from the bow, the keel flattens out and the deadrise softens to 18 degrees at the transom. The shallow



ABOVE: The Senator RH770's hull works well, smoothing out a short chop and tirelessly eating up the miles on its regular trips out to D'Urville Island.
 RIGHT: Simrad electronics include a powerful 1kW transducer.

deadrise means there is plenty of chine in the water to keep it steady at rest.

To keep the boat on track in a cross-wind, *Savage* has electrically-operated trim tabs from Bennett to adjust the boat's lateral trim. The DMW trailer, with stainless steel brakes, is customised for the Senator range.

Savage has plenty of boogie, thanks to its Yamaha F250 four-stroke. The 4169cc block with variable valve timing turns a 15-1/2 x 17T, Saltwater series II SDS prop with a gear ratio of 1.75: 1. That gives it plenty of torque suitable for a range of fishing styles and predictable handling.

However, as the big sister to Senator's RH690, the RH770 is a popular choice as a rescue boat, charter boat, or family boat. It can be powered by single or twin motors or a sterndrive.

CUSTOMISATION PROCESS


When designing the interior, the Savages and Andrew focused on certain areas such as sleeping, eating and deck space.

"It's a balancing act," says Andrew. "The idea is to try and achieve what you want without moving major bulkheads."

They made sure the for'ard vee berth was big enough for comfort and then moved the helmstation bulkhead for'ard slightly to avoid wasted space and gain a tad more length for the wheelhouse.

That extra length provided for a seat and cooker/sink combo behind the helm seat, to starboard. The dining table is to port with a two-seater to the rear, with a 12V fridge/freezer beneath, and a single seat, for'ard. The table drops

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The business end of the RH770 is set up for fishing and diving. There's good access to the water via the transom step-through, a solid dive ladder, plenty of stowage and a very functional bait station.



down between the seat to form an adult-length berth. There is plenty of headroom and, with a lockable wheelhouse, all feels safe and secure, on and off the boat.

The well-stocked helmstation features latest a Simrad 16-inch screen with 1kW transducer, controls for twin wipers with freshwater sprayers, Maxwell auto freefall winch and the new model electric Bennett trim tabs. There are also controls for the searchlight, Fusion stereo with two indoor and two outdoor speakers, VHF, cabin and cockpit lighting and bilge pumps.

Most Senator hardtops have sliding doors between the wheelhouse and the cockpit, but Andrew is not a fan as they can slide shut suddenly in a seaway if not well secured. He suggested French doors but two, even-sized doors would be unable to swing back to 180 degrees. The solution was to have a bigger door and a smaller door. In bad weather, crew can use the bigger door for access; in good weather, both doors open fully for indoor-outdoor flow from cockpit to wheelhouse and give the driver almost all-round visibility from the helm.



The transom island is well presented and very practical. The gas bottle is tucked away in its own locker, servicing the gas hob in the galley and the open air cockpit shower via a califont.

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“The RH770 is a popular choice as a rescue boat, charter boat or family boat.”



On Vaughan's previous boats he had found it frustrating to get back onboard from a dive and find it difficult to stow his gear quickly. So he made sure there was plenty of free space in the cockpit and good storage beneath the chequerplate sole. On *Savage*, he says, “I come onboard from a dive, dump my dive gear in the compartment under the floor and that's it, the decks are clear.”

The Savages are keen fishers, as reflected by the multitude of rod holders – 12 in rocker launchers above and three either side in the coamings, plus another two behind the removable baitboard. A washdown pump is handy to starboard; a livebait tank is to port, in the step-through transom.

Batteries and their switches, and fuel and oil filters for the 250hp four-stroke Yamaha outboard are in dedicated lockers in the transom, well above the sole. Shelves with trendy green strip lighting either side of the cockpit stow rods and other gear.

The gas bottle is forward, starboard side, tucked into a locker in the cockpit/cabin bulkhead. The shower with hot water, thanks to the califont, is up on the port side beneath the wheelhouse overhang. This also provides a home for the Fusion speakers and exterior lighting, ready to party.

“A lot of this stuff was Andrew coming up with ideas,” Vaughan says. “I knew what I wanted and he knew how to go about it. He is absolutely meticulous.”

When *Savage* arrived at Haven Pleasureboats in Nelson from the factory in Napier, there was still about 80 to 100 hours work to make it turn-key ready. Andrew suggested Vaughan and his family drop by on Saturday to see them at work. That led to Vaughan, an engineer, picking up the tools to help out – the best possible way to learn a new boat is to be part of the installation process.

Vaughan and Suzanne have owned a variety of boats and considered secondhand but opted for brand new as the price

wasn't considerably more and they could have it how they wanted it in every detail.

When your playground includes the top of D'Urville Island, you want a solid, safe boat. The RH770 is built to survey standard; the hull is 6mm plate aluminium, the transom and pod are 5mm and 6mm, and pontoon and topsides are 3mm. The 4mm and 6mm aluminium are 5083 grade and the 3mm is 5052 grade.

Senator has committed to staying with the long-term European supplier of its aluminium.

“Senator has been offered slightly cheaper, Chinese-sourced alloy which is supposedly to the same grade,” Andrew says, “but when it was trialled they found it cuts and welds differently so they will stick to the proven mill and supplier – it has batch tracking – that they have always used with no issues.”

Senator has seven of the RH770 models on order. “It's one of the flagship models,” Andrew says. “Everyone loves the concept.”

Senator RH770

- **loa** 7.93m
- **beam** 2.49m (external) 1.99m (internal)
- **pontoon thickness** 3mm
- **hull thickness** 6mm
- **treadplate floor** 4mm
- **transom deadrise** 18 degrees
- **recommended HP** 150-250
- **maximum HP** 250
- **fuel** 310 litres
- **Height on trailer** 3.15m
- **width on trailer** 2.5m
- **length on trailer** 8.7m
- **towing weight** approx 2500kg
- **price as tested** \$160,000
- **manufactured by** Senator Boats, Napier