

FRATERNAL *twins*

Words and photos by **John Eichelsheim**

A pair of Senator RH650s recently joined the Nelson recreational fishing fleet. Both are set up primarily for sportfishing, but their owners have taken slightly different approaches to specifying and then kitting out their vessels.



“Both Senators feel safe and secure and they’re quiet travellers ...”



Mark Cotton works at local fishing tackle and dive store Big Blue Dive and Fish. His boat, *Defiant*, is an enclosed hardtop Senator RH650, vinyl-wrapped in 'Stealth Blue' and 'Carbon Black'. Mark describes it as "a fishing weapon" but he went for the huge cockpit to facilitate his diving.

Dan Govier's Senator RH650 is an open hardtop version with custom seating and lots of optional and owner-specified equipment. Dan is an environmental scientist consulting to the oil and gas industries, but has fished commercially and as a charter operator.

Like *Defiant*, *Aqua Zition* is vinyl-wrapped, in this case in striking green and silver-grey by the Sign Shop in Nelson, including the cockpit sides, side pockets and seat bases to prevent salt water oxidising the aluminium.

Mark fishes locally out of Port Nelson, but also likes to trailer the boat to Whanganui Inlet where he crosses the river bar at Westhaven. There's no transom opening on *Defiant*, for better security when beach launching into a surf and because a lot of the





fishing Mark undertakes requires backing up into the sea to hold the boat in position over fish and structure.

Aqua Zition is without a transom a step-through for the same reason: Dan routinely holds the boat over a fish mark by reversing into the wind and sea. Both men like to fish from their positions at the helm, but have hit upon different cabin layouts to make this possible.

Mark has opted for a short hardtop cabin with doors that open out of the way so he can easily stand or sit behind the wheel and fish over the side; Dan felt an open-backed hardtop would work better for him.

FUNCTION FIRST

Defiant doesn't carry quite as much equipment as *Aqua Zition*, but she's still packed with functional gear designed to make fishing and diving easy. Mark went for Simrad electronics, a 16-inch NSS Evo 2 MFD, using his iPad as a second, portable screen to display data via Bluetooth. The VHF radio is also Simrad; there's a single Roca windscreen wiper and USB and 12V outlets on the dash.

The Fusion sound system features powerful speakers in the cabin and in the cockpit. Senator Boats fitted the custom speakers and Mark is rapt with the result.





Custom features

Dan asked Senator to modify the standard seat bases, widening them and shifting them closer the gunwales. He also had them sealed at floor level, providing dry storage under the seats. The seating arrangement includes two deluxe swivelling bucket seats and a couple of fixed, rear-facing seats.

The helm console was also customised to accept a pair of Lowrance HDSi2 MFDs, fitted by local Navico dealer Fluid Electronics. "I prefer two separate displays because it gives me more ways to configure and display data," says Dan.

Like *Defiant*, *Aqua Zition* is well served by USB and 12V outlets, and also has a 1kW transducer and StructureScan, a single wiper and a slightly less extreme Fusion sound system.

Defiant's hardtop is carpeted inside, including the sides and the shelves, as is the cockpit, deadening hull noise and protecting stowed items. Extensions to the V-berths allow occupants to lie full length. On overnight trips Mark brings a portable chemical toilet.

A large locker occupies the underfloor space between the fixed seats. Close the double doors and the hardtop is cosy and warm; open them, along with the sliding side windows, and ventilation is good.

Both boats are dominated by huge cockpits, but *Aqua Zition* feels more spacious, probably because of her open hardtop configuration. In winter you'd need to rug up, but on an early summer's day in Nelson, it was nice to feel the air circulating around the cabin.

Unlike *Defiant*, *Aqua Zition* has trim tabs, which Dan says he wouldn't be without, and the dashboard switch panels feature custom labels from a local signwriter.

Dan also has overnighting aspirations. LED lighting strips are evident throughout, including in the cockpit and along the side pockets. *Defiant* has them too and both boats have underwater



Build your own charts

Mark finds Insight charting very useful: "Most proprietary charts, while broadly accurate, don't show up the sort of seabed details anglers find so useful," he explains. Using Insight he is building up personalised charts of the areas he fishes most often. A 1kW transducer is mandatory and the boat also has StructureScan.

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Defiant's bait station is a custom affair built by a friend. It features a decent bait/filleting board that drains overboard, plenty of sinker/cup holders, an array of rodholders across the back and a shelf underneath. The hardtop has a useful rocket launcher and there are six through-gunwale rodholders, plus stowage space in the full length side pockets.

lights, red and white LED cabin lights by Hella and cockpit floodlights as well.

Drop covers are coming for *Aqua Zition*, which will turn the boat into a comfortable camper, and there's a plumbed toilet "for the girls", a first for an RH650. Infill squabs and bunk extensions should make sleeping comfortable enough.

FISHING TRANSOMS


Wide open cockpits and fishing-oriented transom layouts characterise both boats. Mark came up with the in-transom

livebait tank design with its glass viewing window and practical venturi water feed, supplemented by an electric pump when the boat's at rest.

Dan had had a similar bait tank in his previous boat so he specified one like *Defiant's* for this boat, though Mark jokes that Senator did a nicer job of the cosmetics on *Aqua Zition* when it came to drilling the livebait tank overflow drains.

Neoprene on the coamings and side decks is nice to sit on and provides good footing when sidling around the hardtop, which is easy enough thanks to grab rails on the roof. There's no

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Game fishing

With game fishing in mind, but also live-baiting for kingfish, at Dan's request Senator fitted tuna tubes across the transom, neatly plumbed with an easy-to-reach on-off valve. Outriggers will soon be part of the package.

Aqua Zition has extra-heavy 6mm hull plates, which Dan reckons improve the boat's ride, especially in choppy conditions, and offer some insurance against trailer and beach launching damage.



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The Right Fit

Dan took his time researching a new boat. With plenty of experience and a number of charter boats behind him, he knew what he wanted. It had to be aluminium for beach launching and it had to fit in his shed at home. He liked pontoon designs for their safety and stability and he'd been impressed by the way Senators ride.

After he settled on buying a Senator and began talking about what he wanted on the boat, he twice revised the size upwards when careful measurement first revealed he could squeeze an RH620 into his shed and close the door, then an RH650.

Shoe-horning all the features he wanted into a Senator RH580, his original choice, or even the larger RH 620, was going to cost almost as much as buying a bigger RH650. So once he was sure the bigger boat, which shares the 620's hull, would fit the shed, a 650 was ordered. *Aqua Zition* is the finished item.

electric capstan on *Defiant*, but Mark reckons he doesn't do a lot of anchoring anyway and when he does, someone else pulls the anchor since he's the skipper.

Dan's layout is similarly functional but slightly different. He plans to troll for marlin – yes, it's the South Island, but marlin are encountered off Farewell Spit and the waters of the Taranaki Bight are quite close.

Aqua Zition is easily capable of reaching both those areas, especially since Dan likes to work the boat out of Okiwi, where he launches off a formed ramp without a pontoon or jetty. The bow ladder was specified to aid in launching and retrieving the boat.

The DMW tandem-axle braked trailer has been upgraded with heavier gauge steel and an extended drawbar to keep the bow and bow ladder well clear of Dan's Toyota Prado's tailgate. *Aqua Zition* is the smallest Senator fitted with a bow ladder so far.

POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Both Senators have identical powerplants: Yamaha 225hp four-stroke outboards with the latest electronic displays and electronic controls.

During our performance runs, *Defiant* proved slightly faster at wide open throttle. We managed 41 knots at 5000rpm in *Aqua Zition* but I'd expect a couple of hundred extra revs and a knot or three of extra speed in optimum conditions. Aboard *Defiant* we reached 44 knots at 5400rpm. 3000rpm gives a comfortable 25 knots.


Both boats perform well, accelerate strongly and ride nicely, though in the choppy conditions beyond the harbour entrance *Aqua Zition* definitely benefitted from trim tabs. Cross winds caused the

boats to lean over into the breeze, but on *Aqua Zition* this was easily corrected with the tabs for a drier more comfortable ride.

In general the ride quality of both impressed but, perhaps thanks to its heavier hull plates, *Aqua Zition* seemed a little more composed in joggly conditions. However, both Senators feel safe and secure and they're quiet travellers, especially *Defiant* with the hardtop doors shut.

Both of these Senator owners expect to make long runs across open water getting to and from their favourite fishing grounds, so comfort and safety were high on their list of priorities. Tasman Bay can be a windy place with choppy seas, but these boats appear well able to deal with those conditions. With their striking vinyl wraps, they'll be impossible to miss on the water.

Defiant and *Aqua Zition* join a growing fleet of Senator Boats operating out of Nelson. According to Mark there are now enough of them to hold informal Senator fishing days competing among themselves.

The Senators were supplied by Nelson dealer and Senator agent, Haven Pleasure Boats. 



Senator RH650

- **loa** 6.75m
- **beam** 2.38m
- **draft** approx 0.4m
- **deadrise** 18° at transom
- **construction** aluminium, 5mm (6mm) bottom, 3mm pontoons
- **towing weight** 1500kg approx
- **engine** Yamaha four-stroke 225hp V6
- **fuel** 215 litres
- **cruising speed** 25 knots
- **max speed** 44 knots
- **packages from** \$73,871.00 (Haven Pleasure Boats, Nelson)
- **manufactured by** Senator Boats, web www.senatorboats.com
- **boats supplied by** Mark Cotton and Daniel Govier