

TRAILER BOAT MAG 2010

TRAVELLER TF185



The Haines Group likes to call the new Traveller TF185 a “spaceship”. Not because it’s full of little green men or creatures in tight Lycra suits on a seven-year mission to explore strange new worlds.

No, the people at the Haines Group call this boat a “spaceship” due to its wide open spaces in the cabin and on the deck. I tend to agree with them and I admit that it feels like an ultra-modern outdoor room, with creative styling and a very sensible and spacious layout.

In a previous life I was actually a Traveller dealer. Back then, the early Haines Group offerings were refits of older Signature models. However, as time went on the company developed new products with their own distinctive design and character. Models like the TC170, TB170 and TC200 combined some real design flair with quality construction and safe handling, so I’m pleased to say that the new TF185 carries on the tradition in the form of an exciting family machine.

READY FOR BLAST OFF

The first thing you notice when stepping aboard the Traveller TF185, which was supplied to us by Melbourne-dealer Wes Frost Marine, is its stability. For a boat with a full length cabin it has a pleasing amount of deck area, while the maximum allowable 2.5m beam combines with reasonably deep freeboard and optimal swept-coamings to create a great work area. There are also toeholds all around the deck, including under the full-length sidepockets. Just don’t step on them as they weren’t strong enough for this big bloke. The coamings are also finished with very welcome and strong stainless steel grabrails which, while not fully recessed, certainly didn’t get in the way.

The transom layout and work station on the TF185 are very attractive with excellent ergonomics. The low-swept sheer to the transom culminates at small rear boarding platforms either side of the small engine well. There’s a drop-down back to the engine well to allow full tilt on the Mercury 125hp OptiMax motor which also happens to allow for more workspace. There’s a small access doorway to the port side and a livebait tank/icebox to starboard. In our test boat this was plumbed with an optional aerator.

I also liked the design of the drop-down rear lounge which is attractive, practical and reasonably comfortable. While the seat is quite low it would make for a great spot for the kids or for lounging around. The upholstery material is Nautolex marine vinyl, which is treated with a pre-fix to make it easier to clean after a day of fishing.

The test rig was fitted with an optional Haines combination-cuttingboard. It’s a solid fibreglass unit with a small built-in sink and storage under the lift-up cutting surface which I’m guessing is not a cheap option. There’s also an optional deckwash and boarding ladder while four stainless steel rodholders come standard.

The test boat’s floor was carpeted up the middle with speckled flowcoat either side. This presents well and is a good old tried and true combination that’s easily cleaned. There’s storage under the floor and

also good access to the bilge, battery, oil bottle and so on.

AT THE HELM

I was pleasantly surprised by the seats at the helm, which are a fibreglass shell with thick two-toned upholstered cushions. They're pedestal-mounted and feature an adjustable slide on the driver's side. They're quite comfortable too.

The real surprise, however, was the vision through the windscreen. It felt similar to something from a modern car, where you can't see the bonnet from the driving position due to the raked cabin lines.

The dash is simple, yet has some really nice features with some attractive soft and rounded mouldings. It can accommodate anything up to a large 12in sounder/GPS/plotter combination although in our case the test boat was not fitted with anything so as to allow for customer preference. Indeed, the choice of electronics nowadays can be harder than your choice of boat package.

The Mercury has SmartCraft gauges which in my view are a vast improvement on some competitors since they're easy to see and operate. The dash also features a six-gang switch panel, key-start, a simple steering wheel and SeaStar hydraulic steering. However, I'd like to see the wheel upgraded, which is an option, as I felt it detracted from the boat's otherwise high standards.

The dash had a large flat section for all those "other" bits and pieces, as well as footrests and a nice curved Perspex windscreen. The helm was adequately protected by the screen and a set of bimini canopies with aluminium frame and combination rocket launcher. There was also an optional stainless steel windscreen-grabrail.

Moving to the cabin, I found it really inviting, albeit very open. It's well trimmed with comfortable fawn textured upholstery and it features a Porta Potti and big sidepockets as standard. The cabin on this model was finished in speckled flowcoat, as was the rest of the boat.

Anchoring is well designed, easy and convenient. There's a large Perspex cabin hatch giving way to the separate anchorlocker, moulded bowsprit and locking bollard. The mouldings are already in place should you also wish to add an optional electric anchorwinch.

HANDLING AND RIDE

The Traveller TF185 is a brand new model so the test day was the first time that me and Wes Frost had been out in one. As mentioned, the first thing you notice is the stability, especially for someone my size; the second thing you notice is the quiet ride. Its construction quality and foam-filling means there's very little hull noise in the chop, and it handles extremely well and turns beautifully. Even when put into hard locks at full speed it remained confident and sure footed.

Unfortunately we only had a little bit of bay chop and a rather large wake off the Queenscliff ferry to play in so I can't comment on its roughwater handling. However, it's a good bet it would perform admirably under such conditions.

I'll be the first to admit that I didn't like the early Mercury OptiMax engines. So I must say how pleased I am to have had to change my mind. I sincerely believe these engines have really improved over time to the point where they're a serious contender for my own boat. They offer fuel efficient power throughout the entire rev range and all that for very reasonable purchase and running costs. The 125hp fitted to the test boat was a little noisy at high speeds but I found it very acceptable owing to its other advantages, including five-year warranty.

All Traveller hulls feature "Datadot" security and a 10-year structural plus two-year componentry warranty.

THE WRAP

The Traveller TF185 is, in short, a very nice boat. Its optional two-toned gelcoat finish creates a classy

outward appearance, and its curvy lines are extremely attractive.

The 6m market is a highly competitive arena so this model should prove to be a strong contender for the Haines Group and its dealers. It's warp speed ahead in the Traveller TF185. I can just see James T. Kirk at the helm, with Spock navigating — best of all, you won't need Bones to straighten your back with the soft ride on this "spaceship".

PERFORMANCE	Specifications: Traveller TF185
12.8kts (23.6kmh) @ 3000rpm (on the plane with little bow rise)	GENERAL
17kts (31.3kmh) @ 3500rpm	Type: Deep-vee monohull Material: GRP Length (overall): 6.14m Beam: 2.5m Weight (hull only): 750kg Weight (towing): Approx. 1500kg Deadrise: 20°
23.5kts (43.4kmh) @ 4000rpm	CAPACITIES
26kts (48.0kmh) @ 4500rpm	Fuel: 150lt Rec. max. HP: 150 Rec. min. HP: 115
30kts (55.6kmh) @ 5000rpm	
36kts (66.7kmh) @ 5500rpm (WOT on new motor — expect better once it's run in)	