



Tested by Kevin Smith

ONE thing that never ceases to amaze me is the ongoing product development within the boating industry of Southern Africa. Although the economy is not the greatest at the moment, boat manufacturers and boating dealerships are still moving forward with the trends and coming out with some really innovative craft that will be the envy of anyone currently owning a boat or contemplating owning one.

Boating International have a choice selection of craft available in the deep sea range and recently added another one — the Ace Glider 530 Cat, manufactured by Ace Boating.

There is such a wide selection of locally manufactured cats of this size now available, that one begins to wonder if there are too many. In my opinion, no, because having more choices ensures that the buyer gets the best product to suit his requirements.

Dayalan Naidoo, Harry Naidoo and Gavin Moodley are the partners at Ace Boating, and I first heard of the Ace Glider while chatting to Dayalan at the Durban Boat Show in 2006. However, I didn't get to see the Ace Glider until she was presented on her trailer at the Natal Rod and Reel Club in Durban on the day of the test. I guess it's true what they say — good things come to those who wait.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

The new Ace Glider is very good looking, with a more modern design than many of the standard cats available. In fact, it's very "bling", with all the shiny bells and whistles you could ever want, but is one of those craft that grows on you as you study it further.

Shortly after my arrival the Ace Glider was gently slipped off her sturdy, galvanised, breakneck trailer and we were on our way out of the harbour mouth. It was equally as simple to load her back on to the trailer after the test.

Out at sea we met up with the photography boat, kindly supplied by none other than Lowrance's Silan Naicker. Gavin Moodley and my legendary personal photographer, Erwin Bursik, served as his crew.

CONDITIONS

For a genuine summer's day, the ocean was on its best behaviour for this test. In fact, conditions were almost too

good, with the baking sun already crinkling the skin, and surface conditions being absolutely flat.

MOTORS AND CONTROLS

The power behind the Ace Glider was supplied by twin 75hp Mercury BigFoot motors, which was more than sufficient to get her out of the hole and onto the plane in a speedy fashion. After that, just a few flicks on the trims to suit the weight on the boat and conditions was all that was needed to get a comfortable ride going through the harbour. With her being a forward console craft, I had a smooth hydraulic steering system and side-mount control boxes to aid with the simple operating of the craft.

PERFORMANCE

Unfortunately, when the conditions are ultra-flat it's quite tricky to get a true feel of how a boat would ride in rougher conditions. Nonetheless, we make do with what we have and utilise a few tricks to get the most out of a boat in these conditions.

As previously mentioned, the twin 75hp Mercury motors provided more than sufficient power to get her out of the hole as well as when full locking from being stationary. There was minimal cavitation out of the hole at full lock and when turning at higher speeds, which is what every skipper requires when surf launching.

At higher speeds in the calm conditions a general comfortable ride could be maintained around 20 knots, and even when jumping the wake and swell that was deflecting off the photography boat, the ride was still constant at the higher speed and was relatively easy to keep control of. Tapping off on the throttles to variable speeds between five and ten knots, it was comfortable enough to sit back in the chair and relax whilst driving.

LAYOUT

Although hull designs are changing rapidly nowadays, many of them are still laid out in a similar way, but this is not the case with the Ace Glider. This boat is one of the most interestingly designed cats that I have seen in a while, and the layout of the boat is the really interesting part.

In the stern you have a standard transom section with slightly deeper motor wells, a centre non-skid step-up section, and a good-sized livebait well with small deadbait holding hatches on either side. Dual recessed cup holders are a nice finishing touch, along with built-in battery hatches and dual trolling roll bars.

Another unique feature is the false transom section that's raised off the main deck. This would be an advantage for quicker draining as well as for cleaning. The main deck has a non-slip finish and features decent-sized flushmount fish hatches with a moveable, raised stowage/fuel/seating hatch in-between.

As tested, the boat had the fuel rigged into jerry cans inside the fish hatches. In my opinion, it would be better to have the fuel inside the moveable hatch, which I would have secured permanently to the deck in the stern area. However, that's a personal choice. The gunnels are fairly high and have built-in rod racks that are recessed behind the flush paneling on both sides of the craft.

Moving onto the forward console area, firstly there's a comfortable padded passenger/co-skipper's seat that serves as a stowage area and has upright rod holders. Alongside this is another unique feature — the small built-in side sink with a tap that works with a handpump. It's ever so simple, is non-electric, and you don't have the hassle of breaking a rib while hanging over the gunnel trying to wash your hands.

Moving forward along the side panel there's another feature that immediately caught my attention — a small flushmount, built-in 12 volt fridge. The few cold drinks that were inside were nice and cold to the touch. Also built into this panel are tackle drawers and another stowage area for gear. The centre section of the console then has a step through to the bowrider front, with hinged door and windscreen to keep it spacious.

The skipper's side consists of a spaciouly laid out dash area with all the necessary sporty-styled gauges and trinkets, and more cupboard space beneath.

The bow will be one of the first things people notice about this craft — she's a cat with a bowrider-styled front. It's very different indeed. Basically, the bow has been cut away to house dual side seats that serve as the anchor hatches, with a wraparound stainless-steel bowrail to complement it. This feature certainly has practical uses, but I would try my best to avoid duck-diving a curler when launching!

There are numerous other innovative features too, but we don't have space to mention them all.

FISHABILITY

On the fishing side, you have all the necessary features and more to make a day out that much more comfortable. Putting the Ace Glider through speed tests, she handled well at fast and slow troll speeds, as well as on the drift. The craft is reasonably stable for her size, and is simple to control and manoeuvre. Judging by her overall performance, her handling capabilities should stay fairly constant in moderate to rough conditions.

Just remember that she's a fairly small boat and not a large sportfisher.

FINISHES

It's really good to see how far the South African boat builders have come in improving on their all round finishes. The Ace Glider has a good combination of well thought out features, and a decent finish from bow to stern.

CONCLUSION

As with most craft of this style and size, the Ace Glider 530 is a practical craft and can be used anywhere, from dams to the ocean. Besides her bowrider, the only difference with the Ace Glider is the many extras and sporty features that come standard. •

AT A GLANCE

Length: 5.3m

Beam: 2.3m

Draft: 40cm

Construction: Wood-free hull, fibreglass bulkheads, imported Komacell deck with bonded non-slip fibreglass floor

Flotation: Polyurethane closed cell foam

Boat weight: 800kg

Fuel capacity: Option — 250 litres under deck or 150 litres on deck

Rated max hp: 2 x 90hp