

ON THE WATER



The West Australian | **BOATS** EXPLORER 465 CENTRE CONSOLE



Impressive: The Explorer 465 provided a motion and a ride that would have been a credit to a boat a metre longer.

Suited to the surf



BOATS

MIKE BROWN

The Explorer 465 Centre Console fits several unusual features into its 4.65m-length.

Made of fibreglass, it has a self-draining deck.

With a hull weight of only 350kg, it has closed-cell foam buoyancy of 923kg and it has a motor-well capable of taking twin outboards. All these factors stem from the rules of its country of origin, South Africa.

Explorers are built in Natal, which has a 400km stretch of coast with no sheltering reef and only two sheltered launching spots — both busy commercial ports that discourage leisure boats.

The result is that almost all launching is done off the beach, straight into nearly permanent surf.

Beaches are steep and the trailers

generally stay dry during launch and recovery because the boats are manoeuvred in and out over inflatable rollers. If two people plan to go out in the boat, they need two mates on shore to help them.

The boats need to be tough (the 465 has a stainless-steel keel strip to take wear) and also self-reliant once out there. If they go more than a mile offshore they need two engines.

Apparently that is an awful lot better than carrying a radio; anecdotes say you could wait a long time for help getting home after a breakdown. Clearly life is easier in WA because the review boat was fitted with a single 60hp Honda.

The self-draining arrangements are neat. The deck is carried fairly low and to prevent backflow of water simple non-return valves are fitted — rubber balls in cages similar to the snorkels of decades ago.

The interior is quite roomy despite abundant lockers. A bow locker doubles as an extra seat, the main seat is a reversible double on a large locker, there are three more lockers in the console and two in the transom, all with doors.

Other compartments have a lidded anchor well, transom bait tank and an underdeck wet locker.

There are no side pockets, the bulwarks being consumed by rod racks. These give rods the VIP treatment. The racks are covered with carpet as are the interior of the bulwarks.

The day we went out to play was a lot more boisterous than any but the really keen would choose to be afloat in, and was a real test for such a small boat. I have to say right away that I was impressed. We used more speed than comfort suggested but

discovered behaviour, a motion and a ride that would have been a credit to a boat a metre longer.

Into the weather, leg trimmed in, we had the occasional big one that wedged the bow up and had us practically riding on the transom.

Inevitably we landed again, but with no trace of slam and remarkably little spray. We did get more of that with the seas on the beam but the hull's behaviour remained commendable.

With the seas behind us the Explorer felt even better. Overtaking the seas at speed, with the passenger sitting aft, the balance was perfect, with not the slightest tendency to bury the bow and little wheelwork needed to keep straight.

Just once we gave the motor its head. It had an 11-inch pitch propeller that felt under-pitched, but which certainly justified the well-braced ski pole the 465 had as standard — the boat would get a tree trunk planing.

A 40hp motor would still provide acceptable performance, with the benefit of a \$3900 reduction in cost. This would drop the Honda-powered price to \$26,000 — close to a bargain in terms of its rivals.

Besides the goodies already mentioned, it gets a rugged bow rail, plenty of grab rails around the driving position, a boarding platform and LED navigation lights.

The agent supplies it with a pair of 25-litre fuel tanks that probably count as a premium over the alternative of built-in. Link these with the unquestioned benefit of a towing weight the smallest car could cope with, and a high standard of finish, and the Explorer 465 stands as a great low-end contender.

LOWDOWN

Explorer 465 Centre Console

Price: From \$26,000; as reviewed \$29,900

Length: 4.65m

Beam: 2.2m

Hull weight: 350kg

Maximum power: 90hp

Motor fitted: 60hp Honda

four-stroke

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