

The latest release from Queensland manufacturer Noosa Cat shows significant evolution from its predecessors, firmly underlined by the brand's amazing rough-riding abilities. So journey with us as Warren Steptoe blasts over the infamous Noosa River bar to experience the bluewater potential of this pedigree Cat.

Among Australia's power catamarans the name Shark Cat is still legend, even though it's many years now since Shark Cat morphed into Noosa Cat. Noosa Cats retain something of a family resemblance to the old Shark Cats, but in truth, although they look vaguely familiar, the Noosa Cat you see today is a vastly different boat to the Shark Cats of yore.

Noosa Cat hulls are considerably more sophisticated than Shark Cats' ever were, and it seems to me, after testing their latest 3000 Sportsman model, that what boating scribes once described as a 'magic carpet ride' over rough water has actually improved. However, rough-water handling was always one of a Shark Cat's strong points, and the advances here amount to precious little compared to how far Noosa Cats have advanced in other areas.

Along with a smooth ride on rough water, which back then was virtually unprecedented, Shark Cats were equally renowned for being fuel-hungry, quite wet and notoriously bumpy when travelling into a head sea at low (trolling) speed. They also towed a low-pressure air pocket behind them that literally sucked spray into the cockpit – and into the engines! As anyone who owned one would soon tell you, the powerful (thirsty) V6 carburettor 2-stroke outboards never lasted long,

although they were necessary to keep a Shark Cat up and running at speeds where the twin sponson hull could work its 'magic' on rough water.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Modern technology in the form of fuel-efficient, big-block 4-stroke outboards has lowered fuel consumption to a point where our test found this eight-metre Noosa Cat, running a pair of Yamaha F225 4-stroke outboards, to be amazingly economical rather than thirsty.

Astute development of sponson shape has improved spray deflection dramatically. Also, the integration of bolt-on engine pods (used in the interim between the Shark Cats of yesterday and the Noosa Cats of today) into the hull moulding itself has reduced 'sucked-in spray' to virtually nothing. A Yamaha technician working-up data for a performance and fuel-consumption bulletin on the twin F225s on our test boat remarked how dry the engine cowls were afterwards.

BlueWater's test of the Noosa Cat 3000 Sportsman involved two days on the water. The first was basically a photo shoot, with Noosa Cat principal Wayne Hennig running the boat through the infamous Noosa River bar only to find sea conditions offshore so smooth that we wished we'd been out fishing. It was no challenge for an eight-metre Noosa Cat at all!





Pedigree **Cat**

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Developed with an enviable heritage of successful bar-crossing hulls, Noosa Cat have designed their boats with wave-busting and rough-water in mind.

The second day came with Yamaha's Glenn Gibson aboard working on the performance bulletin. The second day was quite a test and this bluewater fisherman was quite happy *not* to be fishing. To find calm(ish) water to run Glenn's figures, we had to rely on a narrow lee behind Noosa's prominent north-facing headland and ultimately, head back inside the river to check things out at higher speeds.

Higher speeds being a relative thing on the second day, our main problem was that the Noosa Cat had such long legs we were out from behind the lee in no time. Once past the river entrance (a journey of moments from a standing start among a crowd of surfers), chop generated by the blustery 25-knot-plus south-easters became progressively worse atop a fair-size swell. The speeds we could maintain across pretty crappy water were most impressive – although nowhere near as impressive as the

almost bump-free ride when we turned around and headed back upwind for the next run.

Heading towards the headland, it was difficult to get your head around the way the Noosa Cat cruised along so smoothly, with GPS showing Speed Over Ground (SOG) of 25 and sometimes 30 knots. Apparently the 'magic carpet' has a pretty plush pile these days. It was an amazing demonstration of just what a good power cat can do in conditions rough enough to deliver a beating to most eight-metre bluewater fishing boats.

DRY DESIGN

Thanks in no small part to prominent spray chines, contemporary Noosa Cats lie well-forward on their sponsons. The ride quartering into the wind, precisely the situation its ancestors used to drown everybody, was also remarkable dry. You can see this for yourself in the pictures

shot on the first day of our test. Note how the hull rides slightly bows-high at speed, cramming plenty of air through the tunnel to soften any bumps. The ride keeps those chines positioned to deflect spray, and ensures any spray that does escape along each side does so far enough aft not to get blown inboard.

Our test boat, being used for demonstration only, was fitted out to a basic level and so didn't have the sheltering clears between windscreen and hardtop most owners would fit. This airflow through the gap obviously reduced any low-pressure area behind the boat at speed, and its tendency to suck spray into the cockpit and passenger area. Nonetheless, it's interesting to look closely at those photos to see the effects of recent development to the aft end of the sponsons.

A change from bolt-on metal pods to integration of what is perhaps no longer a pod *per se* into the hull itself has noticeably reduced spray and wash immediately behind the motors, so it's reasonable to expect the passenger area to be drier too.

Last, there's the 'wave breaker' fairing atop the tunnel to smooth out impacts on the bows when heading upwind at low speeds (there used to be a flat area between the sponsons here that had a tendency to meet oncoming water very harshly).

All-in-all the new 3000 series Noosa Cat hull is a far cry from its ancestors, retaining all their desirable characteristics while overcoming their failings. From here I can only suggest people with a negative attitude towards power catamarans go for a test ride in a Noosa Cat themselves. There's nothing I can say about how good

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they are on rough water that will convince you more than a ride on a suitably rough day!

FIGHTING STYLE

While riding around there's something else to look at and think about. Serious bluewater anglers will no doubt notice that this boat has a whopping great outboard motor in each aft corner. There is an excellent walk-through deck between the motors, although, even out there, there's no denying how far you are from each corner of the boat while fighting a fish.

If you are used to fishing from traditional twin-screw, inboard-style boats with unfettered access (and hands-free leg support from wide-covering boards) right around the cockpit periphery, fishing from this boat (and others like it) requires some lateral thinking to get around a 'backing down' fishing strategy.

With some change to how you fish, (and fight fish) from working straight over the transom when livebaiting and trolling, to fishing from the sides, then fishing from twin-outboard-powered boats isn't so bad. Fair enough you can't back down (any outboard-powered boat) to fight a fish as effectively as a twin-screw inboard-powered one, but you can use the boat just as effectively by going forward with the line angled out to one side.

This way the boat is certainly fast enough, and by reversing the appropriate motor to pivot the

boat from side-to-side, also quite nimble. Having fished a power cat myself for over five years, I guess I'd have to agree it isn't as nimble as 'backing down', but I would contend the system is far from as clumsy as someone accustomed to twin-screw inboards might think. I must point out that moving the boat upwind doesn't involve green water periodically bursting over the transom the way it does if 'backing down'. Food for thought...

LENGTHY COCKPIT

All of which aside, the 3000 Sportsman has an enormous cockpit arranged more in a lengthwise axis than the crosswise cockpit space found in twin-screw inboards.

Our test boat had an optional workstation sited centrally in the cockpit, which is again hardly traditional. It's quite convenient while fishing nonetheless, incorporating a handy working surface and a large icebox, which are perhaps more in line with a bottom-fishing mindset than a sportfishing one.

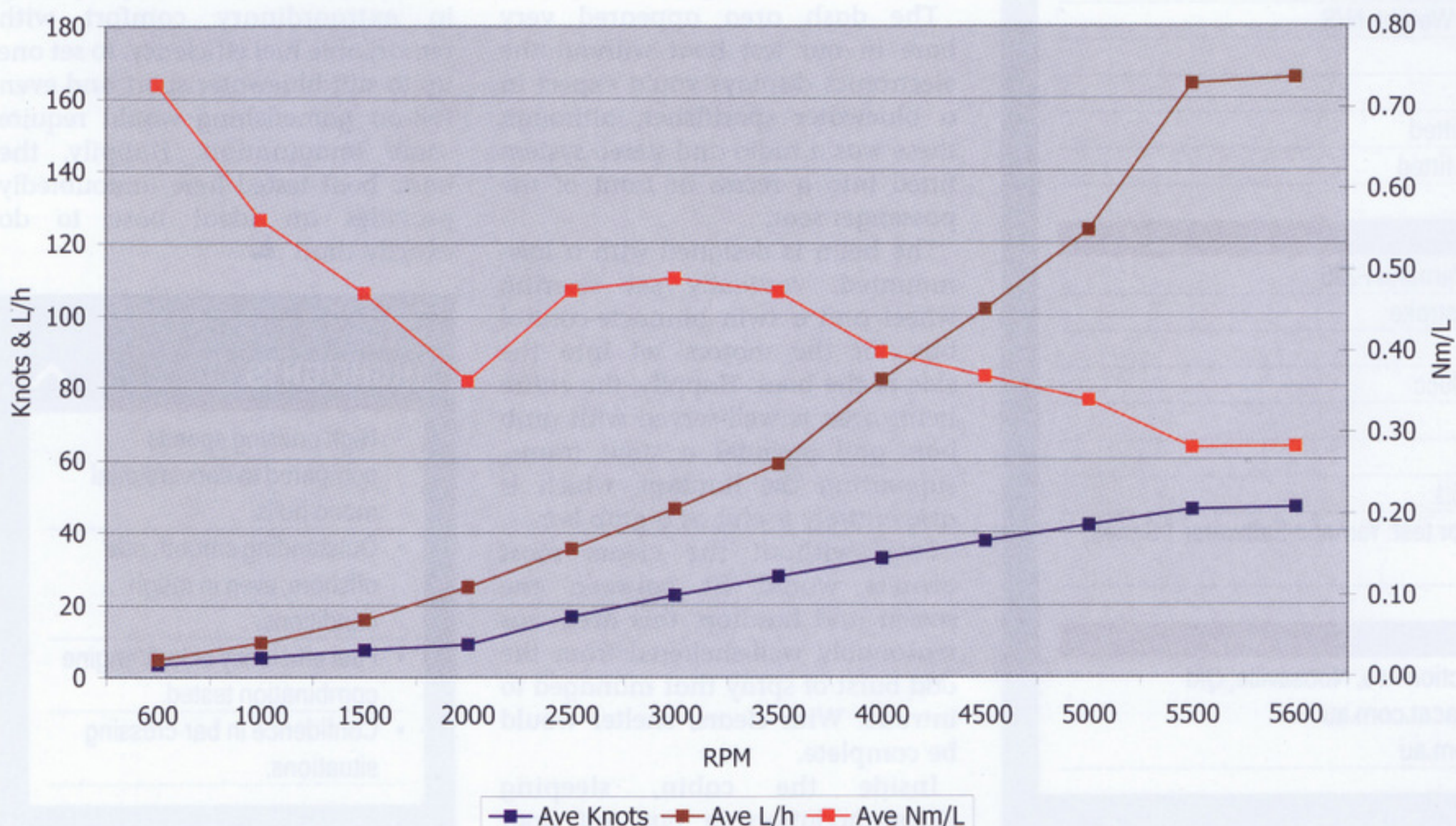
Like so many things in boating, any minus points here must be weighed against this boat's ability to cover water faster, more comfortably and – if you study Yamaha's performance bulletin – more economically than competitors.

Cruising at around 25 knots, say at 3000rpm to 3500rpm, fuel consumption for both motors totals out around 50L to 55L per hour.

The Noosa Cat's broad and long cockpit provides ample room for fishing, even with the handy central work-station.



Fuel consumption and performance figures



"Noosa Cat boats are usually customised, often highly customised."

SPEC CHECK



NOOSA CAT 3000 SPORTSMAN

PRICE AS TESTED

\$117,444 (Cuddy cabin)

PRICED FROM

\$134,473 (Long Cabin)

\$128,996 (Walkabout)

OPTIONS FITTED

Twin F225 Yamaha outboards, heavy duty tri-axle trailer, GME GX600 VHF transceiver, GME GR200 AM/FM radio.

GENERAL

Material: GRP laminates

Hull Type: Cuddy cabin power catamaran

Length: 8.0 metres

LOA: 8.6 metres

Beam: 2.5 metres

Draft: 0.4 metres

Weight as tested: 3300kg

BMT Towing Weight: 3500kg to 4000kg

CAPACITIES

Maximum Rated Power: 2 x 250hp

Maximum Engine Weight: N/S

People: N/S

Fuel: 2 x 225 litres

Fresh Water: Not fitted

Holding Tank: Not fitted

ENGINES

Make/model: 2 x Yamaha F225

Type: 4.2 litre V6 4-stroke

Rated hp: 225hp

Displacement: 4200cc

No. Cylinders: 6

Weight: 2 x 253kg

Gearbox ratio: 1.75:1

Propeller/s used for test: Yamaha Saltwater T Series 19-inch pitch

SUPPLIED BY

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This is pretty impressive stuff for an eight-metre boat. And more so when this eight-metre boat compares more than favourably against much larger boats in terms of how comfortably it travels at these speeds.

Ergonomically, although the 3000 Sportsman provides very secure toes-in-under-leg support around the cockpit periphery, there are several interruptions. Two of these are well forward where they don't represent too much trouble, while two others – protruding lockers in each aft corner – aren't as easy to live with. A thick, upholstered bolster around the cockpit periphery would go a long way towards alleviating any awkwardness here.

Our test boat had a livewell set portside beside the transom walkthrough. This was well-sized for offshore-size baits, although the access lid does look a little narrow.

Underfoot, the deck featured a soft, patterned surface I hadn't seen before that was completely non-slip underfoot. I suspect shoes would be mandatory to fish, as bare feet would soon become uncomfortable on the heavily patterned surface. The deck is carried well-above the waterline at rest, and drains through a big scupper so it can be considered truly self-draining.

HELM OPTIONS

In the helm area a pair of armchair-style bucket seats perch atop stowage lockers, with an upholstered supplementary seat on the cockpit end. The lockers can be optioned in various ways to become iceboxes, tackleboxes or refrigerators.

The dash area appeared very bare in our test boat without the electronics displays you'd expect in a bluewater sportfisher, although these was a radio and stereo system fitted into a recess in front of the passenger seat.

The helm is designed with a low-mounted, vertically set steering wheel and a twin binnacle-control box for the motors set into the side of the boat. Happily, the entire helm area is well-served with grab bars and includes a stout frame, supporting the hardtop, which is also entirely useful as a grab bar.

Even without the clears most owners would fit between the screen and hardtop, this area was reasonably well-sheltered from the odd burst of spray that managed to intrude. With clears, shelter would be complete.

Inside the cabin, sleeping accommodation in our test boat

was very basic, with a pair of short bunks set atop stowage lockers. Headroom is limited due to the usual cat issue of the tunnel raising the floor so high.

If anything compromises this boat it's the small cabin, which no doubt does lose out by comparison against competitors in terms of amenities and interior space. Although I should point out after that comment, that when we tested this early production boat, Noosa Cat was still in process of developing other configurations based on the same hull. These will include self-describing Open Cabin, Walkabout and Long Cabin versions.

CUSTOMISED FOR YOU

Noosa Cat rarely builds two boats the same, and boats this big (and larger) are usually customised, often highly customised. You only need to talk to Wayne Hennig to work out what they can do here.

I'd love to see one of these boats set up with a tower using the hardtop as a floor for an upper-helm station. It would, I expect, make a superb, express-style, bluewater sportfisher. Noosa Cat have certainly built up other models to this configuration and no doubt would be only too pleased to do the same with the new 3000 Sportsman.

In summary, this is an extraordinarily interesting boat. I should point out one last time that the test boat was never intended to be more than a demonstrator. Although it verified the ability of this particular hull and power combination to cover inordinate amounts of water very quickly in extraordinary comfort with remarkable fuel efficiency, to set one up to suit bluewater sport and even full-on gamefishing would require some imagination. Happily, the basic boat tested here undoubtedly provides an ideal base to do exactly that! 🚤

HIGHLIGHTS

- High cruising speeds compared to conventional mono hulls.
- Outstanding smooth ride offshore, even in rough conditions.
- Fuel efficiency of hull/engine combination tested.
- Confidence in bar-crossing situations.