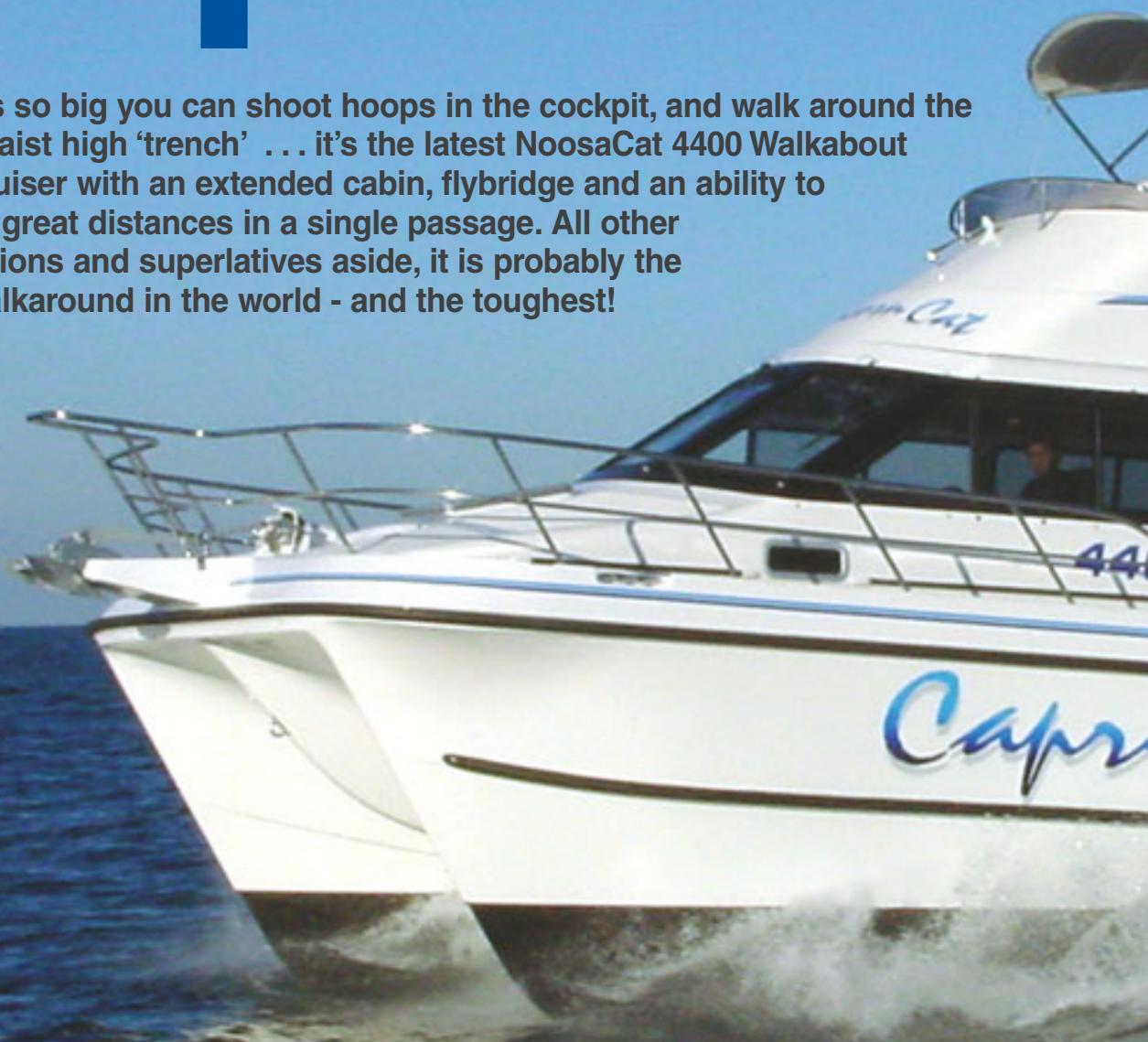


# The Noosaville Express

Man, this is so big you can shoot hoops in the cockpit, and walk around the sides in a waist high 'trench' . . . it's the latest NoosaCat 4400 Walkabout Express cruiser with an extended cabin, flybridge and an ability to travel great distances in a single passage. All other considerations and superlatives aside, it is probably the biggest walkaround in the world - and the toughest!



**O**fficially, it is a Noosacat 4400 Deluxe walkaround extended cabin stern drive sports cruiser – a name that is nearly as long as this boat is wide.

This is without doubt one of the most remarkable boats the writer has ever tested, and although we didn't face any howling gales off a mid winter, sunny Noosaville, there was enough happening in the bar to keep this baby honest, believe me.

Actually, if the truth be known you really don't get a chance to properly test boats like this because to do so, you really need to undertake a substantial passage of the kind that involves the complete package of sea conditions.



We keep volunteering for these jobs but mostly by the time boats like this are finished, the owners are all too keen to get them back to their own part of the world so they can start the “getting to know you” process as soon as possible.

Who can blame them? Ownership of a cat like this is usually the result of a lifetime's very hard work, and there is an enormous degree of personal satisfaction to be enjoyed with family and friends not to mention a great deal of potential as far as long range cruising and fishing is concerned.

At the end of the day, that's what boats like this are all about and we're very lucky in Australia to have some of the world's leading exponents in the art of building high performance, long range fishing and working power catamarans.

As far as I'm aware, this is now the biggest production fibreglass cat in Australia and I suspect, by default, in the world.

The dimensions are awesome. Overall it measures 13.06m from





the bowsprit to the tuck, with a massive 4.50m wide beam. To put this in perspective, this model walkaround cat actually shares the cabin tooling with the 3900 and 4100 models – but this boat is so wide, this cabin tooling literally sits amidships in this boat and leaves enough room for a walkaround up each side of the boat!

Having a trench up each side of the boat psychologically as much as physically tends to make the boat feel simply enormous – and sitting astride the super comfortable ex Porsche racing car helmsman's chair on the flybridge gives one the distinct impression of being atop the bridgedeck of a very large aircraft carrier. It's all truly amazing stuff and does take a little getting used to.

But you can never have too much space, and if you're a mad fisherman who loves to take family and friends out to the Reef for a few days fishing and cruising, it's very hard to think of a more suitable boat than this 4400 Noosacat.

**Design** As noted, it's one of the biggest walkarounds in the world, comprising a vast flat deck of gigantic proportions on to which is dropped a complicated but quite elegant cabin moulding, and to that the subsequent mouldings are added for the targa and the flybridge.

Although the cat seems to be half a football field across, it's actually quite slim in elevation or along the sides and very elegantly proportioned. So much so that in many of the photographs and when the boat is merely cruising along in the water, the trench along each side is virtually invisible and it just looks like a very elegant powered catamaran. Because the boat is so wide, the space in the cabin is in no way compromised – it too is still very large and extremely comfortable. There's no way on this earth it needs to be wider, although in future models the factory has decided they're going to move the forward cabins under the foredeck right out to each side, shortening the walkaround just a smidgeon (I'm sure you'll not notice!) but giving them the space for no less than three double cabins across the boat. But as we tested it here, the boat had the layout for two cabins



although in fact the owner quite sensibly had opted to make just one ginormous berth right across the full width of the available cabin space. This is a man who's obviously spent a lot of time in the tropics because the last thing you want when it's all hot and muggy is to be confined and in close quarters regardless of any romantic inclinations on the part of the crew.

Here, by keeping the centre bulkhead out of the forward cabin, the owner and his family have maximised the airflow at the minimal disadvantage of some privacy.

Noosacat chief Wayne Hennig explained that the division of cabins really didn't affect the structural integrity of the boat in any way, nor did it impact at all on the costings – as most of this area is formed by the cabin and hull mouldings in any event.

To sum up – there's a bit of choice here, this big area can be divided up into one or two cabins with the walkaround running right through to the bows or up to three cabins across the boat if you're prepared to forgo about 4 or 5 feet of the

walkaround's trench.

As a sidebar to this debate, I would like to observe that one of the strangest experiences I've ever had in boating was to stand in the bows of this boat whilst it was cruising through the ocean at some 25 knots. With the waist height trench keeping me safely in the boat and plenty of things to hang on to, it was both exhilarating and exciting – and I can see all the members of the family thinking this was absolutely marvellous as it quite simply redefines the whole principle of "bow-rider". *And boy, is this some sort of bow rider!*

**The Rear Cockpit** Back in the stern of the boat, the test rig was set-up nicely with a very good stainless steel awning extending the back roof of the cabin out some 2.5m and providing vital shade over an important part of the cockpit ie, against the cabin bulkhead.

It was also set nicely not to interfere with fishing rod activity and it didn't take a lot of imagination to work out how RIBs would be stowed against the transom or for that matter

brought onboard. As this boat was set-up (see pic) it had a Davco hoist and electric which set-up to haul the owner's PWC aboard through the double doors Noosacat had installed on the transom. What a set-up! I'm not too sure about the PWC but this would be one hell of a set-up to bring onboard a dory or decent small fishing boat for the creeks and rivers too.

The cockpit measured no less than 4.23m long by 3.76m wide between the coamings (!! ) so there is plenty of space for just about any activity you'd care to think off. Or to put in another way - how hard would it be to stow a 4.55 Quintrex Hornet Wildfisher fore and aft, ready to deploy it some very fishy, remote little creek 'up north' ?

Being sterndrive powered the hatches for the engines are right down in the two back corners, with two more big hatches opening to storage lockers which in this case featured a gen-set on the port side with stowage on the starboard side. There's masses of storage space for all sorts of gear, and if you needed to put away 3 or 4 scuba bottles and weights etc it would be easy to build

its own dedicated locker into the floor. There's that much space.

**Cabin** Inside the cabin, the layout follows the now familiar design of the Noosacat 3900, 4100 and now 4400 with the singular exception that this is the extended cabin version and is thus bigger than all of them.

It's a terrific layout too.

To port there is a very long and comfortable dinette beautifully finished in soft leather with a KAB suspension chair for the passenger as well as one for the skipper. These chairs are brought in from the trucking industry and have been installed in dozens of Noosacats over the years, and have provided sterling service. Occasionally they've needed the shock absorbers replaced but overall they've provided excellent service and of course, they're easily the most comfortable chair you could install in any powerboat let alone a soft riding cat like this.

Down the starboard side is a very long galley, it's nearly 2.5m long so once again there's plenty of

cupboard space although Ruth Cunningham pointed out that many of the cupboards are deceptive in that they often contained pumps or switch gear that reduced the effective storage area that seems to be available. Nevertheless, she agreed there's more than enough galley storage space to take the crew away for a week or two without anyone losing too much weight in the process. Because the boat was powered with its own 240 volt genset, it used the BLA isofoam vertical stand-up stainless steel freezer and refrigerator unit, as well as microwave and electric galley.

Of particular note was the new toilet and shower room to port behind the big dinette.

This is an excellent design feature – it's located right next to the entrance to the cabin so the crew from the outside can rush into the loo without dripping salt and/or worse through the cabin in the process. Nor do you have to jump down into a hole midway along the boat with all its difficulties of getting in and out as

we've had to do so often in the past in powered cats.

This is just a regular stand-up loo and shower on the back deck with the door facing inboard or outboard as you wish. It's first class design and very good tooling.

**Helm Stations** Being a flybridge cruiser the owner opted to retain two stations although as Hennig points out, it's optional to have just one either up or down. Indeed, from that point of view this boat is also available as a non flybridge cruiser with just the wheelhouse configuration – many of these have been sold to people who prefer not to clamber up and down the stairs all day. As we've noted in these pages before the writer is fast becoming one of these converts, although recent months spent picking our way through the Barrier Reef have provided ample evidence of the value of a flybridge as far as better vision for navigation is concerned. Obviously, the flybridge option wins that debate *hands down* – although even in this magnificent vessel, I felt the seating arrangement in the flybridge was fairly ordinary, with all of the emphasis on the magnificent chair provided for the skipper.

However, this is the layout the owner wanted, and from Wayne Hennig's viewpoint, that's all that matters. Normally though, the centre helmsman's chair would be flanked by two full length side lounges.

The owner had opted to make the lower station the all weather, "serious" station, with repeater instrumentation on the bridge emanating from the base units on the lower station.

The rig was fitted with the very latest Furuno "Navnet" system of electronics, which means that different monitors can be positioned in different parts of the boat whilst a whole host of functions can be plugged into the central computer system. These range from video cameras in the engine room to high tech depth sounders, radars – all in a single integrated package from the one manufacturer. A fabulous set-up and one we could have spent another couple of hours quite happily playing with, but the worst part about testing boats at Noosa is that you're always very conscious of the amount



**This is impressive - the latest 285 hp Volvo Duo Prop sterndrives, pushing nearly 9 tonnes of 4400 NoosaCat to 30 knot performance, and very laid-back cruise around 24-25 knots. Installation standard is superb.**





*The NoosaCat standard of finish these days is becoming very impressive - not only in the "spoofiness" of the finishing materials, but in the attention to detail experienced boatowners really appreciate.*

of water that's available to cross the Noosa Bar and as we'd already 'tippy-toed' our way out between the breaks, there was not a lot of enthusiasm for staying out for more than was absolutely necessary.

Given the importance and popularity of Noosa Heads as a boating and fishing centre, the state of the bar and the Noosa River never ceases to appal – that boatowners are expected to deal with these shoal waters on a daily basis is disgraceful and something the Queensland government should have done something about years ago.

**Performance** Powered by twin KAD 300 Volvo turbo charged diesels driving through Duo-Prop sterndrives running C-2 four bladed propellers, this was a seriously impressive package.

Hennig estimated the weight of the light-ship trim at some 8.9 tonnes, so this performance was exceptional in the writer's opinion, with engines that in most monohulls of this size would be considered way under par. If you check Riviera specifications, boats of this length usually have twin 400-550hp diesels in them, so to achieve this boat's 30 knot performance with a pair of "small" 3.6L Volvo 285hp diesels is outstanding.

Better still, we're not talking about wooden, *dragging your arse* type performance here, either. The boat jumped out of the water on plane almost in its own length, and had plenty of performance in the mid 20's cruising range, before topping out for a superb 30 knot average. Even allowing for all the owner's gear to go onboard and so on, plus full fuel, I'd be very surprised if this boat dropped down to much less than 28-29 knots in full cruising trim complete with PWC's etc.

This of course brings up this age-old debate about the effectiveness of sterndrives in the first place, and Duoprops secondly. I don't think there's any doubt anywhere in the world that the Duoprop is the most efficient sterndrive in the recreational market, with the twin rotating propellers achieving a significant benefit in terms of their ability to accelerate and sustain a higher cruising speed for less horsepower.

As well, there's a whole bunch of other benefits including much greater directional stability (remember, this propeller system was originally pioneered for use on torpedoes for the various navies around the world) and as a result of all of these wide recognised mechanical advantages, I don't think there is any doubt that the

sterndrive is worth as much as 3 or 4 knots in outright performance compared to say conventional shafts or worse still, V-drives.

The central, unassailable advantage of the sterndrive power unit is that the thrust is essentially horizontal whereas shafts must, by definition, have a down angle of anywhere between 3 and 8 degrees usually, and sometimes more. Because this (then) pushes the bow up and the stern down, most shaft drive installations lose quite a bit of their effective thrust - estimated at between 10-15% (according to the 'experts' who claim to know about these matters) as well as the advantage of the sterndrives offering "steering propellers" compared to a fixed shaft/prop/rudder combo.

Not so with a sterndrive. Not only is the main thrust of the propellers virtually horizontal, it has the consummate advantage of being trimmable, so the propellers can actually be lifted up and out towards the surface of the water where they can operate even more efficiently, thus resulting in a level of performance that usually enables a well equipped sterndrive rig to run circles (literally) around its shaft drive counterpart.

Knowing that many readers have a



*Above: Struth - the rear cockpit is big enough to take a decent size Quinnie, or hire out as tennis court - and don't you love the double doors ? That's how the owner brings his PWC onboard . . . . Below: Ruth was heading off to Cooktown before we wrestled the wheel off her - and sent 'er back down below ! Hey, check the super trick helmman's chair - it's straight out of Wayne Hennig's racing Porsche !*



fairly dim view of sterndrives of any kind, I quizzed Hennig at some length about the other age old debate ie, do sterndrives deteriorate over the years, and are boatowners better off in deepwater situations with shaft drives ie, for boats kept in moorings or open marina berths?

Hennig is emphatic on this point. He cites a number of examples of boats that have now done thousands and thousands of hours of use, all with the original Volvo equipment.

For readers interested, it's worth pursuing him to enquire about a spanner crab boat that actually operates out of Noosa Heads – because it has to work on that ridiculously shallow bar every day, it has to be a sterndrive – but this particular boat has now been in action for some 7 or 8 years, and in that time, has clocked up thousands of hours – with the Volvo Duoprop working flawlessly throughout this whole period. But Hennig has a drawer full of experiences like this and I must confess; it is a very persuasive argument.

I suspect that Hennig has probably installed more Volvo Duoprops than anybody else in Australia, and there's no way he'd keep installing them if they were proving to be troublesome in any way at all.

It's something to think about, isn't it? And for those readers who are just as emphatically opposed (still) to sterndrives, he point out with a grin.

"Look, at the end of the day I don't really mind what the customer wants, as long as we have the opportunity of doing it properly, using the best materials and making sure it all works. If they want shaft drives or V-drives, jets or sterndrives, it really doesn't matter. At the end of the day all we're concerned about is getting it perfect for each customer and just as sure as we have 10 customers, we'll have 10 different sets of requirements to deal with."

**Handling And Ride** Impressive. Huge. Soft. A bit wet I suspect. But who cares?

The Noosacat 4400 is a seriously big boat that can deal with just about anything at all. Hennig's already brought it back from the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show in 50 knot seas and whilst it was downhill all the way from Mooloolaba, he described the

ride as being hands off the wheel and completely relaxed all the way home.

Having used the boat, albeit briefly I could get a sense of that too. Even in the flat conditions we had on the day, you could feel and sense the way the boat was lifting and rising to the underlying swell pattern, with that beautiful "bring it on" feel that gives the skipper confidence no matter which way he's pointing. Three quarter behind, three quarter forward – even dead head on into the sea, the boat handles superbly.

I'd like to see it in your typical Qld or WA 30 knot sou-easterlies, but I suspect that by bearing off from true head-on by as little as 5 degrees the boat would be magnificent. It certainly gave every indication of it and Hennig and the owner of Boat #1 are both really confident that the boat has virtually no vices.

**Conclusion** As we go into this new century with a surprising number of "baby boomers" with the wherewithal to purchase craft of this calibre for purely recreational use, this is an exceptional vessel. It's in a different world to the Riviera or Mustang set, in so many ways it's almost embarrassing. The Noosacat 4400 is designed for long range cruising and fishing by either recreational or commercial operators – and it has the strength, the handling, the performance to do it superbly.

This is a boat easily capable of running from Sydney or Pittwater through to Port Stephens, on to Coffs Harbour, the Gold Coast, Mooloolaba, Bundaberg, Mackay and then Hamilton Island in one of the great cruising holidays available in the world.

### Basic Specifications

Length Overall	13.06m
Moulded Length	11.99m
Waterline length	10.90m
Beam Overall	4.50m
Draft (hull only)	0.52
Weight as tested	8.9t
Power	2 x KAD300 DP
	<b>Volvo DuoProp Diesels</b>
Price (as tested)	approx \$495,000



**In terms of rough water capability, the Nooscat 4100/4400 IS the benchmark by which all others are judged.**



It's a boat that will deliver its owners and crew along the various legs with so much ease and comfort it will be disarming. Rough seas won't bother it, only the lack of available time to stay and fully enjoy all the wonderful waterways, headlands and vistas to be seen along the NSW and Qld coast.

This is an exceptional craft demanding exceptional owners who will enjoy it to the full.

*I wish . . .*

**F&B**