

Smuggler Strata 750

BIG CENTRE CONSOLE RIBS ARE NOT FOR EVERYONE, BUT IF YOU ARE IN THE MARKET FOR ONE THEN BARRY THOMPSON RECKONS YOU'D BE HARD PRESSED TO FIND ANYTHING BETTER THAN THE SMUGGLER STRATA 750.



Slippery
when Wet



The Smuggler Strata 750 isn't a totally new design and was originally a joint venture between Smuggler Marine and Southern Pacific Inflatables. In fact, the first boat was built seven years ago and sold under the Southern Pacific brand name and while still offered by Southern Pacific as the Vortex 750, the model is now fully owned by Smuggler Marine and known as the Strata 750. The one we tested was boat #17 and whilst it has undergone a lot of upgrades since boat #1, the basic design and concept has changed very little. Southern Pacific still supplies and fits the tubes to the hulls built by Smuggler Marine in its factory in Henderson, Auckland.

Special Features

Being a centre console, the layout is very open plan, with the idea of using as much space as possible. The internal dimensions of the boat, 1.56m x 5.60m, mean you have a lot of area to use, be it for cruising, fishing, family boating or diving. One of the special features of the Strata 750 is the through-bow anchor system, which is operated from the helm. Thanks to a snug fit of the anchor flukes against the hull, no water ingresses inside. It's very neat and tidy, with a deep anchor locker in the forepeak taking care of the warp and chain. The bow section layout has V-shaped seating, which is similar to that used on the smaller Strata superyacht tenders, with dry storage beneath. There is also a large wet locker in the cockpit sole, which has a built-in pump that drains into the flooding keel. An optional full cushion in the bow can turn this into a great sunpad. Ahead of the centre console is a large chilly/

LEFT: IF YOU ARE IN THE MARKET FOR A BIG CENTRE CONSOLE RIB THEN THE STRATA 750 IS WELL WORTH CONSIDERING.

ABOVE AND BELOW: THE CENTRE CONSOLE LAYOUT MEANS YOU HAVE A HUGE WORKING DECK AREA.





TOP: THE TRANSOM AREA HAS A LIVE BAIT TANK TO PORT BUILT IN STORAGE AREAS.

BELOW: A GREAT ENTERTAINING AREA.

esky bin with double seating on top, which really turns this forward space into a very social area. It's a great place to sit when underway, with most of the wind and spray dispelled by the high, bullish bow.

Centre console boats by their very nature don't afford the same protection as a full-screen cabin boat, but then being a little windblown is a small price to pay for the other benefits that this sort of boating offers. Wide walk-around spaces either side give easy access fore and aft and the 38mm diameter stainless steel bimini top frame provides excellent handholds. Simply for longevity, Smuggler has opted to fit a full fibreglass and foam hardtop rather than a canvas package. The top half can be unbolted should you need to remove it for long-term storage. The fibreglass console sports a sturdy acrylic forward screen and of course the fibreglass bimini keeps you protected from harsh UV rays. The centre console has a split-level dash with carbon fibre panels. These look after all the necessary

instruments, controls and up to a 12" multi-purpose screen. Our test boat had a 7" Lowrance, Cobra VHF, Fusion stereo and twin iCommand ETEC gauges.

Inside the console, there's a fully plumbed toilet and a large area for dry storage. Privacy is provided with a zipped vinyl curtain and a couple of overhead opaque port lights let in ample light. It's surprising just how much space there is when you get inside the console.

The helm seat is a new design from Smuggler and includes a built-in dive bottle rack that can handle up to six bottles, plus seating for two that has a reversible backrest that also includes six rod holders.

A number of alternative seating options are available.

As a boat that will be certainly used for fishing, Smuggler has not forgotten the fisherman's needs. The Strata 750 has a live bait tank built-in under the port aft seat, a custom-made central bait station and a large under-sole wet locker which doubles as a fish bin. Divers, swimmers and skiers will like the three-tier drop-down ladder to port, for getting back aboard, and teak treads on the aft deck area. The carpet is removable with a non-skid deck liner underneath, or there is an option for Tek Dek flexible decking.

Slippery When Wet

The basis of the Strata 750 is the incredible Smuggler hull, which with its staggering 27° deep V, in my opinion is undeniably the best riding production boat of its size on the market. The original Smuggler hull mould was 'flopped' off a Bertram 20 hull by David Mutimer in Dunedin in the early 1970s. The hull had come from Melbourne, where it was then being produced under licence from Bertram in the USA. The Bertram 20 was designed in Miami and production commenced in 1964 – yes that's right – 47 years ago! Keith Smith, a boat and outboard retailer in Takapuna at the time, purchased the Smuggler 6.3 moulds from Mutimer, who had come up with the "Smuggler 6.3" brand name, but didn't have the necessary capital to take a decent market share. After the Muldoon '20% boat & caravan tax' was imposed in the late 1970s, devastating the NZ pleasure boat industry, Keith Smith made a fresh set of moulds and took them



to Queensland's Gold Coast, where he again set up shop making the Smuggler 6.3. He left the old moulds in NZ, and since then they have changed hands several times, with varying success. However, only when they were purchased in 2002 by husband and wife team David and Pauline Pringle, the present owners, did they get the attention to detail, in both manufacturing and marketing, that they deserved. David Pringle is a true craftsman boatbuilder, having served a traditional apprenticeship, and he is also highly skilled in composite technology. The Pringles have done a magnificent job, producing new moulds incorporating modern features, especially in the transom and deck areas, but, recognising the incredible performance of the original hull form, have left it virtually untouched, apart from an extension to the transom in 2004. This not only increased the length of the running surface by 400mm but also added built-in trim tabs and a portofino stern.

The Strata 750 hull is the same as used for the Smuggler Stealth 720, but without all the extra fibreglass it is 25% lighter and accordingly somewhat faster with the same horsepower. Our test boat was powered with an Evinrude ETEC 200HO, spinning a 21" Viper three-blade stainless prop to 5500 rpm. Top speed was 53.5 mph.

Outboard power options vary from 150hp to 300hp and with it the top end speed. A 150hp is good for 44mph and a 250hp is reputed to push the Strata 750 at 69mph!

You would think that being such a deep V, it would be a hard boat to get onto the plane quickly. Not so. In fact this would have to be one of the 'slipperiest' boats I have come across. Even with a slow easing forward of the throttle at low rpm, the Strata 750 glides onto the plane at a low 2000 rpm, without any noticeable transition between being off the plane and planing, made possible by the light weight. Also, the tubes obviously help by providing additional lift. The layup of the hull has been engineered by High Modulus, and is both stronger and thicker than the Stealth 695 and 720 hulls, conforming to CPC, CE and MSA standards to give it extra weight, strength and rigidity.

The benefit of the flooding keel to the boat's stability is obvious on the Smuggler Stealth 720, but it's hardly needed on its RIB counterpart. The 600mm wide tubes have been fitted relatively low and at rest they provide the necessary stability factor from the 2.8m beam. Three, four or five people on one side makes very little difference. The boat is able to carry 12 comfortably. Underway, the tubes are clear of the water apart from the trailing edge around the transom and provide an extra wide

shield against water spray. On our run on Auckland Harbour we never took a drop of water aboard, despite a strong wind and slight sea. The boat sits comfortably on top of whatever you throw at it and if you have to toss it into a hard turn it responds instantly. The Strata 750 is an extremely easy and safe boat to drive.

I would describe the ride as 'cruisey smooth' with a touch of bravado. It's a boat that is so easy to drive that you feel like you want to push it harder than you need to. If high speed isn't your thing then the Strata 750 runs nicely around 3500-4000 rpm @ around 35 mph. The economy is also very good at 35-40L/h, which given the 320-litre fuel tank gives the Strata 750 a range of around 300NM.

TOP: AT 27 DEG, THEY DON'T GET MUCH DEEPER VEE THAN THIS.



LEFT: DAVE PRINGLE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE STRATA 750.



TOP LEFT:
THE THROUGH
HULL ANCHORING
IS A NEAT
FEATURE.



TOP RIGHT:
THE CENTRE
CONSOLE HIDES
THE HEAD.



RIGHT:
A SPLIT LEVEL
DSH HANDLES ALL
THE NECESSARY
INSTRUMENTS
AND CONTROLS.

Quality First

Only the highest quality French 'Orca' Fabric, heaviest duty by Pennel and Flipo is used in manufacturing. The 600mm diameter UV-resistant Hypalon-coated fabric tubes are adhesively bonded to the fibreglass hull. A standard Smuggler hull was cut off above the chine and a flange added to accept the tubes, before a new hull mould for the RIB version was made. This flange tapers from 60mm overhang aft to 400mm forward, with the tubes at the rear sitting on the water at rest. There are five air chambers in each tube, plus a couple in the hull for added buoyancy.

If you are in the market for a big centre console RIB then the Strata 750 is well worth considering. The abilities of both Smuggler Marine with its fibreglass construction of the hull and all mouldings, coupled with Southern Pacific's tube work, have resulted in an exceptional boat. The quality is first class in every respect. It's easy to see why Smuggler Marine has also done so well building superyacht tenders, a market where the highest standards of finish are paramount. The Strata 750 is currently available in centre console mode only, although there is a cabin version in the pipeline, to be based on the larger 8.5m and 11m hulls.

PFB

Smuggler Strata 750

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Make: | Smuggler Strata 750 |
| Price As Tested: | \$NZ119000 |
| Packages from: | \$NZ86000 |
| Designer: | Smuggler Marine |
| Material: | GRP hull/Hypalon tubes |
| Type: | RIB |
| LOA: | 7.50m |
| Beam: | 2.80m |
| Deadrise: | 27 degrees |
| Hull Config: | Deep V |
| Trailerable Weight: | 1600kg (dry) |
| Height on Trailer: | 2.80m |
| Engine Capacity: | 150-300hp |
| Power Options: | Outboard or sterndrive |
| Fuel Capacity: | 320 litres |

PERFORMANCE

| | | |
|----------|----------|-------------|
| Revs | Speed | Litres/hour |
| 600 rpm | 2.0 mph | 1.3 L/h |
| 1000 rpm | 4.5 mph | 3.5 L/h |
| 1500 rpm | 6.5 mph | 7.1 L/h |
| 2000 rpm | 10.0 mph | 15.5 L/h |
| 2500 rpm | 17.0 mph | 22.5 L/h |
| 3000 rpm | 23.5 mph | 32.0 L/h |
| 3500 rpm | 30.0 mph | 36.7 L/h |
| 4000 rpm | 36.5 mph | 41.5 L/h |
| 4500 rpm | 44.0 mph | 50.0 L/h |
| 5000 rpm | 49.5 mph | 61.4 L/h |
| 5500 rpm | 53.5 mph | 75.2 L/h |

Notable Standard Equipment

5-year structural hull warranty, Hypalon tubes, 320-litre fuel tank, trim tabs

Notable Options on Test Boats

Built in chilly/esky bin, saltwater wash down, live bait tank, hardtop with S/S supports, Lowrance 7" HDC plotter/sounder, fire extinguisher, remote through bow anchor winch, iPod stereo, radio, forward lounge seating, electric toilet in console.

Engine

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Make: | Evinrude |
| Model: | ETEC 200 HO |
| Type: | Direct Injected two-stroke |
| Horsepower: | 200hp |
| Cyl. Config.: | V6 |
| Max rpm: | 5500 |
| Propeller: | 21" Viper |
| Retail Price: | \$NZ31500 |

Trailer

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Make: | DMW |
| Axles: | Tandem |
| Suspension: | Leaf springs |
| Braked: | Yes |

Manufacturer:

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