

Boat Review: **Southern XP746 Generation II**



# Handsome **BRUTE**

Rugged, good-looking and well-mannered, the new *Southern XP746* was everything **John Eichelsheim** expected and more.

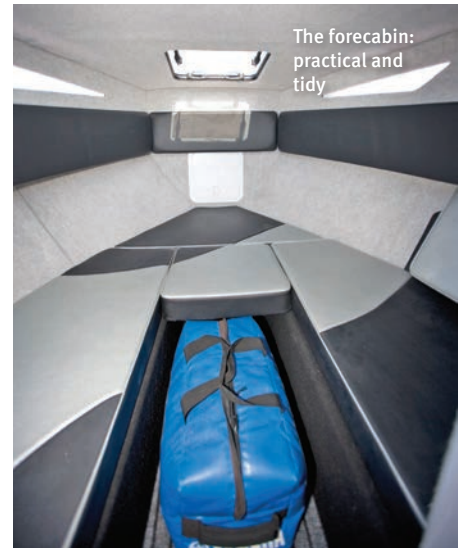
**BOATING**  
NEW ZEALAND



The fibreglass hardtop incorporates stylish curved side windows



To port, the King and Queen seat base hides a gas hob, LPG bottle and additional stowage



The forecabin: practical and tidy

The latest release from Mosgiel's Southern Boats is a stunner. Previously branded as SouthernSportz, Southern Boats recently acquired another South Island manufacturer of high quality aluminium trailer boats in Lazercraft.

With the acquisition came a name change to Team Southern Lazer and a new factory, with room to expand. The company continue to build boats under the Southern and Lazercraft brands, but benefit from economies of scale.

Whatever the company name, it still builds superbly-finished boats, as the latest model – the Southern XP746 Generation II – attests. SouthernSportz boats earned a reputation for being well made and nicely finished, and they were recognised as excellent rough water boats. With the Southern XP746, the company has also managed to add 'handsome' to the new boat's list of desirable attributes.

Starting with a blank sheet, the team at Southern Lazer set out to build a good-looking, extremely capable bluewater trailerboat that would draw on the legacies of both

brands. They have labelled the new design 'Generation II'.

While the boat is unmistakably a Southern, with its generous freeboard, fine entry and soft-riding, deep-vee hull, it draws on Lazercraft's experience with fibreglass hardtops. The XP746's strong but lightweight glass hardtop and decks are a first for a Southern boat.

## Second generation

When we spied the Generation II Southern busting through big seas at the mouth of Tauranga Harbour, we didn't at first call it for what it was. The new superstructure, with its raked screen, distinctive eyebrow and curved side windows, is sufficiently different from Southern's previous aluminium hardtops to give the new boat a totally different look, despite the hull's family resemblance.

The hull is a development of a Southern 755 hull, shortened slightly and given a makeover, including a modified entry and tweaked chines. It shares many Southern/Lazercraft family traits: high sides, a fine entry, deep-vee hull for rough water ability, and wide

chine flats for a dry ride and stability at rest. Heavy-duty, tubular aluminium belting is another feature, while substantial, extra-long, custom-made trim tabs were fitted to Lectra-tab, auto-retract rams after the first set of tabs proved too flimsy for the task.

## Bluewater beauty

First impressions count. Already wowed by the 746's sleek, purposeful lines, the positive vibes continued when we boarded the boat at sea, stepping into a deep cockpit with high, wide coamings, removable marine carpet and a quality finish that wouldn't disgrace a fibreglass boat.

High sides translate into plenty of freeboard, making the big Southern a real contender for bluewater fishing and cruising. There's a feeling of security inside the cockpit, which children and their parents will appreciate.

A feature of the cockpit is a pair of full-length, lockable side lockers under the padded coamings. They look smart and allow secure rod storage, even when the boat is on the trailer. A second-tier of painted side shelves is left



Lockable side lockers and a built-in tackle box are just a couple of the cockpit's useful features

open. Four aluminium rod holders, stainless steel cleats in the aft corners, and heavy-duty non-slip strips on the coamings and side decks are standard features.

The portafino-style transom layout is well conceived and highly practical. There's a T-shaped dive/boarding ladder and pullout transom door on the port side, with grab-rails either side of the swim-step. A central transom island houses well-protected batteries (two) on the bottom shelf, with hoses, pumps and an integrated tackle box in two separate lockers above it. A plumbed livebait tank is built into the starboard swimstep.

A South Island-sized baitboard with outboard drains sits atop the transom lockers and an interchangeable ski-pole is standard equipment.

## Fish-ability

The pair of aluminium fish bins is also man-sized. Raised off the floor on short legs, they fit neatly into the transom corners either side of the transom locker, secured by special hooks/brackets. They function as seats, their

padded tops proving quite comfortable.

These bins can be shifted anywhere in the cockpit – very handy – but are designed to hook over the side pockets so they don't move around. Once removed, they reveal still more under-transom stowage extending into the portofino space, as well as the boat's fuel filter and livebait tank/washdown valves.

The cockpit drains water into a sump aft, where a 1000gph bilge pump takes care of it, and there are 245 litres of fuel in the big tank under the floor, ensuring a useful range.

There's no doubt that the Southern 746's cockpit is a fishing-friendly space, but it's also very well finished, fully lined, and painted to the highest standard. Black vinyl with silver trim upholstery has been used to good effect, while black and grey Frontrunner provides a pleasingly striking effect.

The Southern XP746 is not lacking in creature comforts either. Stepped King and Queen seat bases each support a pair of smart-looking upholstered bucket seats, with the helm seat fully adjustable.

Southern has made good use of the

available space in the seat bases, fitting a two-burner cooker under the port-side front bucket seat, which hinges forward, and the gas bottle underneath. This still leaves plenty of stowage for other gear. On the starboard side the space is unassigned. Up forward, the cabin boasts good-sized v-berths (with stowage under), deep side shelves and space for a toilet under the infill squab. The cabin and hardtop are insulated with foam rubber beneath the Frontrunner, helping to deaden noise. While the cabin is not lockable, the hardtop backdrops provide protection from the weather – and prying eyes.

A hatch in the collision bulkhead opens into the anchor locker and a large hatch in the foredeck allows access to the Maxwell automatic capstan, Sarca anchor and generous anchor locker. Aluminium bow rails are standard, as is non-slip on the foredeck, which can also be safely accessed via the boat's side decks. Handrails on the hardtop afford a secure grip.

Southern rate the 746 for outboards between 150 and 250hp; Tauranga Southern dealer Stuart Miller of Powerboat Services would have preferred to fit a 250hp engine to the test boat, but only had a 200hp available, so he was a little nervous despite Southern's assurances that it would go fine. He needn't have worried; performance with the 200hp four-stroke Yamaha is more than adequate, the tight, new engine propelling the boat to an indicated 43mph on the GPS at 5700rpm with four adults onboard.

More importantly, response and acceleration are good, the 17-inch Saltwater Series stainless steel prop offering plenty of bite. We had a big swell to contend with, which added a bit of excitement as we worked back and forth across the Tauranga Harbour entrance. In the troughs the horizon completely disappeared, and while none of the waves were breaking, it felt at times just like a *bona fide* bar crossing. The trick was to pick a swell, position the boat near its crest and ride it in.

## Underway

We enjoyed an hour or so of charging in and out of the harbour. The big Southern impressed with its soft ride; re-entry was always accompanied by a whoosh rather than a thump and the boat's attitude remained reassuringly horizontal on the odd occasion we launched it off a wave. There was just enough bias towards the tail to ensure we landed stern-first and Hi-Drive steering gave effortless control.

It's quiet, probably helped by foam rubber insulation under the Frontrunner and the marine carpet, and comfortable too. The helm position is good; sliding, tinted side windows offer plenty of ventilation and the adjustable seat provided excellent support. Footrest positioning will be tailored to suit the customer.



“...fit and finish are first rate and the boat is packed with clever features”

Forward vision through the tempered glass windscreen is good, while the moulded fibreglass dash looks the part. A couple of BEP switch panels were flush-mounted in the fascia, along with Yamaha multi-function digital instruments and Lectra-tab trim controls.

The boat was only partially equipped as, like most dealers, Miller prefers to finish the fit-out with input from his customers and will install electronics and any other extras to suit the buyer. There's provision for a VHF and stereo head unit in moulded overhead consoles in the hardtop ceiling, which are easy to rig thanks to the hardtop design, and room on the black, vinyl-covered, non-reflective dash below the screen for bracket-mounted electronics.

Carving turns was a lot of fun. Unlike some deep-vees, the big Southern doesn't heel excessively when the wheel is put hard over. Turns are crisp and precise and backing up provided no drama either; the boat's high transom should make shipping water over the stern unlikely.

Nor did we find much use for the trim tabs on the day. The swells were impressive, but there was little wind to contend with. However, given a 20° deadrise at the transom,

a trailerable beam and a fibreglass and glass superstructure, I'm sure there will be conditions when the tabs are welcomed.

### Boating's verdict

The new Southern XP746 is an impressive beast. It's possibly the best-looking Southern to date and it has the handling and ride to match its looks. The pearlescent PPG paint job is exceptional, courtesy of Exclusive Painters in Dunedin. It's oven-baked and comes with a serial number and a five-year warranty. Any PPG painter around the country can affect repairs under warranty.

Fit and finish are first rate and the boat is packed with clever features like locking side pockets and movable fish bin/seats, that boaties will use and appreciate.

The Southern XP746 comes across as a capable bluewater sportfisher/cruiser. The addition of a sink, or at least a freshwater supply, will turn it into a handy overnighter, while its all-up towing weight of 1640kg on its tandem-axle trailer should mean it's not a huge drama to tow either, especially since the trailer is braked on both axles.

Performance with a 200hp outboard is sharp; with a 250hp it might be exceptional. ■

## Southern XP746

### SPECIFICATIONS

|                    |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| model              | Southern XP746                    |
| designer           | Team Southern Lazer               |
| builder            | Team Southern Lazer               |
| construction       | aluminium, fibreglass<br>hard top |
| loa                | 7.5m                              |
| boa                | 2.5m                              |
| deadrise           | 20° at transom                    |
| alloy thickness    | 5mm, 4mm                          |
| horsepower range   | 150-250hp                         |
| engine options     | outboard                          |
| max speed          | 43mph (70kph)                     |
| fuel capacity      | 245 litres                        |
| length on trailer  | 9m approx                         |
| height on trailer  | 3.2m approx                       |
| trailerable weight | 1640kg (dry)                      |
| price as tested    | \$139,000                         |
| packages from      | \$129,000                         |

### ENGINE

|            |                                |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| make       | Yamaha                         |
| type       | four-stroke outboard           |
| horsepower | 200hp                          |
| cylinders  | V6                             |
| max rpm    | 5800rpm                        |
| propeller  | 17-inch Saltwater<br>Series SS |

### TRAILER

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| manufacturer | Team Southern Lazer                        |
| braked       | override on both<br>axles                  |
| suspension   | Trojan Duratorque                          |
| rollers      | multiple, fixed                            |
| features     | aluminium<br>construction,<br>LED lighting |

### PERFORMANCE

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 2500rpm  | 13mph (off plane) |
| 3000rpm  | 21mph             |
| 3500rpm  | 27mph             |
| 4000rpm  | 31mph             |
| 4500rpm  | 34mph             |
| 5000rpm  | 37mph             |
| 5500rpm  | 41mph             |
| 5700rpm (WOT)  | 43mph             |
| Indicated fuel burn at 4500rpm/34mph<br>(55kph) cruise: 0.9km/l. |                   |