



26 Sportfisher - Tested

By Steve Leptig

Cairns

Has anyone noticed the recent trend in offshore charter boats? — they're getting smaller. Boats right down to the 5m mark are now in survey and taking paying customers to the reef for a spot of bottom or game fishing. It's not surprising really ... with increasing costs across the board. The clued-up operator is looking for ways to reduce costs and increase profits.

Enter the new 26 Sportfisher made in Cairns by CJH Yachts!

It seems to be around this size that small boats start to become very serious fishing machines. For this reason many manufacturers have had a crack at getting it right, for example the Black Watch or Deep Vee 26, and the Caribbean 26 Flybridge are a couple that come to mind.

But while they're also great boats, I think the 26 Sportfisher has got something special to offer. Here's why.

My first glance came at the Cairns Marlin Marina where I was picked up to put the boat through a few of its paces. It was the official launch of hull No. 1 and the finish was dazzling — it was very obvious the boys had spent many hours polishing. A six inch deep appearance in the light blue gel coat looked great. Unfortunately, the boat was not completely finished despite a tremendous effort put in by the manufacturer leading up to the launch.

Made to fish

This boat was designed as a fishing machine, first and foremost. Its huge flared bow and a 19 degree dead rise gave an immediate indication that it would be a seaworthy and dry boat.

The twin 180Hp Yanmar diesels sprang to life (yes, I said twins) giving almost neck-snapping acceleration from a standing start. These latest-technology, common rail turbo diesels are a joy to drive. They are very quiet at any revs, with almost no vibration from either the engines or drive shafts. The boys had apparently spent many hours tuning them to perfection.

Scott Taunton demonstrated the vessel's superior manoeuvrability. With an experienced skipper at the

helm, the 26 footer backed down hard and (thanks to the Yanmar's wide shaft spacing) was able to turn and relocate with absolute ease. Indeed, it was easy to imagine that a marlin or sailfish would be mowed down and tagged in near record time with such an agile boat.

Twin built-in live bait tanks (although not yet plumed and finished) were located in the transom. The capacity of the underfloor twin kill tanks will handle the biggest catch, and can be used as extra eskies if required.

There is a great sense of freeboard while standing in the self-draining back deck. When combined with some great looking teak flooring (with excellent grip underfoot), you gain a real sense of security. Although there is extra effort and building costs to use this natural timber flooring, it should provide many years of service. Only a quick sanding is ever needed to restore it to new condition.

Additional rod storage would be needed if you fish anything like me (10 outfits on an average day), but obviously these items would come under a "custom fit-out" to the client's requirements.

Extra places please

One of the common complaints I've heard about small flybridge boats is that, with only one driving position upstairs, the skipper is often left on his own while everyone sits downstairs laughing, drinking, and having a good time. There'll be no such complaints with this boat. The 26 Sportfisher, being an express-style vessel, has two driving positions.

The lower helm is located on a raised bridge deck (all teak underfoot) where the skipper has a superior view.

Its large bench seat easily accommodates two people, and a reversible backrest means you have the option of facing the stern to watch the fishing action. The microfibre-type fabric used for the display boat is pleasing to the eye but would be hard to keep clean. A serious fisherman may need to replace the fabric with a more durable vinyl.

The upper helm station is at mid height — not too high; it's only a 26 footer after all. The half tower is



The 26 Sportfisher by CJH Yachts shows off its clean lines and big flared bow at the recent launch in Cairns.

constructed from tubular aluminium and, although stainless steel or anodised aluminium would have been more pleasing on the eye, it was very user friendly.

The main structure folds forward when towing or is needed for storage — a very handy feature. Repeated on the small, but usable, dash area is a full set of controls; easy to achieve with electronic "drive by wire" and "steer by wire" with no throttle cables or hydraulic hoses for the steering. A bimini is to be fitted at a later date.

As the upper station is a lean-type tower, a padded backrest would be a great addition. No electronics, other than a single Furuno chart plotter, were fitted at this stage.

Got a family?

Fear not, there's plenty of room for a family! Access to the cabin is via the starboard side of the boat, next to the bench seat. The cabin is not lockable but, if required, I'm sure a door could be easily fitted. A V-berth

takes up much of the room up front, with plenty of under-bunk storage.

To the port are a fully enclosed head with an electric loo (top stuff) and a small kitchen with a single-burner stove and electric fridge providing a great meal preparation area.

There's plenty of room for those wanting to recline or just spend some time out of the sun. And a couple of people could comfortably sleep overnight with no worries.

Power to burn

Scott pointed the bow towards the horizon as we punched our way out through the Trinity Inlet marker leads. Although we didn't have sufficient time to take the boat out into rough bluewater seas, we did experience a typical 20 knot day with the short and sharp Inlet chop we all hate.

With the Yanmars ticking over at 3,300rpm and 28 knots registering on the GPS (hardly a slow cruising speed), the Sportfisher ran nice and level. No hard thumps were felt and that big flared bow kept the spray well away from the clears — all this for just 22 litres of diesel per hour each side.

Behind the helm I dared not push the fresh engines too hard, but I would anticipate a performance around 30 knots plus. The throttle levers were super sensitive — the slightest touch added extra rpm's. A RPM sync button was a handy addition, ensuring both motors are simultaneously doing the same work.

No trim tabs were fitted at the time of testing. They may be added at a later date should the boat not stay on an even keel in strong cross winds. The boat carried 450 litres of diesel in two separate tanks. This should translate to around a 265 nautical mile range at 26 knots.

Tyrannosaurus on a trailer

Although the rig hasn't been put over the weighbridge as yet, the CJH team is confident they can keep the total weight under 3.5 tonnes. That's great news and means it can be towed being your average large 4WD (Landcruiser or similar with 3.5 tonne rated towbar).

The 3m beam does however mean you will need a towing permit, requiring two side clearance flags.

It's a big rig on a trailer; one that I'd personally be trying to avoid in 9am rush-hour traffic. However, not having to pay berthing/marina fees is a saving of thousands of dollars a year, not to mention additional anti-fouling and dry costs.

Summary

What didn't I like about the 26 Sportfisher? Not much really. Although initially more expensive, the twin electronic diesels are the only way to go. The boat configuration is first class and I'm sure CJH Yachts will be building quite a few more of these vessels in the future.

Oh, there is something I would like to ask the boys to change — the look on my wife's face when I asked for 300K to buy a new boat!



The back deck is well laid out and very fishable. Note the twin live bait tanks in the transom, and the underfloor kill pens.



A spacious V berth cabin sleeps two people comfortably.