

THE Best ingredients



CJH Yachts have blended the very desirable ingredients of shaft drives, fuel efficiency and trailering capability, along with a bunch of other ideas, into an exciting, agile and comfortable 26-foot gameboat. As Rick Huckstepp discovered, this innovative rig really opens up your gamefishing options.

AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHY: **RICK HUCKSTEPP**

“This boat has the credentials to go the distance in some serious offshore seas with comfort.”

There are some really head-turning boats on our waters, many of them in the ‘dream boat’ class, with a price tag to suit. But one very smart-looking boat that caught my eye recently is the 26 Sportsfisher from CJH Yachts. This exciting bluewater platform offers lots of advantages and is much more reasonably priced. Amazingly, although it’s a twin-screw shaft-drive, this offshore gameboat was being launched at a boat ramp in Cairns.

Cairns-based Chris Headley, proprietor of CJH Yachts, has spent the past decade modifying and repairing the town’s splendid array of gameboats. All that time he has been picking the brains of some of the world’s most accomplished skippers to come up with a formula for something special.

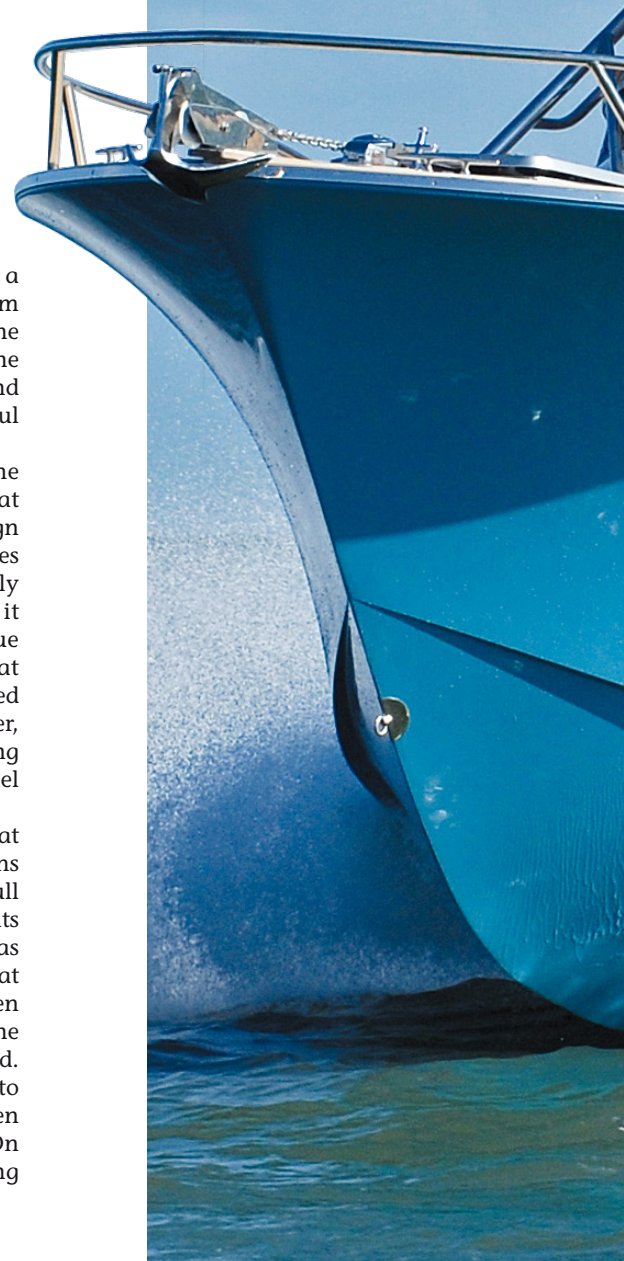
A SPECIAL RECIPE

The recipe had to include some crucial ingredients. It had to be trailerable, fuel-efficient and – last, but by no means least – it had to have shaft drives. That’s a pretty big call in anybody’s books, as Chris discovered when he tried to find a naval architect that would take the project on. Convincing them that

this was a feasible project was a task in itself, but Peter Hogbin from Aurora Marine at Coomera on the Queensland Gold Coast liked the concept. He took Chris’s ideas and refined them to produce a beautiful end product.

The Sportsfisher’s beam at the aft waterline is wider than that at the coamings. This is a design seen on many boats in the fifties and sixties and is generally called ‘tumblehome’. While it gives the Sportsfisher a unique appearance, the extra beam at the waterline provides improved stability when dead in the water, not to mention increased planing area, which should improve fuel economy somewhat.

The weather conditions were flat during our boat test on the Cairns Inlet, but when pushing this hull hard astern, no water found its way up the aft quarters. There was no sign of those sloppy waves that drench angler and deckies when backing down on a fish with the boat stern pushed port or starboard. Water was pushed outwards due to the hull sloping inwards between the chines and the gunwales. On the drift, stability when moving around the cockpit was excellent.



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AGILITY BACKING-UP

The agility of the 26 Sportsfisher when going astern is surprising to say the least. Push and pull the throttles with aggression and your crew will need to hang on! Response is rapid and the hull turns quickly.

Going forward was another matter. At the helm, it appeared that there was not enough rudder travel to give the hull positive direction when manoeuvring in tight turns while on the plane. This comes back to rudder adjustment, but there remains three degrees available in the mechanical setting that will shortly be implemented.

A VERY DRY RIDE

The substantial flare of the Carolina-style bow, coupled with a deep leading forefoot on the keel line, provides a very dry ride. While the sea was flat on the day, the constant movement of shipping to and from port provided plenty of test bumps to prove a point. There was no banging experienced when heading across ship wakes of a metre, and definitely no spray finding its way up to the reverse-angle wind-deflector mounted in front of the helm.

The point at which the Sportsfisher was officially on the plane was hard to define. Its sharp entry on the bow and broad planing area aft allowed it to slide off the water and lift gently. Acceleration was pretty smart under hard throttle though. We shot from dead in the water to 21 knots in 12sec.

FISHABILITY ON THE TROLL

A trolling speed of seven knots pushed out multiple, short pressure waves running out from the propeller wake. This would allow for good placement of lures and baits using the 4.5m Relax outriggers. And at that speed a miserly fuel burn of just 4lph will have you smiling at the bowser. With 450l of diesel on board it will only be the weather that shortens the trip (or the lack of an extended leave pass).

When going to and from the hot spots, a cruise speed of just over 17 knots felt comfortable, and the 180hp 4BY2 Yanmars were purring at 2400rpm, with

consumption running at 25lph. The worst-case consumption scenario of 68lph was realised at a WOT of 4000rpm.

CREATURE COMFORTS

This boat has the credentials to go the distance in some serious offshore seas with a high degree of comfort for those on board.

While ostensibly designed as a day boat, there are still creature comforts. The high sheer at the bow of the boat allows a large cabin with ample head height for folks of about 190cm.

There's a V-berth in the bow that features one side longer than the other, and with the usual stowage underneath. Beneath the portside cushion they've secreted the plumbing for the pump-out facility for the head and the holding tank. The vanity hand basin and head are in close proximity to each other in a timber-lined compartment, not overly large in diameter, but hey, we are on a 26ft trailerboat!

A small galley with cooker and fridge will do the job nicely for getting snacks organised while trolling. And if you're taking a nap during the dull part of the fishing day, there's a large roof vent directly overhead to offer a cooling breeze.

AN ANGLER'S COCKPIT

Out in the cockpit, the coamings are plenty high enough for thigh support while fishing stand-up, and there are no sharp edges to bump into if you're getting dragged from corner to corner on the leader. The rear section is dressed with a smooth fibreglass shroud that cuts in at the centrally mounted transom door, which is big enough to handle a respectable gamefish with no problems at all. Its coaming opens up for walkthrough access. There's a single, wide and high scupper that swings below the door opening to release any rogue waves that try to fill the cockpit while aggressively backing up on a rough day.

Although not plumbed when we conducted our test, a livebait tank is featured on each side in the transom bulkhead. Either could be modified to house a twin tuna-tube kit. The tanks would handle 30 slimy mackerel or 50 yellowtail without a problem. The removable lids to these tanks



Top: There's a V-berth in the bow, with storage underneath.

Middle: The helm offers ample room for instruments and provides a great view over the large bow.

Bottom: For a 26-footer, the CJH provides a very usable galley with cooktop and fridge, and a head with hand basin.

“The Carolina-style bow,
coupled with a deep
leading forefoot, provides
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are neatly rebated, relying on their weight to keep them in position. I'd like to see these hinged, or at least with a safety lanyard attached, to retain them should they bounce free, as replacement would no doubt be expensive.

CUSTOM BUILD

This 26 is the first of its kind and no doubt each subsequent boat will be different in layout. It is a specialised custom-build, and while there is no side-pocket stowage for gear, gaffs and tag poles in the cockpit, the sky is the limit if you wanted any add-ons. Likewise, there is currently no bait-rigging table, but plans are under way to build a rigging station on the back of the beamy helm seat. The seat has a large stowage area with a rocking back rest so observers can swing it over and sit facing the wake while the skipper is driving from the tuna tower. The large in-deck fish boxes are to be further extended in future models, to cater for larger than normal wahoo or tuna. If they are both needed for fish, fenders and lines may be stowed in the auto bilge-pumped lazarette, situated between the two.

SPOTTER'S VIEW

The robust upper helm station is made from alloy tube. The manufacturer is still pondering on the finish to add to this part of the superstructure. Large anodising jobs are impossible in Cairns, so a soda blast and a coating of Nyalic looks to be the future finish of this framework. While the initial boat has no rod stowage on the tower (only in the coamings), nothing is out of the question. These have been left out of the equation while the mechanics of how the structure folds into the cockpit for towing is perfected.

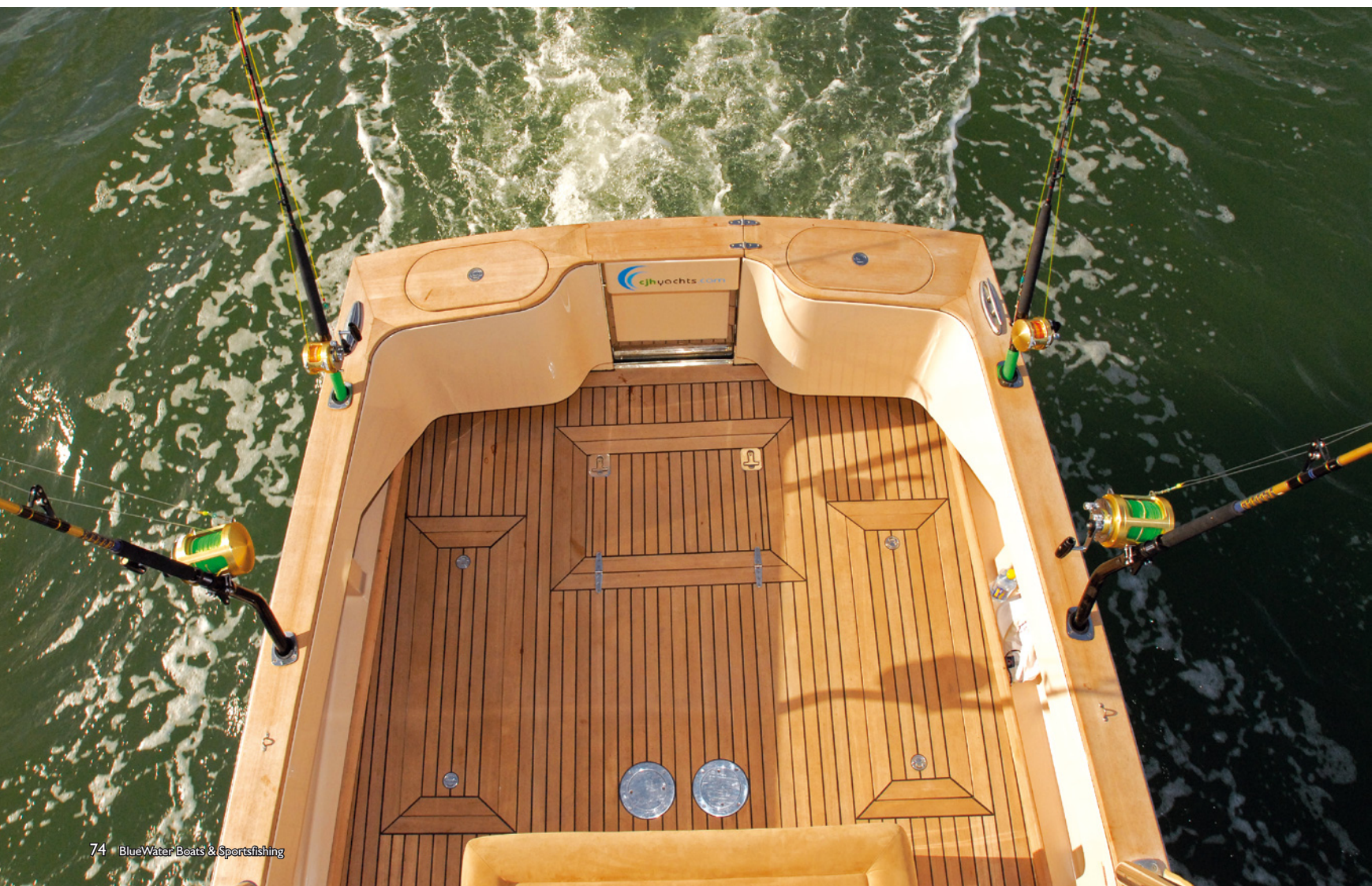
When driving from the tower the skipper has uninterrupted views in all directions. This makes for very effective hunting, manoeuvring and docking. From the upper helm, steerage is via the throttle levers only.

If you'd like to fight or cast to fish from the bow, some customisation would be advisable. The bow rails have been kept low profile to complement the aesthetics, and non-slip coating has been added to the topside. There would be room for four anglers on the bow if you option up to higher bow rails for safety's sake.



Top: The twin 180hp Yanmar diesel engines are easily accessible.

Above: Unobscured views from the upper helm make docking and hunting much easier and more effective. Steerage is via throttles only.





ENGINE ROOM

The engines are readily accessed via the hatch on which the helm seat is mounted. The entire assembly is gas-strut assisted when opening and allows easy access to the top of the motors. Dip-sticks are readily at hand and remote engine and transmission oil pick-ups are also close and handy.

Fuel filters are easily manipulated, being fixed to the aft end of the compartment, and the strainers are situated further aft. They can be visually checked without a problem, and should you need to provide maintenance you can jump down into the bilge between the two Yanmars.

The isolation switches for the electrical systems are attached to the forward bulkhead of the engine compartment. These are easily accessed even when the engine-room hatch is closed, via a small deck hatch directly above.

THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

In the mix of things, CJH Yachts' 26 Sportsfisher has all the right ingredients and the builder has achieved what he set out to do. Fuel economy is fantastic and the twin shafts perform nicely. Yes, it is trailerable, but you would be struggling (and overstepping legal boundaries) with a Toyota Landcruiser. However, a light truck capable of this job would come in at half the price of a Landcruiser.

All up, CJH Yachts have baked up a superb, mini, big-gamefishing rig. Just change the icing to suit yourself. 🍰

Above: It's a big rig, but having the option to move up or down the coast and follow the action with your gameboat is a huge advantage – and saves on marina fees too.



HIGHLIGHTS



A fabulous little 'big' gameboat.
 Fantastic manoeuvrability going astern on fish.
 Has the fuel economy that we only dream about.
 Very attractive!

SPEC CHECK



CJH 26 SPORTSFISHER

PRICE AS TESTED

\$290,000 plus GST

OPTIONS FITTED

Teak deck and cover boards, volt meters, Furuno electronics, remote anchor winch, UHF radio and aerial, freshwater tank, insulated ice box, forward bollard, two aft pop-up cleats, aluminium hard top and frame, transom door, gunwale rod holders, internal teak fit-out, upholstery in cabin, galley and fridge, shower and mirror, electric toilet, safety kit.

PRICED FROM

\$220,000 plus GST

GENERAL

Material: Fibreglass
 Length overall: 7.9m
 Beam: 3.0m
 Deadrise: 19-degrees
 Weight: 3.0 tonne dry

CAPACITIES

Fuel: 450l
 Water: 160l
 People berthed: 2
 People day: 8
 Max.rec/hp: 180x2
 Min.rec/hp: 120x2

ENGINES

Make and model: Yanmar 4BY2 x 2
 Type: Electronic diesel
 Rated hp: 180 each
 Displacement: 1995l each
 Gearbox ratio: 2:1
 Weight: 258kg each
 Propellers: 4-blade, 16x16

SUPPLIED BY

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