

Wave Warriors



MAIN PIC: The same but different. Two FI-Glass Warriors side by side, one powered by an outboard, the other by a sterndrive.

TOP RIGHT: The FI-Glass Warrior is a handsome boat from any angle.

BELOW LEFT: Carpets lift out in moments revealing a non-slip GRP floor. Seating is identical in both boats.

BELOW MIDDLE: Griff Simpson, managing director at FI-Glass Boats.

BELOW RIGHT: Attractive woodgrain dash with analogue instruments.

**STORY BY JOHN EICHELSHEIM, PHOTOS BY MIKE HUNTER
PUBLISHED IN BOATING NEW ZEALAND - JULY 2003**





SEA CONDITIONS IN TIRI CHANNEL WERE GNARLY, demanding plenty of concentration from boat drivers and passengers.

Every third or fourth wave was tall and steep enough to launch the boats skywards and judicious use of the throttle was necessary to maintain reasonable contact with the sea.

Our brace of Fi-Glass Warriors brushed off the conditions and proceeded up the channel averaging 25mph. When we did grab some air, controlled re-entries ensured both boats touched down stern first, with a whoosh rather than a crash. Inside, the boats' passengers remained dry and more comfortable than the conditions and high average speed would suggest possible; Fi-Glass' popular and well respected Warrior hull was living up to its reputation.

With two identical hulls but quite different power options, our day with the Warriors was an interesting one. Both boats are new model Fi-Glass Warriors with modernised topsides and new interior features. Fi-Glass has made no modifications to the Warrior hull, however. Construction methods and materials have been updated, but Fi-Glass didn't want to play around too much with such a good performer.

One boat, supplied by Cambridge Marine, had a 140hp Mercury V6 bolted to the transom – a conventional installation and popular match for this six-metre hull. The second boat, supplied by Whangaparaoa's Gulfland Marine, had a 4.3 litre 220hp Mecruiser MPI in its belly – the first new model Warrior to be fitted with a sterndrive, though plenty were installed in earlier models.

Fi-Glass set up the boat with help from Mercury Marine New Zealand. Mercury Marine's Richard Cains was busy making final adjustments to the control cable settings when we arrived at the jetty on the Wade River – he'd managed a quick run before we arrived and pronounced himself happy with the boat's performance.

The sterndrive Warrior is the personal boat of Fi-Glass managing director Griff Simpson. It's a top-spec model with top of

the range Raymarine electronics, automatic Bennet trim tabs, a portable toilet, plush interior and a substantial bimini top supported by a fold-down stainless steel rocket launcher.

The most noticeable feature when you step into the cockpit is the engine box. It seems quite imposing at first, but appearances can be deceiving. The engine box intrudes only 100mm further into the cockpit than an outboard well. Seats either side of the box lift out to give easy access to the transom and the fibreglass cover has moulded drink holders and an extra fold-down bench seat across the front, boosting the boat's seating to accommodate seven adults.

A custom stainless and plastic baitboard fits neatly across the transom above the engine cover, but there is plenty of scope for turning the top of the engine box into a work area while fishing or using it as a table when anchored in a quiet bay.

The cover is easily removed and access to the engine is good. Fi-Glass has used plenty of sound deadening in the engine box, ensuring quiet operation throughout the rev range. Battery isolation switches are mounted on the port side aft and the transom area either side of the engine box is neatly screened off with vinyl curtains. The sterndrive installation weighs 389kg, considerably more than the 184kg Mercury outboard on the other boat. But the weight is carried low in the boat and further forward, as is the fuel tank. Only 90-odd kilograms – the Alpha One sternleg – hangs off the transom; the rest of the weight is inside the boat.

By contrast, in an outboard installation the majority of the mass is carried high up and outside the boat. Obviously, the differences show in the way the boats handle.

The sterndrive Warrior feels rock-solid. It rides deeper in the water, a characteristic that should make it popular with wake-boarders, and feels a heavier boat than the outboard version. Performance is not a problem. The big Mecruiser uses its cubic inches to good effect, propelling the boat onto the plane in a flash and holding it there at remarkably low speeds – another



FAR LEFT: Both boats are capable of covering the ground quickly.

TOP LEFT: The Mercruiser powered Warrior felt well balanced and handled nicely.

TOP RIGHT: The boats really came into their own in lumpy conditions.

ABOVE: The sterndrive is easily accessed once the engine cover is removed.



plus for the wake-boarding fraternity. Top speed is 50mph and 35-40mph turned out to be a comfortable cruise speed. We maintained 35mph in relatively choppy seas, the sterndrive boat bouncing less and holding its line better than the outboard model in cross seas.

The hull tends to ride flatter, too. A reasonable amount of sternleg trim is required to get the best from the boat, complemented by the trim tabs which can be adjusted to hold the nose down even with plenty of up-trim on the leg. By playing with both trim settings we dialled in a comfortable and swift ride.

The boat steered easily and the flush-mounted throttle control falls nicely to hand. Simpson has opted for analogue instruments on this boat, but it is available with Mercury Smart Craft gauges. All the critical engine function gauges – oil, tachometer, temperature, speedometer and trim – are mounted on the dash; fuel and hour meter nestle beside the throttle control. The second boat has all the gauges on the dash.

The outboard-powered Warrior was not fitted with trim tabs, and probably doesn't need them. On a few occasions it would have been nice to adjust the boat's trim at the touch of a button, but we achieved the same thing by moving our passengers around to compensate for wind and sea. Once or twice we managed to land hard on the flat of the hull or the chine – after that the third person vacated the rear-facing queen seat and stood in the middle between the seats.

Performance with the 140hp Mercury is crisp. It's a big capacity engine with plenty of low-down grunt. Three-up, it didn't appear to give much, if anything, away to the Mercruiser in acceleration – it may even be quicker – though it lacked the same mid-range punch and ultimate top speed. It trails the sterndrive by 80hp, so its performance is creditable.

The boat handles differently, though. The hull still does a fine job of cushioning the ride and keeping its occupants dry, but it feels more lively with outboard power. Throttle response is a little quick-

er, though there's less urge in the mid-range; the hull rides higher and takes air more easily, and it's a little more susceptible to being knocked around by the waves.

This model had fewer extras but still sported a useful quick-release folding bimini top and two-tone upholstery on the same seating arrangement as the sterndrive model – one swivelling helm, one king and queen and two transom-corner seats. Lacking an engine box, it also lacks the fold out bench seat of the first boat, limiting seated accommodation to five.

The Warrior's cabin is a light and airy affair; acrylic side windows, a huge Perspex forward hatch and no bulkhead between the cabin and the cockpit ensure plenty of light. The cabins are fully lined and carpeted; carpets in both boats can be removed in minutes when serious fishing or diving is in the offing – a useful feature. Vee-berths are a good length and there is full sitting headroom in the cabin. Side shelves are deep and wide, but there is no storage under the vee-berths, as they are foam filled.

There is no shortage of storage space in the rest of the boat. An underfloor locker – shorter in the sterndrive model – will take care of long, bulky items; full-length side shelves and a cubbyhole for odds and ends on the port side look after the rest. The king and queen seats also hinge forward to reveal generous dry storage and there's more space under the transom behind the vinyl skirts. Rod racks accommodate two outfits a side and two stainless steel rod holders are standard, as are internal grab rails either side, a grab handle for the front passenger, a dive ladder and stainless steel bow rails.

The helm seat is completely adjustable, footrests are well placed and the curved, tinted screen provides excellent protection from the wind. I also liked the screen's easy-to-hang-onto frame.

Fi-Glass' general standard of finish and presentation is good. Two-tone vinyl upholstery looks classy and the comfortable seats offer useful lateral support. Fabrics are good quality and the cabin linings were neatly fitted.

WHICH WARRIOR?

Of the two boats the sterndrive was the more interesting – stern-drive installations in New Zealand-built boats of this size are no longer common. It's hard to understand why – the set-up works well and of the two Warriors we tried, the sterndrive is the pick.

We liked the way that it rode, its solid feel and excellent balance due to its lower centre of gravity. Although there is a penalty to be paid in a slightly reduced cockpit area and smaller under-floor locker, the engine box can be put to good use. The extra seating is a bonus.

Both boats are good performers, especially in the rough. According to Craig Lewis from Gulfland Marine, owners love the Warrior because it so predictable. It's just about idiot-proof, he

says.

Both boats were fun in the conditions and felt well sorted. The sterndrive had the performance and handling edge, but the outboard version is still a nice package offering a soft, dry ride, good performance and respectable fuel economy.

There's a price premium for the sterndrive version, but it's not as high as you might imagine. The advantages of improved balance, better fuel economy, heaps of grunt for towing skiers, wakeboarders and water toys, quietness and refinement may well tip the balance in favour of the sterndrive option for many buyers.

If not, there's the desirable alternative of an outboard-powered Warrior.



ABOVE: King and queen seat folds forward.

RIGHT: The vee berths are a good length with full sitting head-room in the cabin.

What's new?

The latest Warrior differs in several ways from earlier incarnations. It's the first of Fi-Glass' big boats to be built using the company's latest technology. No wood is used in the structure: stringers are fibreglass and the transom is Kledgecell – a feature present in the company's smaller boats for some years.

Advantages of no-wood construction include increased strength and non-rot characteristics, as well as efficiencies in labour and material use during the build process.

The deck is new and the boat features a new, larger screen and a smart looking vacuum-formed soft-touch vinyl dashboard with mock-walnut fascia. The dash is big enough to accommodate the normal complement of engine function instruments.

Hulls are completely foam filled and CPC compliant.

SPECIFICATIONS

BOAT

model	Fi-Glass Warrior
designer	Frank Simpson
builder	Fi-Glass Products Ltd.
construction	solid GRP
loa	6.4m
lwl	5.95m
boa	2.3m
deadrise	22 degrees
horsepower range	125-225
engine options	outboard or sterndrive
max speed	55mph
fuel capacity	120L standard
length on trailer	7.5m
height on trailer	2.3m
trailerable weight	outboard 1670kg sterndrive 1870kg
boat supplied by	Cambridge Marine Gulfland Marine
price as tested	outboard \$61,000 sterndrive \$79,000
packages from	outboard \$52,850 sterndrive \$62,000

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE(s)	Outboard	Sterndrive
make	Mercury 140hp	MerCruiser 4.3mpi
type	Outboard	Sterndrive
horsepower	140hp	220hp
cylinders	V6	V6
max rpm	5500	5000
propeller	19in Vengeance	17in Vengeance
price	\$17,600	\$23,986
TRAILER		
trailer	6m tandem-axle	6m tandem-axle
manufacturer	DMW	FiGlass Products Ltd
braked	Trojan Brakes	Trojan Brakes
suspension	multi-leaf	single parabolic
rollers	multi	multi