



Sea Jay's quality build, functional design – and the pure practicality of a serious plate aluminium trailerboat – makes their Plate Xtreme 6.2 Freedom a winner for the offshore angler.

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FREEDOM TO FISH

For more years than I want to think about, Sea Jay boats have been part of the furniture in Queensland. Sea Jay has survived, in fact thrived, outside of the state's southeastern-based boatbuilding industry by doing their own thing – and doing it very well indeed.

For a company founded on traditional skinned-frame construction, this boat represents a change of direction into the world of 'plate' boats. A different type of construction altogether and, speaking as a student of all things boating, a fascinating step into something new for a boatbuilder that has always built boats that stand up well to some of the toughest owners on the planet.

To put the cart before the horse and start with a summary, Sea Jay's centre-cabin 6.2 Freedom didn't disappoint in any way, shape or form. As plate aluminium boats go, it's as good as they get, so good in fact that I'll happily place it among a small and very select group of plate boats at the absolute sharp end of the genre. It seems to me a lot of people will choose Sea Jay, as this boat gets almost everything right – and I don't get to say that very often!

THE CASE FOR ALUMINIUM

The relevance of plate aluminium boats in bluewater fishing is a good

question to ponder. Testing this boat provided some clear, if necessarily qualified, answers. There's no escaping the fact that aluminium boats can't match the offshore ride characteristics of a good GRP hull, and this one is no exception.

Our test coincided with a strong wind warning, so with a 25-knot east-southeaster tearing in, we took cover for the photo shoot – thus the grey-green water in the photos. Travelling across the wind-battered surface incorporated plenty of the bumps and bangs that you'd expect. However, to the 6.2 metre Freedom's credit, a sensible hand on the go-faster lever could reduce them to an acceptable minimum. This was largely because the hull transitioned from displacement to planing speeds without digging in its stern and wobbling its bows in the air, like so many plate aluminium hulls do. Perhaps such an easy transition was helped in no small part by a set of Minn Kota trim tabs on the stern – and I rest my case that all boats this size are better with tabs than without them.

To put this in perspective – and using the example of a 25ft Contender in which I recently fished the Great Barrier Reef – a good 'glass hull would have left the Sea Jay for dead in the trying conditions. On the other hand, when trailering along bad roads, launching over bad ramps

and motoring over fibreglass-munching coral and rock – as so commonly encountered by those who fish bluewater – there is a sound explanation for our national fixation for aluminium boats. To a large extent, alloy boats just suit our needs better, making plate aluminium boats entirely relevant for bluewater fishing around much of the Australian coastline.

FUNCTIONAL DESIGN

Getting down to details, Sea Jay's 6.2 Freedom is an excellent rendition of the centre-cabin configuration commonly delivered by plate aluminium boat builders. The decks around the cabin are raised several hundred millimetres above the cockpit, and are wide enough to make forward access a surefooted process.

The 6.2 Freedom's cabin is quite roomy and two blokes in sleeping bags could camp there in some comfort. The usual portable toilet beneath the central bunk cushion is an option, although carpet lining to the full cabin interior comes standard.

To an amazing extent, that carpet also damps down the racket that metal hulls make on rough water. Presumably, this is helped along by foam flotation out of sight inside the hull structure. The end result is perhaps the quietest bluewater tinnie that I've ever ridden in.

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Up in the bows, Sea Jay once again demonstrates its mastery of anchoring ergonomics. It’s a faultless system of a large, open well supplying warp through a divided bowrail, integrated with a bowsprit-mounted fairlead and roller.

Similarly, the cockpit is how a bluewater fishing boat cockpit should be. Aft of the steps to the foredeck, the periphery offers uninterrupted leg support, and big side-pockets provide plentiful stowage for all the stuff that we always seem to need. A well-thought-out central workbench on the aft bulkhead is standard, as is a baitwell and portside transom door.

The checkerplate deck self-drains through a pair of spring-loaded metal scuppers, and about the only thing I’d personally change on this boat would be not having checkerplate and instead, staying with the standard carpeted deck.

Behind the helm, a pair of deep bucket seats (both on slides) perch atop frames designed to stow IBOX (a 110-litre IBOX with a divided lid is an option) or tackle BOX. Our test boat didn’t have clears fitted between the windscreen and hardtop – although it’s hard to imagine anyone not fitting them.

To say the hardtop looks robust would be an understatement. In fact, you could say that about the whole boat! The hardtop includes a sturdy rack stowing eight rigged rods across the aft end.

About the only thing that I wasn’t entirely enthusiastic about in this boat, apart from the checkerplate deck, was some unfinished welding around rod holders set into the

covering boards. These looked as though they would scratch your rod butts. While visible welds are part and parcel of plate boats, these did need some finishing.

So that’s only one minus point that can be fixed with some carpet, and a criticism that can be fixed with 10 minutes grinding – which is why I place Sea Jay’s 6.2 metre Freedom among a very select group of the best of its genre. It’s one hell of a good fishing boat, however you look at it!

POWERPLANT

Our test boat ran a 150hp Yamaha 4-stroke, which is Sea Jay’s recommended power for this hull – inside the rated maximum of 200hp.

The F150 is the largest of Yamaha’s 4-cylinder engines; they go to V6s from 200hp. On the test day, conditions precluded top-speed runs, but we were able to check out some mightily impressive cruising fuel-consumption figures thanks to Yamaha’s digital monitoring instrumentation.

At 3500rpm, and around 40km/hr, the F150 was burning just under 25 litres per hour. At 4000rpm, speed increased to 50km/hr and fuel consumption to 31 litres/hr. At 4500rpm, and around 55km/hr, the F150 still only burned 38 litres/hr. As I said, mightily impressive fuel economy allowing the boat to go a long way on the 300-litre tank fitted inside a sealed cell.

With the 220kg F150 on its transom, the 6.2 Freedom felt perfectly balanced in the water and lifted on to the plane effortlessly, contributing significantly to the hull’s overall rough-water performance. The motor proved especially quiet and vibration free, and in general can only be said to make a significant contribution towards the favourable impression with which this boat leaves you.

Twin installation and dual transoms are both options for this boat that some bluewater anglers will consider.

HIGHLIGHTS

A cockpit designed as they’re supposed to be for bluewater fishing!

Hardtop stows eight rigged rods.

Robust construction.

Attractive ‘hipped’ sheerline.

A spacious cabin.

SPEC CHECK

SEA JAY 6.2 FREEDOM

OPTIONS FITTED

Checkerplate deck, Minn Kota trim tabs, GME GX600 VHF radio

GENERAL

Material: Plate aluminium (5mm bottom, 4mm sides, 3mm deck)

Hull type: Mono

Length overall: 6.5m

Beam: 2.4m

Deadrise: 19.5 degrees (at transom)

Weight: 1170kg (hull only)

BMT towing weight: Approx 2170kg

CAPACITIES

Maximum rated power: 200hp

Maximum engine weight: 350kg

People: 7

Fuel: 300 litres

Freshwater: 75 litres (optional)

ENGINE

Make/model: Yamaha F150

Type: 16 valve DOHC EFI 4-stroke

Rated HP: 150

Displacement: 2670cc

No. of cylinders: 4

Weight: 220kg

Gearbox ratio: 2.0:1

Propeller/s: Yamaha s/s17-inch pitch

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