

“MAN, CHOOSING A BOAT IS TOUGH!”

Boat salesman Angelo San Giorgio thought he knew it all when it came to ordering his perfect ‘family fishing boat’. He was wrong.

Nomad by name and Nomad by nature. Here's how several meters of what Angelo's kids call "squashed frog green" became the family's passport to a lifetime of good memories.

Photos: Mona San Giorgio



The pile of magazines and catalogues littering my night stand was starting to resemble the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The once empty notepad that crowned the paper tower was now chock-a-block full of scribble; hopes and dreams jotted down in a feeble attempt to come to a conclusion that was skilfully eluding me. Man, choosing a boat is tough!

Whittling down the alternatives for months was taking up all my time. Literally every waking moment since I decided to have a boat parked in the garage again was spent narrowing down the alternatives. There were so many options that I was literally spoilt for choice. New or used? Fibreglass or alloy? Four-stroke or two-stroke? Outboard or sterndrive? Do I buy local or take a punt (no pun intended) and import something unique from the vast range of rigs available from the US. These were all valid options, each with their own merit.

I remember how it was so much easier the last time I embarked on this journey over six years ago. I just did the normal thing; scoured fishing and boating magazines and short-listed a few options. Next, I wandered into a couple of boat yards and annoyed the crap out of the salesmen, in an effort to whittle down my alternatives even further. Eventually I ended up with something close to ideal.

But here's the punch line: things have come full circle, and as a boating consultant at New World Honda Marine I'm now *that guy* that people came to see (annoy?) when they're ready to upgrade or enter the market for the first time. Isn't karma a bitch?

What makes matters even worse is that I'm my own worst client! I keep changing my mind and expecting the impossible. I should have it sussed by now because I've helped hundreds of boaties over the years realise their dream of boat ownership. Each rig is in some way unique but therein lies the problem. Because I've been intimately involved in putting together so many varied packages, distilling it all down to one boat seemed an insurmountable task. To compound the issue, since I have access to a fleet of demonstrators at work, I wondered if I even needed to own one? I mean, I've

spent the last five months or so fishing out of a perfectly good Stacer 489 Barra Pro side-console, powered by a new 60hp Honda four-stroke. And what's more, it didn't cost me a cent. But ultimately, it wasn't mine and having your own rig to tinker with is one of the great joys of boat ownership. I pondered this one long and hard but the itch needed scratching and so the search began.

WHAT NOW?

Whatever I chose, it had to be fishable. It needed to be safe and robust, because I fish a lot with my family and their safety was paramount. Plus I'm tough on my boats. It needed to be versatile because I wanted to do it all — chase bream and flaties in the estuaries, snapper and salmon in the bay, squid on the inshore reefs and tuna and kings offshore when conditions were favourable. Dragging the kids around on inflatable tubes was also on the agenda.

Let's look at that again... a little big boat that excelled in the shallows and wouldn't disgrace itself in the rough; not to mention a no compromise fishing machine that would also tow water toys. See what I mean about wanting the impossible?

Now while I regularly advise my customers that boating is an exercise in compromise, there were a couple of items that weren't open to debate.

- Since most of my fishing these days involves flicking soft plastics and towing hardbodies, the new rig had to be an open platform, unhindered by traditional windscreens and canopies. A side- or centre-console was therefore on the cards.

- I needed a raised casting deck to afford better vision, but with more substantial freeboard than my previous Barra Pro or ProStrike. I'm kinda tired of ending up wet as a shag half the time.
- The raised platform would also need to accommodate a livewell capable of holding a meter-long flathead prior to release (I might as well dream big) and plenty of storage (let's face it, I carry around way too much shit).
- A rear casting platform was a no no since I wanted the cockpit left uncluttered, just in case the mood to drown a pilchard or two overwhelmed me.
- It had to be relatively soft riding and stable at rest because rocking and rolling is reserved for the dance floor.
- Two motors were a must — an outboard to speed us to our destination and a bow-mount electric to silently tow us around once we arrived (geez, guess I need a hybrid).
- And finally, it had to fit in my garage so as not to raise the ire of the old farts who run the Grievance Committee in our Body Corporate estate. They already pinged me for allowing one recalcitrant weed to poke its offensive head through the mulch in our front garden. They might lynch me if I dare park a boat on the newly manicured nature strip.

For inspiration I thought back over the boats I've fished from over the last 20 years or so. They've spanned everything from a 3.9m Stacer tiller-steered dinghy to a twin-rigged Haines Hunter 680 Patriot. I've done well over 50kts (92.6kmh) in a

Haines Hunter ProStrike (a boat that I had a hand in designing) while I'm currently pedalling a Hobie Pro Angler kayak that tops out at 6kts (11.1kmh) with a stiff tail wind. I revelled in the open space of a Haines Hunter 520 Prowler centre-console and I've lapped up the comfort of the Stacer 639 Offshore owned by my offsider Brett Hanna. Even my old customised 4m Seawasp stood out for its sheer fishability despite being the size of a shoe.

However, it was a compact open boat that recently took up residence on our showroom floor that drew my attention. For weeks I'd walked past it, barely giving it a second glance, except when customers expressed an interest in it. But some time later it got moved closer to my desk. I began eying it off and eventually got in and had a really good poke about — insert light bulb here!

This rig had flown under my radar but now it was giving me a bit of a tingle. It's kinda like that girl with the pony tail,

"I'm my own worst client! I keep changing my mind and expecting the impossible."

Below: My boat must've barfed and everyone's buggered off in disgust. The Nomad decided to take advantage of the situation and enjoy the sunshine prior to slipping into its new outfit. Note the extended bowsprit and bow-mount thruster-plate up front.

braces and Superman specs you knew at high school. You know the one. You never gave her a second glance until one day when the braces came off, contacts replaced the specs and that pony tail was unleashed in a cascade as the light hit it just the right way. Yeah, that's the tingle I'm talking about. Um, sorry, enough of that. Back to boatie stuff.

So, while the Stacer 479 Nomad MP leapfrogged to the front of the queue, it was a follow-up visit to the vast Telwater enterprise in Coomera, Queensland, that galvanised my resolve. Now unless you've just escaped from a monastery, you'd no doubt be aware that Telwater is the parent company of Stacer, Quintrex and Savage alloy boats. The recent update of the company's EVO 2 hulls, the EVO Advance, was what I'd come to sample first hand. After tossing around the second boat I'd piloted for the day, coincidentally a 479 Nomad — under the wary eye of our Stacer minders — I left very impressed. And I'd found my boat!

POWER OPTIONS

Next to consider was what engine was going to hang off its bum. After initially considering the keenly priced Mariner outboard options available as part of Stacer's Ready To Go packages, I settled on a 75 Honda four-stroke, then begged the factory to upgrade the boat rating to accommodate the Honda 90. It's not a rational thing I know, but I've been in love with the VTEC-equipped 90 since I first tried one on a heavy Haines Hunter 530 Breeze and wasn't about to let the opportunity slip by. I figured that more power for no more weight had to be a good thing. In hindsight, since I very rarely need to run it at full throttle anyway, the 75 would have been ideal while giving away very little in performance. Price wise, the saving would have paid for my sounder upgrade.

The main decisions made, all that was left to do now was fine-tune the options. I let my kids select the colour scheme. Toxic Green, or as they affectionately nicknamed it, "squashed frog green", was their unanimous decision, in the new 2011 Stacer three-quarter hull finish. Since I could almost fit the similarly sized 489 Barra Pro into my garage with the standard trailer, the optional swing-away drawbar was added to the top of the



Above: This must be how Stacers reproduce in their natural environment. The steeply raked forefoot, which is part of the EVO Advance hull concept, softens the ride in choppy conditions.

Below: Someone with a really big can opener has taken to a really big sardine can and ended up with these nifty hull panels. Note the pronounced reverse chine (top right) which aid stability.





Above: My freshly painted rig about to enter the Stargate to be transported to another dimension. Actually it's in the drying oven where the paint is baked to a tough, shiny finish. The tape job minimises the chance of overspray creeping on to white hull.



Left: The sturdy swing-away drawbar ensures that the rig fits snugly into my garage. It's seriously engineered and could happily double as a coupling that would make Thomas the Tank Engine proud.

wish list. The Nomad's side-console was ditched in favour of the sports console standard on the Barra Pro. It sports four rodholders and several flush-mounted LED work lights on its leading edge. The swept back design also looks pretty cool.

The location of this console was a saga in itself. I initially convinced myself that I wanted a rear centre-console, similar to what is found with barra guides up north. In the end I abandoned this idea as it would make baitfishing a pain in the "transom". The mid-mounted side-console, on the other hand, would keep the cockpit uncluttered and would facilitate a good flow from bow to stern. The standard plastic rodholders were upgraded to the stainless variety and the bowrails were lopped off to give a cleaner appearance.

The gaping anchorwell would eventually sport a carpeted lid, transforming it into a second casting perch that was a bit higher. A thruster plate was added to accommodate a bow-mount electric motor.

A Lowrance HDS-8 would eventually take pride of place on the console when I find an extra couple of bucks. The HDS-5 currently fitted there would then migrate to the bow. And finally, a couple of factory ski hooks to tow my kids and their friends were needed. So with my wish list complete, all that was left to do was place the order and get the ball rolling.

And I've just done it. The order's in and the new boat arrives in a month or so. The relief is incredible, like the weight of the world's been lifted off my shoulders. The family's relieved too. The kids finally

get their dad back and my wife's regained a husband. The paper Leaning Tower of Pisa has been consigned to the garage and the Hobie Pro Angler was recently sold on eBay. Now I'm pacing around like an expectant father waiting for the arrival of his first born. This is how my customers must feel after they've slapped down their hard-earned. I'd forgotten about this part.

Stacer was kind enough to allow me to document the rig from coil to quality control. The first photos have just arrived in my inbox and I'll be heading north shortly to see it in the flesh and take more happy snaps. No doubt it'll be an exciting journey.

This concludes part one. Part two will follow as Angelo adds the indispensable extras 🍷