



BOAT TEST

Warren Steptoe

"What endeared it to me was how it interacted with people aboard"



Stacer 559 Cape Runner

An aesthetically-pleasing, aluminium cuddy-cab that's taking on fibreglass and coming out on top



A pretty boat, Stacer's Cape Runner has stepped into real contention with the 'glass hulls so popular in its genre.



The keen of eye might notice this boat is branded the "549 Wave Runner"—that's because Stacer has changed its name since the time of the test.

ALTHOUGH OUR love for aluminium boats continues unabated, among the ever-popular cuddy-cabin family/fishing boat genre, 'glass has always ruled supreme.

For a couple of generations already, 'glass boat builders such as CruiseCraft, Seafarer, Haines Hunter, Whittley, and Haines Signature have made building cuddy-cabin family/fishing boats into quite an art form. To sell well in one of the Australian boating

industry's most competitive sectors, boats have needed to prove themselves.

As for aluminium cuddy-cabs, there've always been metal alternatives, but people only bought them because they were aluminium. In terms of style, finish and general classiness, our aluminium cuddy-cabs have always been the poor relation.

Until recently, anyway. We've seen a new generation of aluminium boats that summarily booted this particular tradition into touch. And as you'd expect from one of our leading aluminium boat-builders, Stacer is right there among a select few leaders offering aluminium boats with real style.

Stacer has turned its attention to cuddy-cabin family/fishing boats and its latest range of Runner models may well storm the bastion of 'glass dominance in cuddy-cabs.

At the time of our test, Stacer was finalising size increments and exact model designations. I can tell you though that there will

be four Runner models: a Sea Runner, a Cape Runner, a Coral Runner and an Ocean Runner, ranging from around 5.4m to 5.5m for the Sea Runner up to the Ocean Runner at about 6.3m. We tested a boat that is now the 5.6m 559 Cape Runner, but at the time of testing was the 549 Wave Runner.

Where to begin? For starters, although it doesn't take a particularly keen eye to identify our test Wave Runner as an aluminium boat, the rough finish we've become accustomed to is nowhere to be found.

Welds are still visible here and there, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Sure, welds can be ground and bogged to make them invisible, but you have to be careful about doing so, because grinding a weld weakens it. Ultimately, welds are best left alone.

Accepting that it's an aluminium boat, our test Wave Runner was well finished indeed.

How it rates for style is important in this genre. While hardly gorgeous, I think most



Navico recommends the Lowrance HDS-7 Fishfinder/GPS Chartplotter for the Stacer 559 Cape Runner.

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STACER 559 CAPE RUNNER

SPECIFICATIONS

Hull length:	5.63m
Length overall:	5.71m
Beam:	2.33m
Hull weight:	649kg
BMT total length:	approx 6.4m
BMT total height:	approx 2.51m
Power during test:	90hp
Max Power:	125hp
Max Motor Weight:	242kg
Fuel:	118L
Max Persons:	6 adults
Basic BMT packages:	from \$37,490
Price as Tested:	\$42,302
Website:	www.stacer.com.au

people would happily give it a "nice-looking boat" rating.

The paintwork is good and has been sensibly applied, leaving the bottom—where scratches and marks occur on any boat—unpainted. It's one valid reason so many Australians choose aluminium boats.

The upholstery is good and has been sensibly incorporated into the interior to provide a high degree of comfort and class without compromising practicality. The fisherman and the socialite will be satisfied here.

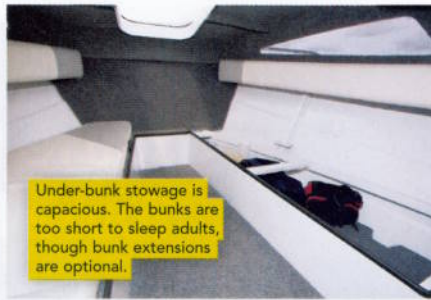
On-water performance was very interesting. An aluminium hull with a moderately angled deadrise is not going to approach a steeper deadrise in rough-water ability. Having said that, Stacer's stretch-formed, variable-deadrise Evo hull offers a significantly improved ride over your average moderate-deadrise, aluminium hull.

This was evident when we ran the Wave Runner around for a few hours on some typical open-estuary wind-chop for our photo shoot and test session.

If you don't spend a lot of time offshore, the shallow-deadrise hull provides satisfactory performance (we recorded a top speed of more than 32 knots with a 90hp Mariner two-stroke) with perhaps 25 or 30hp less than an equivalent 'glass hull, making for a lower purchase price and better long-term fuel economy, depending on the engine.

Less power also means a lighter motor, though remember aluminium hulls like Stacer's are no lighter than equivalent 'glass boats. At 649kg for the bare hull, the Wave Runner is no lightweight. Any difference in towing weight between this outfit and an equivalent powered by a 115hp four-stroke would be worth investigating.

The Cape Runner is going to emerge as a serious contender in its class. What



Under-bunk stowage is capacious. The bunks are too short to sleep adults, though bunk extensions are optional.

endeared it to me was how it interacted with people aboard.

Fishermen will like that their toes slot into under-leg supports right around the cockpit periphery. The driver will enjoy the cushions in those big comfy bucket seats, and will like that they flip up to create a bolster you can lean against securely while standing.

A substantial grab bar is sited right where a standing passenger needs it. Footrests are strategically sited for seated comfort. Ergonomically, the wheel and its relationship to the helm seat were spot-on for my 170cm frame. I don't get to say that very often.

Access through the cabin to the anchor well on the bow is also clever. Aft, the lounge folds out of the way and seats two adults when in position. Inside the cabin, the bunks aren't quite long enough to sleep an adult, but extensions are an option.

Similarly, the Wave Runner we tested lacked storage for rigged fishing rods. A rocket launcher across the bimini top is an option. Our test boat was basically a standard model except for two-tone paintwork.

The lounge, bimini, boarding ladder, plush bucket seats, drain valves and pair of lined stowage compartments below deck are all standard.

What would I add? A rocket launcher and a bait board in the socket provided in the aft bulkhead, and some additional carpet on the boat's sides inside the cabin. The roof is carpeted, and though I didn't find the Wave Runner too noisy, carpeting the hull sides inside the cabin would quieten it down to quality 'glass-boat levels.

Comparisons between the Cape Runner and 'glass boats its size are inevitable. No doubt some will still choose 'glass and some will choose aluminium out of loyalty. For open-minded people, however, the time has come to compare this new generation of aluminium hulls against the GRP establishment in cuddly-cabin family/fishing boats. ☞

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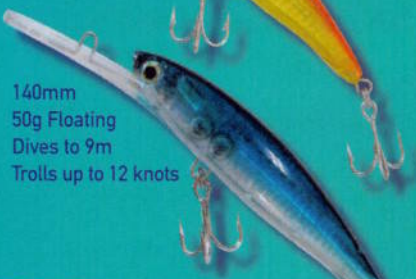
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