

# Tricked-up pontoon Senator RH780

Well-known Napier boat manufacturer Senator Boats launched the RH 780 back at the 2006 Auckland Boat Show.



Above: the over-width RH780 hull has plenty of cockpit space.  
Below: the flat gunwale faces provide top-of-thigh support for anglers.



## Specifications

Material:	aluminium	Test engines:	two Mercury 150hp four-strokes
Configuration:	enclosed hardtop pontoon	Props:	15-inch pitch Eternia
LOA:	7.97m	Fuel:	310 litres under-floor
Beam (external):	2.70m	Trailer:	DMW Premier tandem
Beam (internal):	2.11m	Turn-key package:	\$159,990 (250hp Verado)
Bottoms:	6mm	As tested:	\$199,990
Pontoons, sides, topsides:	3mm	Test boat courtesy of Auckland Marine Centre.	
Decks:	4mm		
Deadrise:	18°		
Rec. HP:	250-300hp		

The then-new model was well received and won the ‘Alloy Boat of the Show’ award that year. This hull was originally a scaled-up (not just stretched) version of the highly successful RH 750 model, and the design process took the outside beam of the hull to 2.7m, putting it into over-width towing territory. But as long as you have a suitable tow vehicle, an over-width boat is not a big deal these days – add a couple of flags to the trailer, get an over-width permit, and with some restrictions on travel times and places, you’re in action. The payback is gaining a lot of extra space inside the boat.

Auckland’s Senator agent, Auckland Marine, recently launched a new demonstrator of this model with some clever fit-out ideas, so I joined principal Gary Hatton on the water for a day to check it out.

### Putting it all together

The RH780 is built with 6mm bottoms, 3mm pontoons and 3 and 4mm topsides. Decks are 4mm Tread Plate with Tube Mat over the top. The deadrise at the transom is 18°, with the bottom edge of the pontoon forming downturned chines.

Lengthwise, the hull is supported by four stringers, a flat plate across the keel V and the pontoon construction. Laterally

there is: a collision bulkhead forming the anchor well in the bows and a second behind it; a bulkhead at the helm position; underfloor sub-bulkheads forming the hold in the cockpit; and the transom construction.

By the nature of the pontoon design, there is a massive amount of reserve buoyancy incorporated in five separate, pressure-tested compartments: three in the pontoons and two under the deck. Senator calculates the positive buoyancy at about 800kg, much of it high in the gunwales so the hull floats upright should it ever suffer swamping. Hulls can be built to survey standard if required.

### Get up and go

Rated for 250-300hp, the test boat has been built to take two 150hp Mercury four-stroke outboards with 15-inch pitch Eternia props. Twins have some useful advantages over single engines in terms of insurance against engine failure. The two Mercs are set relatively wide apart, providing more manoeuvrability and allowing a path between the engines for the boarding ladder leading to the Tread Plate boarding platform and central transom step-through.

A quick squirt of the twin engines gave us a maximum speed

of 67.6kph (36.5 knots) at 5800rpm (maximum book revs are 5000-6000rpm). A comfortable cruise speed was 51.5kph (27.8 knots) at 4600rpm. With twins, running both engines at the same revs produces the best harmony. I spent a fair bit of time peering at the tachos, synchronising the revs.

Trim-tabs had not been incorporated in this rig, so the hull attitude (affected by windage and loading) was adjusted with the tilt/trim of the individual engines. After a few hours practice I got better at helming this rig.

The hull was soft-riding in the half- to three-quarter-metre chop we encountered as the wind picked up over the day. Naturally, the enclosed cabin kept us warm and dry. Visibility through the 6mm toughened glass ‘screens and side-sliders was good when standing up to drive, aided by a pair of excellent Roca two-speed wipers.

An underfloor tank accommodates 310 litres of fuel, giving this rig a pretty substantial range to match its stay-away capabilities. A surge/expansion chamber is fitted in the fuel line to prevent blow-back when filling, or weeping from the vent due to a full fuel tank on a hot day.



The sound system and VHF are flush-mounted in the dash face.



From left: electronic requirements were handled by the latest Furuno Navnet TZ Touch 14 multifunction display. The helm seat folds back to disclose a two-burner cooker and forms a work-top with the addition of a wooden insert.

### Working the pick

Although it's an easy climb to the bow around the cabin sides, thanks to substantial bow rails and handgrips on the cabin roof, the permanently-mounted Sarca anchor and helm-operated Maxwell capstan minimise the need to get out on the pointy end. The hatch in the forecabin roof offers an alternative access.

The capstan feeds through the foredeck into an anchor locker in the bow. Should you need to get into the anchor locker, a hatch in the forward cabin bulkhead allows for this.

### Spacious setup

The forecabin and wheelhouse will sleep two adults comfortably – or three at a pinch with the berth infill added. They are fully lined. A flush toilet is fitted under the centre berth, and the wiring and steering in the helm console is easily reached through a hinged hatch. There is stowage space under the berths and narrow side shelves.

Out at the helm position is a full-width dash tray with a back lip and dark grey marine carpet trim, which respectively helps secure items and cuts glare on the 'screen. A Fusion sound-system and Uniden UM380 VHF are flush-mounted in the front face of the dash tray. Other electronic requirements were handled by the latest Furuno Navnet TZ Touch 14 multifunction display with sounder, GPS plotter, radar and so on, all flush-mounted in the console. Engine instrumentation and switching are also flush-mounted, although one bank of switches tucked behind the wheel could be better placed.

Fixed benches answer the seating requirements. The passenger seats are fitted on each side of a small but nicely

finished dinette table. This last can be lowered and the forward bench seat hinged back to form another decent-sized berth. There is stowage beneath the seats and inside the rear seat base. The helm seat is also cleverly fabricated so it can fold forward to disclose a two-burner stove. A teak infill fits atop the folded seat to form a work surface and there is space for a small fridge underneath.

Other fittings include concealed strip-lighting, side pocket stowage, passenger grab-rails on the dash and, under the hardtop, LED cabin lights (with night-light option) and a lure or document pocket that Velcros to the back of the helm seat.

The wheelhouse can be closed and locked by a three-piece sliding door, which allows the best of both worlds – good ventilation and communication when (say) game fishing on a hot summer's day, but full protection for the crew when conditions are cold and wet.

Out in the cockpit, three (two-plus-one) bench seats face astern and are sheltered under the overhanging hardtop, which is also fitted with grab-rails. One unit houses a freshwater hot-cold faucet and sink, with gas bottle underneath, while the other provides more stowage space.

The cockpit is huge, benefitting from the boat's over-width beam, and with the twin engines, there are aspects of catamaran design to the layout. The deck drains back to a sump under the transom, emptied by an 1100gph bilge pump. An under-deck hold, fitted with pipes and bungs, may be flooded or drained (by running the boat forward), and can be useful as a wet locker or for stowing the catch. Gunwale tops feature Deck Tread panels, making them handy places to perch, and full-length side shelves provide more stowage, one



The passenger seating has bench seats either side of a table.



In the cockpit, the two-person bench seat has internal stowage space.

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The twin-battery system is in a protected position in a transom locker.



From left: the removable bait stations feature three rod holders, drained rear gutter and stowage tray. A transom step-through makes for easy boarding.

level on the port side and two levels to starboard. The double shelves are robust enough to form a two-step 'ladder' up onto the gunwales. Two cockpit floodlights are fitted, along with a more passive overhead white/red LED light.

The two lockers in the transom wall house pumps for bait tanks and the wash-down hose on one side, with a dual battery system on the other.

As mentioned, a central transom step-through with drop-door accesses a Tread Plate boarding platform with grab-rails and a well-executed fold-down ladder. Separate mounting plates for trim-tabs and transducers are attached to the transom, removing the need to drill into the hull. Substantial bollards are fitted at the bow and stern, with two more amidships for full mooring options.

#### Fish and dive

The over-wide body of the 780 provides plenty of fishing space, along with the stability offered by the pontoon configuration. Tread Plate decking with Tube Mat over the top allows secure and comfortable footing, and there is reasonable toe room around the sides. High gunwales offer top-of-the-thigh support.

Rod stowage is very well catered for. Up in the forecabin, six stand-up or short jig rods can be stored in horizontal tube holders. The hardtop supports a ten-position rocket launcher, and there are eight through-gunwale rod holders. Not enough? Each of the two bait-stations has a further three holders for a total of 30!

The twin bait-stations are cleverly designed, being set on



Transom railing provides two fair-weather fishing positions.

rails and removable if you want a clean transom (you need to remove one to get at the fuel port). They feature: a custom cutting board with engraved fish measure; rear-drained knife gutter; and a plastic drawer/tray underneath that can be easily removed for cleaning.

A live-bait tank built into the boarding platform also houses two tuna tubes under the hatch. This combo is fed by a 3200gph pump, proving plenty of oxygenated water for two skippies in the tubes and a bunch of mackerel in the tank. Rails around the rear platforms make for fair-weather fishing positions, and beneath the platform are underwater bait lights. The catch can be stored in the under-deck hold, or in an after-market plastic icebox.

This boat is certainly blue-water capable and is fitted with a set of Reel Rods Ocean Blue outriggers. Big fish could be easily boated, if necessary, between the outboards, via the transom step-through.

Divers will find excellent boarding facilities, thanks to the good-sized Deck Tread-covered platform, fold-down ladder, handrails and a step-through transom. The lower side shelves offer dive-tank stowage capabilities.

#### On the road

The boat was carried on a DMW Premier tandem-axle trailer featuring extra gusseting and welded supports. Brake Commander Hydraulic braking was fitted with a wireless actuator that is activated by the current in the brake-light wiring.

This trailer is a cradle A-frame design with entry bay, 12 pairs of wobble rollers per side, plus three keel rollers. It was an easy drive-on, drive-off launch and retrieval. Also fitted are galvanised rims, zinc-treated leaf springs, a dual-ratio manual winch, submersible lights, spare wheel and a wind-down jockey. Tow weight for the rig is around 3200kg dry.

#### All in all

A well-finished, top-notch fish and dive platform, blue-water capable and with overnighting capacity, the RT 780 travels well. There is a heap of cockpit space, and its great stability and load-carrying ability complements the hull's excellent reserve buoyancy and other safety benefits inherent in pontoon construction.

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