



# At the **limits**



Main picture: Courtesy of Professional Skipper magazine

Fast, agile and adaptable – the Senator 750 is the perfect option for a rescue boat.

**Lindsay Wright** meets the team who regularly put the boat to the test.



**Go online**

There are currently 43 Senator boats for sale on [tradeaboat.co.nz](http://tradeaboat.co.nz), click on 'Used' and type "Senator" in the search bar to check them out



**BOAT REVIEW & SPECIFICATIONS**



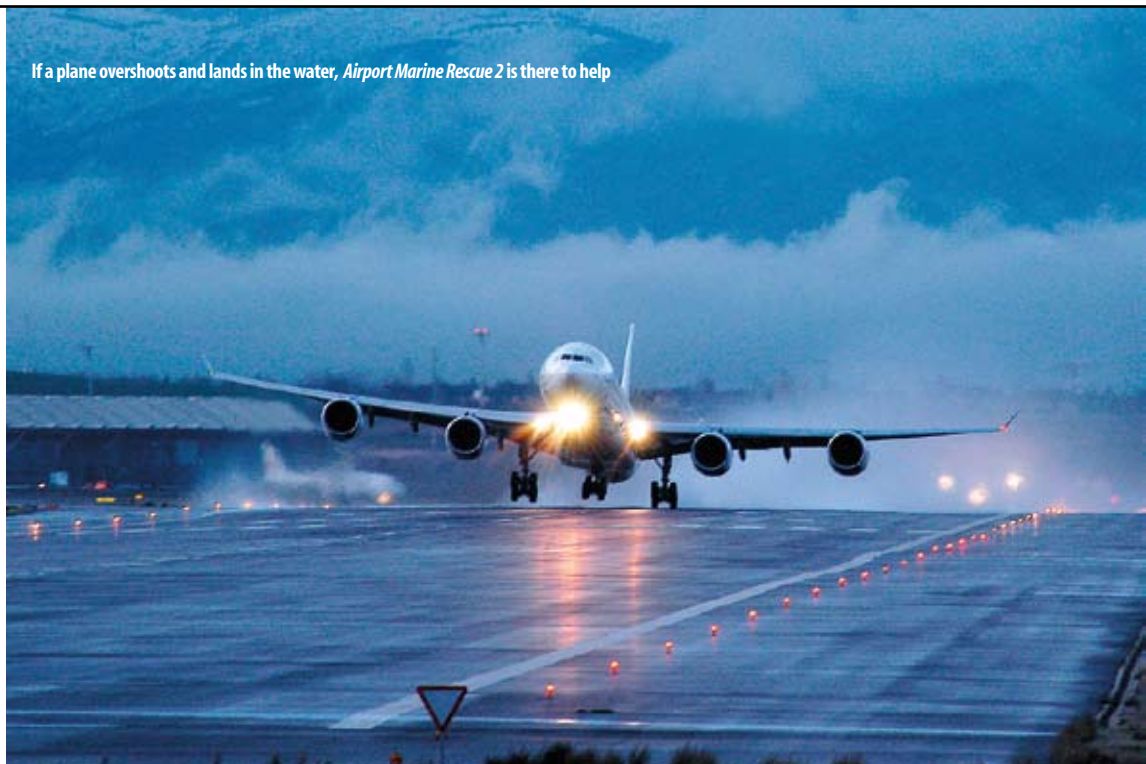
**Senator 750**

**SPECIFICATIONS**

<b>LOA</b>	7.50m
<b>Beam</b>	2.50m
<b>Weight</b>	2200kg (approx boat only)
<b>Fuel</b>	500lt
<b>Engine</b>	Twin Yamaha 150F two-strokes

This Senator 750 has been outfitted to carry four 80kg liferafts, has enough deck space for helicopter evacuations and is hardy enough to handle some of the toughest sea conditions in the country.

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If a plane overshoots and lands in the water, *Airport Marine Rescue 2* is there to help

In an age where we're bombarded daily by galleries of images, there are some that lodge in our memories longer than others. One such photo is framed on the wall of the Senator Boats office in Napier. It shows a Senator 750 with fetching lime green graphics, standing vertically on its transom, outboard engines awash, while a steep, ugly, grey wave rolls underneath it.

"That," says sales manager Murray Thomson, "is the crew from the Wellington Airport Fire and Rescue Service testing their new boat."

So, with a few hours to spare in Wellington recently, I decided to find out just what these Evil Knievels of the boating world were really like...and what sort of injuries they suffered when the boat came back down again.

After negotiating my way through the airport security doors, I was met by deputy crew chief Lester Gemmell, a short and nubby firefighter with the clipped and efficient manner of a military man.

"We spent two years looking before we ordered this boat."

The fire and rescue service used an open Stabicraft for 13 years before buying the Senator in 2007. The new boat had to be capable of carrying four liferafts, and enough deck space to conduct medivacs or helicopter evacuations from the deck. Working with the Westpac helicopter is a regular part of crew training.

*Airport Marine Rescue 2* (as the Senator is officially known) is a Senator RH750R (for rescue) and measures 7.5m LOA with 2.5m beam. She's powered by twin Yamaha 150F two-strokes with 14 x 19 stainless steel props. Top speed is 40 knots (74km/h) at 5600rpm and service speed is 21 knots (39km/h) at 4600rpm.



She carries 500 litres of fuel in an under-floor tank, good for about eight hours' operational endurance.

On board, the most noticeable alteration is the aluminium chutes – mounted either side of the cockpit and fitted with nylon runners to carry and deploy four 30-person liferafts.

"If there are people in the water, we get upwind of them, the deckhand launches the rafts and, if they can, the victims climb into them," says Gemmel.

The rafts weigh 80kg each and Lenco electric trim tabs are fitted to help trim the boat when she has all 320kg of lifesaving gear on board.

*Airport Marine Rescue 2* operates with a five-kilometre radius of the airport. That can take boat and crew well out into the windswept waters of Cook Strait to the south, or choppy Evans Bay at the northern end of the runway.

"We're about a kilometre from either launching ramp," says Gemmel. A Mitsubishi Challenger (three-litre diesel) tows the 2.2-tonne boat and response time, from an alarm being sounded to the boat being fully operational on the water, is about eight to 12 minutes from a launching ramp in Tarakena Bay on the south coast (half-owned by the Wellington Airport company), or 12 minutes from Evans Bay Marina launching ramp.

"We hold training sessions, eight hours at a time, four times a year," says Gemmel. "We just nominate a day and go...we train pretty much whatever the conditions at the time."

The airport's logo reads: "Wild at Heart – Wellington Airport" – and it's often an accurate description.

"We limit training sessions to 35 knots of wind and 3m swell," says Gemmel, "but it's really up to the skipper on the day to make the call."




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All of the 25 fire and rescue personnel at the airport come from a firefighting background and work a roster of two-day shifts of 12 hours each, two 12-hour night shifts and four days off. Eight of the staff are qualified firefighters and eight are senior firefighters, with four deputy crew chiefs, four crew chiefs and a chief fire officer/operations manager overseeing operations.

Ten of the firefighters are also qualified skippers who operate *Marine Rescue 2* or *Marine Rescue 1*. The latter is a purpose-built 1988 Cougar Wildcat 850, which was recently refitted



and repowered with two Suzuki DFV6 225 horsepower four-strokes and precedes the Senator as primary rescue vessel.

"New international airport safety regulations are coming into effect in 2011 – so we've been proactive and bought the new boat to comply with them," says senior firefighter and boat skipper, Warren Ofsofke.

"We can be called on to work close inshore in some pretty atrocious conditions – so the alloy hull is a plus when we have to work around the rocks."

New recruits start out with on-the-job marine training, leading to a Boatmaster exam and Restricted Radio Operators ticket before they progress to Maritime New Zealand Rescue Skippers' certificates of competency. They also undergo special airport marine training.

Wellington Airport has sea on both ends of the runway



A noticeable addition to *Marine Rescue 2* are the fibreglass whitewater kayaking crash helmets lined up above the dashboard.

"We had a problem with some of the taller guys smacking their heads on the ceiling when we came off waves," says Gemmel, "so we wear crash helmets now."

Ofsofke is one of the most experienced skippers and was at the wheel the day the vertical take-off photo was snapped just south of the airport.

"We tested the boat way past the manufacturer's specifications – so much so, that they threatened to withdraw our warranty."

Was anybody hurt?

"Nah – as soon as the props dug in she came straight down on her bottom – it was a pretty soft landing, but she chucked a fair bit of spray around."

Ofsofke has had the boat out in southerly winds gusting to 65 knots and three to four-metre swells

and has nothing but praise for its handling qualities.

"We're a bit different to most pleasure boats – they go out with a heap of gear piled in the forepeak whereas we're always light ship – except for the rafts. So we have had to add a bit of ballast in the bow."

"Not many people know this," says Gemmel, "but we responded to the *Wahine* tragedy [April 10, 1968] – our guys were out there in open Zodiac inflatables saving lives."

The rescue boats are available to be called out for search and rescue work after the police launch and helicopters have been alerted.

The service's fire engines are connected to heaters so that their engines never cool down but this is impractical with outboard motors so the engines are monitored daily, get a weekly mechanical inspections and start battery voltage is checked twice daily. Washing, polishing and cosmetic maintenance is ongoing.

There is little evidence of the 18 months hard usage that *Marine Rescue 2* has had except for some minor denting on the starboard side, which was sustained during high speed, close proximity manoeuvres with *Marine Rescue 1*.

One requirement for the Senator was being able to mount a radar scanner on the hardtop without having to lower it when the boat was being garaged at the airport. The Furuno NavNet system that was installed is always left in radar mode but also has chart plotter and sounder capabilities.

"We still maintain position fixes on paper charts though," Gemmel explains and demonstrated the slide-out chart table on the port side of the dashboard.

A special transponder means the staff in the airports traffic control tower can track the boat at all times. Communication is via a combination

marine and aeronautical VHF radio transceiver.

Other requirements were extra handholds, a specially designed boarding ladder that can be deployed over either side of the cockpit and generous stick on non-skid on the decks forward. A manual tackle and sling system can also be used for retrieving people from the water.

*Marine Rescue 2* is designed to be worked by a crew of two but can accommodate four for the big jobs. All are equipped with Mustang exposure suits and PFDs.

There's no bravado among the rescue crews. Just dedicated professional boatmen, doing their job in some of the toughest sea conditions this country can turn on. ↴



## SPECIFICATIONS

SENATOR 750 (BASE PRICE FROM \$90,000)

LOA	7.5m
HULL LENGTH	7m
BEAM	2.50m
DEADRISE	18°
TRANSOM	635mm
HULL BOTTOM	5mm
HULL SIDES, DECK AND CABIN	3mm

## TO OWN THIS BOAT:

	EXAMPLE BASED ON
Purchase Price of	\$90,000
Deposit	\$27,000
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