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**BOAT REVIEW  
SENATOR  
860 & 650**

Trade-A-Boat | March 2009

## Recreational fishing in Foveaux Strait is not something one takes on lightly...

So when Ewan Bennie began looking for a boat to do just that, his criteria were very specific. His research led him to Napier's Senator Boats - where he quickly became a repeat customer. Lawrence Schäffler reports.

**B**ennie - we should explain - is a somewhat unusual boatie. With wife Kathryn, he owns and runs an exclusive hunting lodge - Hollyburn Deer Park - in a remote part of Southland. It lies in thick native bush, near Tuatapere, an hour's drive west of Invercargill. And it's within spitting distance of the coast.

Hunting lodge? He caters predominantly for American hunters who come to stay and, with guides, track species such as red stag, fallow buck and wapiti (elk) that live in the park's 1000 acres of bush. He also takes them further afield to hunt tahr and chamois.

The guests come to stay for a week at a time, and as they often achieve their hunting quota within three or four days, they're usually keen to explore anything else New Zealand may have to offer.

As Bennie points out, "often they are keen fishermen, and as the fishing doesn't get much better than in the Foveaux Strait, we thought we'd expand our operation to allow them to sample - catch as well as taste - some of the superb seafood we have down here.

"But because conditions in the Strait aren't always easy, we knew we'd need a special vessel. A good, strong boat able to handle big seas, providing an easy, comfortable ride. She'd have to be built to survey, and equipped with all the comforts demanded by guests paying premium dollars.

"I had a fairly clear idea of what I wanted - a sizeable vessel with plenty of power and a healthy margin of safety. Given the conditions, an enclosed hardtop was obvious.

It needed features such as a separate, enclosed toilet

and shower, a heater, a fully-equipped galley, and plenty of space for landing big blue cod, groper and tuna - as well as handling crayfish pots.

"I'd heard lots of good things about Senators, and was immediately drawn to the pontoons and buoyancy concept. And as I would be spending quite a bit of money, I decided to fly to Napier, visit the factory and trial a few of the boats.

"I was impressed by the workmanship, and particularly by the ride. The boats have a particularly fine entry with a deep, pronounced deep-V, and that's fundamental for slicing through the seas we have in the Strait. The hull shape provides an exceptionally comfortable ride - even when launched off waves, the boats land easily."

He settled on an RH860 (overall length 9.9m) enclosed hardtop, called her Shogun, and after researching engine options, selected twin 225hp four-stroke Yamahas.

"Conditions can quickly turn nasty in the Strait, so you want plenty of power to fight through rough seas, and the twin rig offers an additional safety margin."

His thinking was spot-on: Shogun once lost its windscreen wipers, ripped off by a wall of solid green water over the bow...

### Client liaison

Perhaps the most important factor for him as a client, says Bennie, was the care Senator took to keep him involved in the project, accommodating his requests for customising Shogun's layout.

"We wanted specific changes and adjustments from the standard boat - such as the fully enclosed toilet/shower cubicle, the gas heater (a first for Senator), and changes to the dash configuration.

"We needed a fairly comprehensive galley - we like to offer our guests the opportunity to taste what they catch - and it's always best to eat it fresh. Kathryn is a great chef and prepares the meals on board.





We've wanted a fridge, sink and a decent cooker and oven.

"The boat was built during our busy hunting season, when we couldn't get away to fly to Napier to view the progress and approve the changes. So the Senator team emailed us detailed pictures as the work advanced – and we found that immensely reassuring."

Fishing in Foveaux Strait demands unconventional techniques. Typical conditions mean anchoring is seldom an option. Bennie says they opt for drift fishing 99 percent of the time, with one of the Yamaha's idling in reverse to slow the rate of drift.

***Because conditions in the Strait aren't always easy, we need a special vessel. A good, strong boat able to handle big seas, providing an easy, comfortable ride...***

"It's also fairly deep, so we tend to fish over pinnacles. And that means we have to be able to pinpoint our location, so I use twin transducers, allowing me to take guests to a precise location where I know we will find fish."

As well as conventional rod fishing, Bennie deploys crayfish pots and a dredge for oysters. Big seas, strong currents and winds make such equipment difficult to recover, so Senator fitted a heavy-duty pot hauler (electric winch) to the starboard side of the cockpit. Those transducers are connected to twin 10" Furuno screens – Navnet VX2 and separate sounder – and they are mounted on a dash that Senator customised for Bennie.

"It's almost vertical. When I'm tending to guests, I'm usually at the back of the boat, and in a drift-fishing situation, I like to be able to see the fish finder from there, so we know exactly when to deploy the bait."

He also equipped Shogun with radar.



"The Strait can get pretty foggy, and we often the return from fishing after sunset, so the radar is invaluable".

## Towing

Shogun is not exactly a lightweight (around five tonnes fully loaded including trailer), but despite that, Bennie tows her extensively on a braked, triple-axle Mudgway trailer. He also sometimes opts to go fishing from Milford Sound – a fair distance from the hunting lodge.

The 5.7-litre turbocharged Dodge Ram does the job perfectly. It's Dodge's heavy duty model, with beefed up suspension and transmission.

Having launched at Milford Sound, Bennie usually heads well out to sea – and even with the extensive range from Shogun's 450-litre under-floor tank, he carries extra fuel in drums.

Another destination is the nearby Lake Hauroko (reportedly New Zealand's deepest lake) – a tranquil body of water in the Southland National Park. And because conditions in the Strait were unwelcoming the day we visited, Lake Hauroko is where we took Shogun to put her through her paces.

Barrelling along at 30 knots is not what Bennie ever does in the Strait, but it did give us the opportunity to experience the synchronised grunt from the twin Yamahas.

"They are magical engines," says Bennie. "We're delighted with them – smooth and quiet, the perfect complement to a great boat. The overall package is everything we hoped for – and more."



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## ◀ Tri Duckin

**So if Shogun has been such a success, why has Bennie just invested in a second, smaller Senator – a RH650?**

“Launching issues, mainly. Our local ramp – at Riverton – is very tidal, and we can only launch and retrieve Shogun about three hours either side of high tide. There is a second, much more basic ramp at Garden Bay, but it’s very rocky and launching and retrieving is tricky – especially at dark, and particularly for a boat of Shogun’s size.

***They’re excellent boats – they’re sea-kindly, they inspire confidence and they’re comfortable... those are all very important considerations***

“Another factor is the size of the fishing party. Shogun is rated to carry 12 – but sometimes there are only one or two hunters, and in such cases it seems silly to launch Shogun. A smaller boat was the answer to greater launch flexibility, and after our initial experience with Senator, we ordered the RH650 Special Edition – again with a few modifications such as a pot hauler. We’ve called her Tri Duckin...”

An unusual name, Bennie concedes.

“It’s the name of a dish prepared by many Americans – and it was introduced to us by our clients. They use three deboned birds – usually a turkey, a duck and a chicken. The chicken is stuffed into the duck, which is in turn stuffed into the turkey. Once cooked (with plenty of spices), it is sliced, and you get flavours of three birds in one meal.”

Like her bigger sister, Tri Duckin is a twin rig (two x four-stroke 115hp Yamahas), and is similarly equipped with a pot hauler. She too is built to survey, rated to carry eight (including the skipper). She doesn’t have quite the same sense of unbridled power as her sister, but does offer same smooth ride.

Given that she’s easier to tow, launch and retrieve, however, Tri Duckin has become the boat Bennie tends to use when just he, Kathryn and the children take off for a bit of relaxation.

“They’re excellent boats – they’re sea-kindly, they inspire confidence and they’re comfortable. And where we fish, those are all very important considerations.”



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