

# A truly epic adventure

MATTHEW JONES SPENT A DAY ON BOARD  
WITH THE RULERS OF CORAMANDEL'S  
KINGFISH KINGDOM





**ABOVE** Pretty coastline around these parts, but we weren't here for the view. It was fish on our minds...

**OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** Bart's first day battling kingfish included a few surprises – such as hooking up a marlin! Big fish equal big smiles; The final moments of Bart's marlin fight before it shook free.

“You know you're in for an exciting day when *even the oversized mackerel baits are taking line*”

**L**ocated in the stunning surrounds of Mercury Bay, Epic Adventures calls both Tairua and Whitianga home. But this is no coincidence – along with laidback locals and stunning coastal scenery, both these both locations also hold large numbers of XOS kingfish – if you know where to look.

Due to Epic Adventures' popularity, this trip had been in the works for a few months, patiently awaiting a gap in the schedule of their new vessel Coro King. In the meantime, my mate Bart had casually mentioned that despite regular fishing trips and ticks on the

fishing bucket list, he'd still never caught a legal kingfish. Finally a date became available, and it was with great anticipation that we packed our bags and headed south to the seaside town of Whitianga.

**BAIT FRENZY**

The next morning, we met at the wharf to be greeted by a stunning sunrise and our guides for the day – skipper Owen Wills and Epic Adventures owner Roy Veal. Owen's charismatic wit and Roy's relaxed nature set the tone for a thoroughly enjoyable adventure in good company.

We cast off the dock and joined the

other Epic boats in their pursuit of fresh jack mackerel to fill the livebait tanks. We didn't have to wait long and you know you're in for an exciting day when even the oversized mackerel baits are taking line!

Three anglers catching three fish each time certainly kept Owen on his toes. The without warning, a kingie grabbed Bart's livebait on the way up. He had no chance against a kingfish hooked on a sabiki rig, but already the day had a magic feel to it and it seemed like Bart's luck was in...

Tanks suitably stocked, we plotted a course for Cuvier Island's deep offshore pinnacles.

With much anticipation, the unlucky livies were hooked through the nose, before Owen lined up the drift and instructed “four colours”.

We dropped them into the depths, counting the colour changes of rainbow braid as it spooled off, to ensure the baits were in the target zone.

Bart “the kingfish virgin” had to wait a mere 30 seconds to have his cherry well and truly popped, experiencing the arm-wrenching pull of a solid 15kg kingfish which was quickly placed on ice to satisfy the hunter/gatherer urge and the hungry families back on shore.

Not to be completely undone, I followed suit with a slightly less

**WHAT'S THAT RIG?**

Here's the gear that Epic Adventures uses to tackle the big green freight trains:

- RODS** Ocean Devil 50B ML rod of 200-350g or Composite Developments rods of 150-250g/250-400g.
- REELS** PE7 Jigging Master power spell reel; or Daiwa Saltiga 6500; or Stella 20000.
- LINE** Saltiga 80lb rainbow braid connected to 6m of 140lb Varivas monofilament shock leader (tied with a PR knot (braid to mono)).
- SINKER** 8oz running egg sinker over the shock leader, with heavy-duty swivel tied with a Uni-knot.
- LEADER** 1.5m 120lb fluorocarbon leader tied to swivel with Uni-knot.
- HOOK** High quality 7/0 circle hook tied using Uni-knot.
- BAIT** Attach the jack mackerel (aka yellowtail) livebait by passing the hook through the nose and not the dorsal fin. This way they swim better and are presented to the kingfish more naturally, who gulp them down head first.

*(Much of this gear is available online through Epic Adventures)*



**AUSSIE CONNECTION**

The lure of big kingfish and beautiful scenery has caught the attention of our mates across the ditch. "56% of our total customer base is from Australia. Sydney and Melbourne people just love coming to this beautiful spot here in Whitianga," says Epic Adventures owner Roy Veal. "I understand that if you catch a 10kg kingfish in Sydney it's a big one. "But we tend to call those rats here. We don't even bring them on the boat – as we're so used to catching 20kg-plus kingfish on a fairly regular basis for our customers."

**CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE**

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**GETTING THERE**

DESTINATION	FROM		
	Auckland CBD	Taupo	Tauranga
Whitianga	2h 28m (191 km)	3h 35m (287km)	2h 25m (167km)
Tairua	1h 52m (151 km)	2h 59m (247km)	1h 49m (127km)

*“Owen’s knowledge and perseverance paid off and we finished the day with a double hook-up”*

impressive, yet still sizeable kingfish. High fives all round and another livie was deployed.

**STRIPED SURPRISE**

Bart was soon on again with another solid kingfish and a smile a mile wide. As I began plotting how to discretely swap sides to the “really lucky” side of the boat, there was another drop, but this time Bart’s line began screaming off the reel at an alarming rate of knots.

Cue one very big splash and “It’s a marlin!” cried Bart. All eyes were glued in the direction of the said splash in disbelief, but right on time, an estimated 100kg striped marlin again

showed its aerial prowess behind the boat.

A furious grudge match ensued where Bart’s body, the rig setup and Coro King’s manoeuvrability, stability and fishability were truly tested.

Nearly one hour later, we had it on the leader and things were looking good. But unbeknown to our tired angler, the reel seat had come loose and the reel simply dropped off at the worst possible moment. Despite desperately trying to re-attach it, the marlin seized his moment and with one last run managed to secure his freedom – bugger!

Disappointed yet grateful, we

returned to the pinnacles to continue fishing. The kingies went quiet for a while, but Owen’s knowledge and perseverance paid off and we finished the day with a double hook-up of 20kg-plus fish for the camera, before heading home thoroughly relaxed and truly satisfied.

**MAKING MEMORIES**

I’ve been privileged enough to enjoy many amazing days on the water and caught more than my share of big kingfish, but this day will always rate as one of my all-time greats.

I don’t think Bart will forget that epic day any time soon either. Of course, as

**TOP** A few slabs of smoked kingy are always well-received on the home front.  
**ABOVE** That’s what it’s all about – making people jealous on the dock!  
**BELOW RIGHT** All the gear for a big day out.

**OPPOSITE** it’s easy to see why Epic Adventures choose Senators for its charter boats. These rigs are all business.

far as memories go, treating the family to a feed of freshly smoked kingfish and sharing the story over a cold beer is very hard to beat as well.

Epic Adventures are a great bunch of blokes with top notch gear, a safe and stable ride and an undeniable passion for fishing and for showing their customers a good time. They know where to find the fish and most certainly know how to catch them.

“Every day we catch peoples’ Personal Best kingfish – that’s pretty much a given,” says Roy.

After that amazing adventure, I certainly can’t disagree. ■



Senator RH690



How does it rate?

Senator RH690

1	FUN FACTOR / FISHABILITY	★★★★★★★★★★★★
2	INNOVATION	★★★★★★★★★★★★
3	DESIGN AND LAYOUT	★★★★★★★★★★★★
4	QUALITY OF FINISH	★★★★★★★★★★★★
5	HANDLING AND RIDE	★★★★★★★★★★★★
6	STABILITY AT REST	★★★★★★★★★★★★
7	ERGONOMICS	★★★★★★★★★★★★
8	STANDARD EQUIPMENT	★★★★★★★★★★★★
9	VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★★★★★★★★
10	X-FACTOR	★★★★★★★★★★★★

Average ★★★★★★★★

# Hail to the king

WHEN KINGFISH GURUS EPIC ADVENTURES NEEDED A THIRD CUSTOM VESSEL TO KEEP PACE WITH CUSTOMER DEMAND, SENATOR PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS TO CREATE *CORO KING*

In the competitive world of charter fishing, safety, fishability and reliability are must-have qualities in any good workboat. But when the target species are large, feisty pelagics which lurk on deep offshore pinnacles exposed to wind and swell, then stability and ride rank highly on the priority list as well. That's without even considering that Epic Adventures' charter fleet clocks up an impressive 200 days per year, all the while hell-bent on catching giant

kingfish for their customers. Such dedication requires a rig that can stand up to the rigours of commercial use, excited anglers and stropky green fish on a regular basis. "All our boats are Senators, and that's for a very good reason," Epic Adventures managing director Roy Veal explained. "We think Senators are a tried, trusted and tested type of boat. They've done us well and they look after us well." Of course, the hull only makes up

part of a successful equation – there's also the driving forces at work. "All three boats run identical 250hp four-stroke Yamahas and they've really done us proud," says Veal. "Reliability is key as it's Epic's livelihood. "You can't have these things break down when you're out there and ring the Coastguard – that doesn't work for us. "We have the regular servicing done and they are just so reliable."

**TOP** This RH690's cabin has been shortened for increased fishing room. **ABOVE** The livebait swim happily in large aft tanks, unaware of what the afternoon might hold for them.

**OPPOSITE** The 6mm hull and integrated pontoons work well to create a smooth ride while heading well offshore for another kingy charter mission.

**CUSTOM SATISFACTION** Computer-aided design (CAD) expertise and a customer-driven attitude allows Senator to accommodate elaborate custom builds such as *Coro King*. In this case, the options list was long and distinguished, but the clever blokes from Napier have managed to integrate all these features in an ergonomic, functional and fishable feast. The most notable change from the standard plan was shortening the front cabin to give *Coro King* the same deck space as the larger Senator RH770. And customers generally only use the cabin for storing their gear or using the toilet anyway. When combined

with the RH690's maximum road legal 2.5m beam, the abundance of rod holders, wide parcel shelves with foot holds below, a plus-sized baitboard and brilliant livebait tank system, you have a spacious cockpit that means business. Big kingfish are notoriously fussy eaters, so healthy livebaits are extremely important to ongoing success. Cleverly, Senator custom built a flow-through, dual tank system with twin pumps and integrated tuna tubes. The pumps are externally mounted behind a door for easy cleaning and if one pump fails, the livies will live on. To cater for all angler types, high

bow rails make the pointy end a secure place to fish from, while the bow ladder allows rock and beach drop-offs without fuss. Bluetooth connectivity allows customers to crank their favourite tunes on the Fusion stereo with pumping 200W speakers to set the mood, and a 1.2m underfloor kill tank is tailor made for icing down the resulting catch. **READY FOR ACTION** On the Whitianga wharf at dawn, we were met with the sight of *Coro King's* impressive 17 rod rocket launcher fully stocked with a mouth-watering array of gear. Once on board, skipper



## Highs

- Enjoyable combination of stability and ride
- Seriously tough, yet comfortable
- Extreme customisation available
- So many rod holders, so little time
- Supersized dash
- Brilliant livebait tank system

## Lows

- The striped marlin took one good look at our fishing weapon and bolted!
- Windscreen wiper was temperamental

Owen Wills and Epic Adventures owner Roy Veal made us feel at home as we effortlessly filled the livebait tanks on our way to Cuvier Island, aka kingfish country.

En-route through a variety of sea conditions, the RH690's robust 6mm hull, pontoon stability and moderate 18° deadrise muscled its way through the swell and chop with ease, while we kicked back on the super-sized seats and enjoyed the view (and building anticipation).

Hovering over the deepwater pinnacles, the Furuno TZ Touch came into its own with the Accu-Fish feature giving an indication of individual fish lengths and effectively determining schools of rats from "proper" kingies.

The maximum rated 250hp four-stroke Yamaha felt perfect for the job and resonated refined power as it dished out plenty of push.

*Coro King* has been specially propped for carrying loads of excited anglers and gear, so economy and top end have been sacrificed for down-low torque.

But to give you an idea, here are a few figures from the trip: 7kts @ 2000rpm used 12.2lt/h; 24kts @ 3800rpm used 41.5lt/h and 28kts @ 4500rpm used 70lt/h.

We covered 96nm in a 12 hour day and used 160lt of fuel, which is admirable considering the impressive stability, ride, build quality, and gear on board.

Not forgetting we spent an hour giving it copious amounts of throttle while chasing down a runaway marlin in both forward and reverse, and the outboard wasn't switched off once.

## THE LAST WORD

As the sun set on what was a truly Epic Adventure, I stepped off *Coro King* thoroughly impressed with the functionality, fishability and dependable feel of what is one hell of a good fishing boat.

It's big and seriously strong, with the reassuring stability of a pontoon boat for fishing offshore but also enjoying one of the better rides amongst its rivals. ■

## facts & figures

### Senator RH690

**PRICE AS TESTED**  
\$185,500

### OPTIONS FITTED

Yamaha F250 XCA upgrade with electronic shift control and LAN gauges; UM380 Black Solara VHF; Fusion RA200 stereo; Furuno Navnet 14in MFD; Johnson washdown pump and much, much more.

### PRICED FROM

\$95,000 (Yamaha F200XA and trailer)

### GENERAL

**TYPE** Pontoon monohull  
**MATERIAL** Aluminium  
**LENGTH** 7.13m  
**BEAM** 2.49m  
**WEIGHT** 2080kg (towed weight)  
**DEADRISE** 18°

### CAPACITIES

**BERTHS** 2  
**REC. HP RANGE** 150-250  
**FUEL** 260lt

### ENGINE

**MAKE/MODEL** Yamaha 250hp 4-stroke  
**TYPE** Fuel injected 24-valve DOHC V6  
**WEIGHT** 253kg  
**DISPLACEMENT** 4169cc  
**GEAR RATIO** 1.75:1  
**PROPELLER** 19P SDS Saltwater Series

### MANUFACTURED BY

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