

THE FAMILY FUN BOAT

THAT'S EASY TO USE

The Takacat brand has been around in New Zealand for almost two decades and over that time has gathered a strong following for its wide range of Catamaran RIBs and traditional inflatables both in New Zealand and overseas.

Top features are stability and versatility.

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Designed and developed in New Zealand by Greg Sowden (since 2007), Takacat is the original NZ portable inflatable catamaran manufacturer and has since become a global success with more than 11,000 boats sold worldwide. Not only are they well known, but Takacat is also well awarded, having taken second place for the Altus Most Innovative Boat of the Show award at the 2022 New Zealand Hutchwilco Boat Show with their Takacat T640 Catamaran RIB. Not too shabby

when one considers that the awards were judged based on the most innovative boat, both international and local, exhibited at the show.

I will confess when writing this article, after being out on it for the morning on a fine autumn day at Gulf Harbour north of Auckland, that initially I really hadn't known what to expect. Having been asked to do the 4.6 boat test just before going on a three-week New Zealand road trip with friends from Canada, I had no time to do my usual pre-test research regarding

the boat. Further, now that I'm in full confessional mode, I didn't even appreciate what boat I was actually testing, other than it was a 4.6-metre-long inflatable catamaran Takacat.

As I had recently completed a boat review on a Highfield SP560 (see article on pages 156 – 160), a traditional mono hull RIB, I certainly wasn't expecting the mini-rocket craft that awaited me on the beach at Gulf Harbour! Suffice it to say, the expression "different as chalk and cheese" between the two RIBs, came to mind.

I'll be honest, when I first saw this 'platform' sitting on the sand, I thought, "Oh, oh, maybe I should have brought my 3mm shortie wet suit along, this is looking like I might get wet". But my initial concern and surprised reaction was soon to be changed. As Paul Powney (owner of Takacat NZ) and I pushed the vessel into the water (didn't take much pushing as this is an extremely shallow draft boat) and climbed on board, I asked him to slowly motor out to our test site to demonstrate and tell me a bit about this unusual looking vessel, which at this point from my past

experience, I could only liken to a surf lifesaving type of craft.

Paul explained that their aim was to introduce an affordable family fun boat that was safe and easy to use as well as functioning as a suitable large tender. It had to be fast, efficient, and built tough (think of your teenage kids using this boat). So, the new Takacat LX-R series are built tough with performance in mind. What makes the LX-R's tough is a durable dual plate 3mm alloy deck and central 3mm alloy hull (which isn't really in the water when the

boat is up on the plane – more on this later) married to 1.2 mm TPU (Thermoplastic Polyurethane) welded inflatable tubes. The deck is finished with a durable and easy to clean composite decking material, which also adds to the aesthetics of this otherwise Spartan looking craft. With a beam of 2 metres, the oversized tubes provide exceptional buoyancy and load carrying capacity – this boat is rated to carry up to 8 passengers or a maximum load of 830kg. But what I found unbelievable, was that it is also rated to take up to a 50 HP (36.8 kW) outboard motor! More on this later as well.



Large swim platform showing huge bow locker hatch with anchor rode and fuel tank secured against forward bulkhead.

Houston, we are preparing for launch

Optional trailer provides easy launch/retrieve capability.

Uncluttered, complete, easy to use package.

With ‘how to use’ instructions completed; Paul swapped places with me. Him mid-ships on the starboard side tube and me towards the stern on the port side tube for easy access and use of the throttle and steering arm of the 25 HP Yamaha Four Stroke outboard motor. Speaking of motors, please recall my comment above regarding the fact that this boat is rated for up to a 50 HP motor. Suffice it to say, after playing around on the 4.6 for about an hour, with just two of us on board, the 25 HP Yamaha was more than enough, thank you! In fact, there is so much torque with this motor, that the throttle control can be somewhat ‘twitchy’, and a firm hand and strong arm are required when executing more ‘adventurous’ manoeuvres. The mind boggles as to what this boat would perform like fitted with a maximum 50 hp motor!!! Not for the faint of heart, that’s for sure.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, we encountered an exceptionally beautiful, sunny, tranquil day out on the water. With a smooth sea, it was difficult to find out how this craft would perform in more tumultuous conditions, and we had to satisfy ourselves with finding wakes caused by the numerous large craft exiting the Gulf Harbour marina on this fine Easter Monday, in order to bang this boat about.

But first things first. After a few minutes of experimenting with the throttle and general steering response, I asked Paul to hold on while I executed a dead in the water to full throttle straight line acceleration run. Wow! This small performance platform got up on the plane within several seconds and as a few following runs, authenticated by Paul’s handheld GPS attested, we were hitting over 20 knots in no time, and on one run hit 23 knots. Exhilarating is the expression that came to mind. Envisage excited, happy face emoji here.

Okay I hear you saying, but straight-line runs are one thing, what about agility? My exact thought dear reader. So, after asking Paul if it was okay to give it my darndest, I set out to see if I could throw both of us overboard (slight exaggeration folks) as I proceeded to put the 4.6 through as many tight as possible, high speed turns as I could manage. Both of us hanging on for dear life, this boat refused to endanger us. No matter how tight the turn, whether a tight circle or S-type zigzags, it just stuck to the water like glue, with nary a hint of sliding out of control.

Yay, yay, but what about the rough stuff? Seeing a large launch exit the entrance to the Gulf Harbour Marina and beginning to quickly accelerate, thus throwing up a large wake, we headed aft of its stern to

hammer the RIB through the substantially generated wake waves. Throwing caution to the 20 knot (self generated) wind, we hit the first wave with force and hanging on to both the throttle lever and the safety line fitted along the inflatable tube, I fully expected to have my teeth fillings loosened, but I was most pleasantly surprised by two things. One, the expected spine numbing thump didn’t eventuate and two, my expectation of getting us soaking wet didn’t happen. Must have been a fluke, but no. Further attempts to make visiting a spinal specialist a priority and to also seek a change into dry clothing were not necessary. How did this magic occur?

Slowing the craft down, and idling back to the breakwater where our illustrious photographer was recording our antics, I asked Paul why we were still dry and in one piece?

Simple. It all has to do with the design of the dual plate hull/deck design and the larger than usual inflatable tubes. You will recall that near the beginning of this article I mentioned the part about the alloy hull which isn’t actually in the water when the boat is up on the plane? Therein lies the secret. When we hit the wake wave, the deep-V hull alloy deck design came into play slicing through and providing an air pocket that cushioned the wave impact and, although throwing a lot of water, the large inflatable tubes deflected most of the wave. Just so there is no misunderstanding, as I am oft accused of a certain amount of hyperbole, I would be stretching the truth in saying there was zero hard impact or a no amount of wetness. The point is, both were far less than expected and my spine was none the worse for wear and my clothing remarkably dry.

But allow me to mention a bit more about the clever dual plate hull and deck design. Suffice it to say that the ‘space’ between the hull and deck is, for lack of a better word, hollow. This is most easily seen if you look behind the battery box secured to the transom.

There you will see a large, ‘D’ shaped opening in the deck plate allowing you to observe (when the boat is riding still in the water or at anchor) water in the hull cavity beneath the deck, with a large, unbunged drain hole at the stern of the hull space. What’s this all about? Well, as Paul explained, being a catamaran it’s naturally stable at rest. However, for additional stability the drain port can be opened allowing water to fill the deck cavity through this stern hole, providing an exceptional amount of ballast, ensuring that the 4.6 won’t tip, even with a person standing on one of the inflatable tubes. What a great feature if you are using this boat for fishing, or especially SCUBA diving, when stability exiting the boat or hefting yourself back on board is paramount. So, while divers may elect to heave themselves back into the boat over one of the tubes, an easier option on this craft is to climb in over the bow platform between the inflatable tubes (refer also below). As an inexpensive dive boat, this small inflatable is definitely worth considering and although it can take up to four divers with all their equipment (remember the 830 kg maximum load rating?), it is perfect for just two divers with a safety ‘surface’ person on board. When you are ready to head off again, as soon as the boat gets up on the plane, all that water ballast quickly drains out through the

Up on the plane in seconds and hanging on!

(Below) Ballast water quickly drains as the 4.6 gets up on the plane.





Now that's stability!

large diameter, unbunged stern outlet hole. A bung is provided with the boat for those times that you may not wish to have the hull cavity full of water.

Shallow draft makes beach access a dream.

One of the most popular water sports in New Zealand (as well as many other parts of the world) is sport fishing and the designers have not forgotten about our fisher folk. Rod holders abound, with four rod holders on the stern transom and two up forward, port and starboard of the anchor/storage locker. The interior of this craft is so roomy that four fishers will be able to comfortably enjoy their day without crawling all over each other. The forward locker could easily double as a fish storage tank, about which I have further personal thoughts which I will discuss later, along with the other bow features of the boat.

Well that was fun!

This craft has a unique bow in many ways, and I'm reminded of a manta ray, with its broad gaping mouth between mandibles designed to help it feed on small fish such as krill. Between the inflatable tubes is a large deck tread laminated bow platform that not only houses a large, multipurpose (in my mind) hatched locker, but also an extended tubular alloy rail welded to the bow platform, which serves more than one purpose. The most obvious, referring to diving, is to grab onto it before or after a dive and then utilising it to help you climb back aboard, which I feel is a much better option than climbing over either the port or starboard inflatable tubes. To this end, Paul mentioned that a ladder of sorts could also be hooked to this rail and employed to make getting back into the boat that much easier. You will note in the bow image on

Page 118, that there is also an unobtrusive, welded retrieve ring just aft and below the bow rail for your trailer winch cable to hook onto during boat launch or retrieval. Takacat provides a trailer at an extra cost – see below for details.

However, since I've already made such a big deal about it, let's look at that 'dual purpose' bow locker. Firstly, for a boat this size, the locker and latched hatch lid are comparatively monstrous! Not only is there more than ample room for an anchor and adequate length of anchor rode (anchor locker), but there is also enough room left over to store additional gear such as fishing tackle boxes and other gear (storage locker). Note also that when the lid is closed when the boat is at anchor, there is a small, curved opening on the middle of the forward hatch lid edge (that could frankly do with being a bit bigger) for the anchor rode to sit in when the hatch is closed.

But what about that water in the forward locker? Paul and I discussed this while we were motoring back to the boat ramp. The water does get in there on purpose, as the space between the hull and deck is open and, with a large drain hole at the stern, water floods when the boat is at rest to provide ballast, as explained above. I pointed out to Paul that while the bow locker can be used for storage, things stowed there do get wet. This led to the conclusion that perhaps new builds will have the forward locker sealed with a drain bung, thus completely sealing off the forward locker when desired. Therefore, allowing for the best of both worlds. Ballast when required, dryness when needed.

Before concluding, just a few other small things to be mentioned. The boat is built to ISO and CE Standards and as such, does come equipped with oars and, if needed, an optional inflatable seat can be fitted centrally athwart ships to sit on while rowing. There are a two, full cockpit length 'grab ropes' installed along both the top of and inside of both inflatable tubes. With a "speed demon" craft like this, grab ropes are essential! In addition, there are three carry handles on the outside of both inflatable tubes. The 25-litre portable fuel tank is secured forward against the bow locker bulkhead and the fuel supply tube, encased in protective plastic hose guard coil, is tucked out of the way under the curve of the starboard tube. The battery (for electric outboard motor starting), housed in a strong plastic battery box comes with a BEP battery on/off switch unit mounted to one end of the box. Finally, there are a total of four substantial lifting eyes welded to the transom and the forward locker bulkhead for those owners who want to lift their 4.6 aboard their larger 'mother ship'. All these features, as well as a few more are summarised in the table below.

TAKACAT 4.6 LX-R SERIES TECHNICAL DATA

Standard Features

- 4.6m x 2m x 550mm
- 8 Pax or 830 kgs maximum load
- 1.2mm TPU Inflatable Tubes
- Strong welded seams
- Pressure relief valves on both tubes
- 4 x Air Chambers
- 3mm alloy deck
- 6 x Rod holders
- 2 x Tow eyes welded on the stern for pulling water toys
- Protective rubbing strips along both tubes
- Rubber keel protection
- Non-skid, hard wearing, soft composite decking
- Oars and fitted oarlocks.

Pricing: NZD \$14,995^{incl GST} for standard scope of supply

- Trailer options from NZD \$3,500^{incl GST}
- As tested, a Yamaha 25 hp 4 stroke with electric start, trim and tilt installed NZD \$8995^{incl GST}
- Boat/Engine/Trailer Packages from \$27,495^{incl GST}

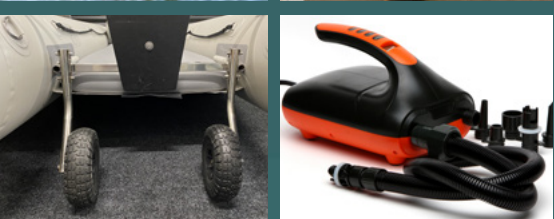
Summary:

Takacat's large diameter tubes and catamaran hull design provide exceptional stability. When you are out on the water, whether boarding from a mother ship or enjoying a spot of fishing or diving, you will really appreciate the stability of the 4.6 LX-R Takacat. There are two other large hull variations available; a 4.2m and a 5.0m and three configurations available in the smaller hull variations, being 3m, 3.4m and 3.8m.

The light weight, low resistance catamaran hull design provides quick and level planning, exceptional stability, and fuel economy. Boasting a shallow draft with loads of buoyancy also allows for extremely shallow water navigation plus the ability to get further up the beach or boat ramp. In short, a family fun boat that's easy to use. ☼

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