



TEST: STESSL 560 SEAHAWK

There's always a story attached to the purchase of any boat, and it usually revolves around the age-old conundrum of matching all of your needs and at least some of your wants with your budget. Human nature being what it is, we're all after a top-shelf boat for a bottom-end price, so the search and eventual decision are generally anything but easy.

Gold Coast boater Elliot Griffen recently made the decision to upgrade from his 4.5m side-console tinnie to something a bit bigger and more suitable for his family. Let's face it: the more comfortable your boat, the more time your family will want to spend with you on it.

His preference was a plate-aluminium boat in the region of 5-6m with a reasonably-sized cabin — something with ample space and good fishability that wasn't too heavy on the hip

pocket. Basically, he needed an all-rounder that could be used for family pleasure, fishing, and even a bit of skiing — and so it came down to a choice between the Stessl 560 Seahawk half-cabin, the Formosa 550 half-cabin and one of the Horizon half-cabins. After lengthy consideration Elliot decided the Stessl ticked all the boxes, and the deal was done.

Why did the Stessl get the nod? Well, firstly good ol' fashioned service played a big part. From what Elliot says, Stessl's new owners certainly gave him plenty of personalised attention. Stessl was bought out in June last year by family members Justyn and Rod and their wives Gloria and Amanda. With Justyn's background in engineering and Rod's in marketing, we're told the company has quickly reached new heights in terms of both quality and design. By the sounds of it, the new Stessl crew really took the time to create the perfect boat for Elliot and his family.



Secondly, the 560 simply had all the necessary attributes to suit the Griffens and of course Elliot's budget, which eventually stretched from the original \$40,000 to around \$50,000 to get exactly what he wanted.



HEY GOOD LOOKIN'

Sporting modern looks, this new 560 half-cabin packs plenty of visual appeal. With its sharp lines and painted hull, it looked like it was just begging for a day on the water, either inshore or further afield. In this tester's opinion painted hulls look far better than the standard mirror look. Aesthetics aside, painted hulls are also far easier to keep clean, which helps when it comes to keeping the dreaded corrosion at bay. If you can afford the extra expense, it's well worth it.

Access to the craft is via the full-length boarding platform, which has a retractable ladder with solid grabrails and even a small transom door to make the job even easier.

Once aboard there's no shortage of space for a boat that's only 5.8m in length. The 560 has a wide beam of 2.48m and an uncluttered deck area, which means there's plenty of

room for the family to move around.

At the stern there's a solid baitboard with rodholders and a built-in plumbed livewell, plus a double-sized lounge that folds up to grant access to the batteries and fittings behind.



The gunwales are nice and high but not too high for the kids when they're fishing, and they have generous sidepockets that are raised up off the deck (they're also handy to lock your feet under when you're fighting The Big One).

The deck is carpeted throughout for extra comfort and it has a decent-sized killtank with drop-in lid. Personally, though, I prefer recessed and hinged lids — I just find them easier to work with, and there's less chance of leaving the lid open.

Moving into the console area, the 560 has dual adjustable pedestal seating with a small flush-mounted hatch/icebox on the deck between the seats. The full-length dash has a small glovebox on the passenger side, while the skipper's side has a full complement of gauges and electronics with space to spare. For extra protection from the elements there's a wraparound screen with full clears and bimini top. This is a

big plus on windy or wet days, and is also great for night fishing during the cooler months.

STEP INSIDE

The cabin's entrance can be open, but in this case Elliot had opted for a canvas panel with a zippered door. This simple add-on has many benefits, not the least of which are privacy and of course protection from the elements (and those bloody insects!) when overnighting. Even better, it simply clips off when you don't want it.



The ample space inside the cabin can be configured as a seating area or, with the central infill in place, a full bed. The 560 comes with a Porta-Potti as standard, which I'm sure you can imagine is a handy item for when the ladies or kids come along for the ride.

With the Stessl's fully protected cockpit and cabin, I can see Elliot spending many more hours on the water, with or without his family. At least if things get a little rough you can quieten the kids down in the cabin — fit a 12V accessories socket and plug in a DVD player and you won't hear a peep out of 'em. And let's not forget the "other" benefit of having a cabin, when the fish aren't biting and the kids aren't around (but the missus is). The 560's hull is supremely stable when at rest, and I'm sure it can handle a little rocking without losing its composure...

From the cabin you can access the bow through a cabin hatch or outside via the gunwales. I did find the latter route a little daunting, however, because the painted surfaces are slippery. Fresh, shiny paint with a touch of water is a recipe for breakdancing, so I'd definitely be adding some non-slip material to finish things off. At the bow there's a standard open anchor hatch with split bowrails on either side, plus bowsprit and roller.

ON-WATER PERFORMANCE



Fitted with a Suzuki DF140, the 560 had more than enough power to get the job done, while its standard hydraulic steering meant the craft was both smooth and simple to operate. The motor was set up nicely, with good torque out of the hole in super-tight turns, and with that typically Suzuki-smooth transition up to a top speed of 35.5kts (65.7kmh) within the Gold Coast Broadwater.

The 16° variable deadrise hull makes the 560 super stable, without adversely affecting its ride. It's one of those unavoidable compromises — you sacrifice one for the other — but in this case the extra stability is called for as there are often small kids onboard.

The ride was great in moderate conditions but it did bang a

bit once offshore as it tackled the chop left over from the previous night's wind. If you're usually in one hell of a rush offshore, this boat mightn't be for you when things roughen up — but if you're happy to cruise at a more civilised pace, then I'm sure it will be more than adequate.

THE WRAP

Plate-aluminium boats generally carry quite a price premium compared to their standard pressed-aluminium siblings, and starting at \$42,990, the Stessl 560 Seahawk half-cabin fits more into the entry-level plate-aluminium boat bracket. However, for your money you'll be getting a strong build, the safety of under-deck foam-floatation, and too many standard features to mention.

They all add up to good value for money.

A few cosmetic improvements like touching up welds here and there and adding some non-slip material would take it to the next level, with minimal fuss or expense. But at the end of the day buying a boat is all about getting the best deal for your bucks, and this Stessl — being suitable for both inshore and offshore applications and also a manageable towing proposition — has much to offer.

On the plane...

- Well-priced plate-aluminium family boat
- Decent space to lock feet under sidepockets
- Open, uncluttered deck space
- Canvas cabin door
- Long list of standard inclusions

Dragging the chain...

- Lack of non-slip tape
- Welds could be neater and better finished
- Exposed fuel hose in gunwale (would be better if it was hidden)

PERFORMANCE

- 7kts (13.0kmh) @ 1500rpm
- 10kts (18.5kmh) @ 2500rpm
- 17kts (31.5kmh) @ 3300rpm
- 26kts (48.2kmh) @ 4500rpm
- 31.9kts (59.1kmh) @ 5500rpm
- 35.5kts (65.7kmh) @ 6100rpm (WOT)
- 31kts (57.4kmh) @ 6100rpm (WOT, against the current)

Specifications: **STESSL 560 SEAHAWK HALF-CABIN**

HOW MUCH?

Price as tested: \$49,490

Options fitted: Transom door, in-floor killtank, bait station, plumbed livebait tank, hull colour, bunk infill, twin batteries, Fusion stereo, Lowrance Elite-5 with Aus map, twin-12V power sockets, cabin privacy screen, cabin hatch flyscreen, cabin fan, front and side canopy clears, Suzuki DF140TX upgrade

Priced from: \$43,490 (with Suzuki DF115TX)

GENERAL

- Type: Half-cabin
- Material: Plate-aluminium
- Length (LOA): 5.80m
- Beam: 2.48m
- Hull weight: Approx. 650kg (dry)
- Deadrise: 16°

CAPACITIES

People: 7

Rec. HP: 115
Max. HP: 140
Fuel: 150lt

ENGINE

Make/model: Suzuki DF140TX
Type: DOHC 16-valve
Weight: 186kg
Displacement: 2044cc

MANUFACTURED BY

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