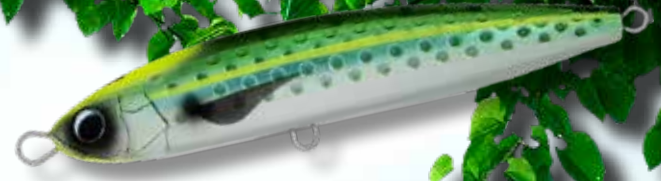




WORDS and IMAGES  
The Captain



# Sound Off!

Senator Boats have been around since 1996. And you know what? We've never been aboard one before. But all of that is about to change. At The Captain's disposal are two seriously specced RH770s, skippered by two of the best fishos in these waters. Oh, and did somebody say monster kingfish on topwater?







**OUR DIGGS:**  
The Te Rawa Lodge in Marlborough Sounds is seriously special.

**“The lodge is base camp for our fishing mission and just getting here has been an adventure on its own.”**



**MEET THE LADS:**  
Dan Govier (left) and Mark Cotton are both Senator RH770 owners. Time to hit the road.



**MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS, NEW ZEALAND**

**W**e're sipping beers at the Te Rawa Lodge in Marlborough Sounds. Although it looks and feels like we're back in the remote Alaskan wilderness, we're actually at the very top of New Zealand's South Island. It's seriously spectacular country — ancient sea-drowned valleys surrounded by dense forest. If you check it out on the map, it's a maze of islands that would take a lifetime to fully explore. Unfortunately, we only have a couple of days to uncover its secrets, but we're in expert hands. Say kia ora to Mark Cotton and Dan Govier, both Senator RH770 owners and weapons on the fishing front.

Mark runs a fishing YouTube channel, on which he posts his adventures. Might we add that 30kg-plus kingfish are a pretty usual occurrence on his page. An environmental consultant and son of a commercial longliner, Dan's love for fishing runs deep. As you might imagine, he's also pretty good at filleting fish.

The lodge is base camp for our fishing mission and just getting here has been an adventure on its own. We started with a flight into Wellington, followed by a twin-prop plane ride to Nelson. From there, we linked up with the lads and hit the road eastward to the small town of Havelock, at the head of Pelorus Sound. The 770s were loaded and launched before undertaking the final leg, a 15nm cruise through the glassy sound. Yep, although we haven't even touched a rod yet, we've certainly earned a beer.





**SHOT IN THE DARK**

The next morning, we're up at 3am, our sights set on an area called Stephens Passage. It's a 90-minute run from the lodge in pitch black, but Mark and Dan want to be there for sunrise, to see if we can tempt a few big kings to eat off the topwater. We're starting the morning on Mark's 770, for no other reason than he told us his boat is loaded with the best snacks — sold. His rig also rocks an incredible Lumishore lighting set-up, which we're drawn to like a couple of dim-witted moths. Once aboard, we settle into a cosy corner of the cabin, munching on cheesy pastries while Mark plots his course through the labyrinth on the Simrads. Also aboard is Mark's old man, affectionately (Captain's note: we think) known as "Knackers" — a nickname he picked up working on Aussie cattle stations. He reckons throwing stickbaits is a young man's game, but can certainly still drink beers like a young buck. We head into the black abyss, the lack of any artificial light in the sounds making it an eerie and exciting run north. There are no other boats, no people, no phone reception and our rugged adventure vibes are peaking.

Halfway there, the radio crackles to life. It's Dan with the weather report. "The forecast is still looking good, Mark," he says. "But with the outer Marlborough Sounds, they can forecast one thing and it'll do something completely different."

Soon after, we're out of the protection of the sound and in open water. There's minimal swell, a light breeze and the boys breathe a sigh of relief.

(ABOVE) RED LIGHT DISTRICT: Mark's RH770 has an insane Lumishore lighting set-up. Very handy for 3am missions.

(ABOVE) THE KNACK FOR IT: Mark's old man, Knackers, loves the dickie seat in the RH770's cockpit. The only time he'd leave his post is to grab a fresh beer — legend.

"Once aboard, we settle into a cosy corner of the cabin, munching on cheesy pastries while Mark plots his course through the labyrinth on the Simrads."



### BATTLING BEASTS

As the sun starts to rise, we approach the kingfish grounds. "Looking good," Mark says. "Lots of current is pushing from east to west with the incoming tide. That'll force the nutrients up to these pressure edges around the islands and attract the plankton, bait fish, kahawai and, hopefully, big kings."

We're in 40m of water and running a drift across a bank that comes up to 20m. Mark has a selection of stickbaits, poppers and jigs rigged up and ready to rumble. In fact, his boat has more fishing gear than our local tackle store. Choice, bro.

Mark is first on the tools, lobbing his stickbait long while Knackers provides commentary from the sidelines. "Well, that's a shit cast, Mark!" he sniggers.

"Shut up, Dad," Mark replies just before a kingie smashes his lure, knocking the wind out of his sails. He hangs on for dear life in the starboard corner of the cockpit, the long stickbaiting rod giving him little leverage to turn the head of the big fish. After a five-minute huff and puff, an 18kg king is in the boat and we're all cheering.

"I wasn't quite ready for him, but you never really are," Mark says. "This is just a baby, but it's a good start to the morning."

Too excited to keep watching from the sidelines, it's time for The Captain's crew to get into the mix. We follow Mark's lead, sending the stickbait over the ledge. A dozen casts and a few long sweeps of the rod later and there's an explosion of white water. A kingie has launched completely out of the water to broadside our lure, Spanish-mackerel-style. That's a first.

"Holy fug," is all we manage to grunt before the big dog is heading back towards the bottom like an anchor in a pair of cement boots. The Captain's lower back is cooking and his legs shaking like maracas as Mark jumps on the wheel and slowly drives the fish away from the reef. Ten minutes later, an even bigger fish comes over the gunwales and into our arms for a cuddle. It's a thick 25kg model and a Captain PB — on topwater, no less.

"The kings around here are really girthy, a bit like me," Mark laughs as we release the bruiser to fight another day.



**(ABOVE) THE BATTLE BEGINS:** Mark hooks into an 18kg model on the topwater outfit. This place just might be kingfish heaven.



**CAGE MATCH:** Dan's first mate, Adam Marshall from Marine and Outdoors, utilises the RH770's caged swim platform to tame a kingie.



**BIG DOG:** Jack with a 25kg slab of kingfish. This monster launched out of the water to inhale a stickbait.

**"I wasn't quite ready for him, but you never really are."**





“The Captain’s two cents on Senator after a couple of days aboard? Very impressed.”

### SENATE INQUIRY

All kingied out, we decide to jump over to Dan’s boat and have a bottom drop out wide. Unfortunately, the hapuku aren’t biting and neither are the snapper. It doesn’t matter, nothing is wiping the smile off our faces today. We cruise back into the lee of the islands and get stuck into lunch. Dark horse Dan has whipped up an absolute feast on the down low. Out of the oven comes a quiche, meat pies and pulled pork sangas. Can this day get any better?

A closer inspection of Dan’s boat after lunch reveals just how much he has packed into his rig. “The few extra home comforts helped me get it over the line with the wife,” he explains.

Mark’s boat, on the other hand, is rigged for hardcore fishing. That’s what’s cool about Senator builds, the customer customisations are off the charts. These blokes’ 770s are completely different rigs.

The Captain’s two cents on Senator after a couple of days aboard? Very impressed. Everything looks rugged and over-engineered. We’ve seen these sleds being used by commercial operators for years and can see why. They’re pontoon boats, which means they’re super-stable. The 770s have got sharp points of entry into the water and a variable deadrise hull that runs back to 18 degrees on the transom. Soft-riding in a head sea? Check. Predictable in a following sea? You betcha. Killer fit-out? Chef’s kiss. And all you Aussies will be happy to hear they’re 2.49m wide and have a tow weight of under 3.5 tonne, including fuel and all the gear. Plate thickness is 6mm on the hull, a 4mm floor and 3mm pontoons. These rigs mean business.



**MARK’S MACHINE:**  
Mark’s RH770 is a certified fishing weapon. He has done a brilliant job in setting up his boat.



### INFAMOUS

Mark and Dan have been suckers for Senators for years. Prior to upgrading to their respective RH770s, they both had RH650s. “They were fraternal twins,” Mark says. “The same model, but set up completely different to suit each of our fishing styles. The same goes with our RH770s — the same boat, but worlds apart.”

Some highlights on *Infamous*, Mark’s rig, include his custom-designed slide-out drawers, which match the size of his Shimano tackle boxes. It’s totally OCD, but we’re loving it. Also in the cab is a foldaway cooktop and 70L Dometic fridge. Just remember not to leave the milk in there unrefrigerated again, eh Mark? Sorry mate, we’re going to have to deduct some points due to the cabin smelling so horrible.

But back to business. Electronics-wise, Mark has a Simrad NSS16 evo3 and NSS12 evo3 on the dash and an NSS9 evo3 in the cockpit. These are running through an S5100 sounder module to TM275LH-W and Active Imaging 3-in-1 transducers. For eyes in the sky, he’s running the Simrad Halo 20 radar. A super-cool addition to the helm are the custom rocker switches that glow in the dark. Mint.

Out in the cockpit, the double-stacked side pockets are a win, as is the bait board, which is super-beefy and features a slide-out drawer for tools. Another cool feature of the bait board is the LED strips mounted inside. “This allows me to charge up my glow lures for bottom dropping and night fishing,” Mark says.

Speaking of fishing, Mark has 53 rod holders. No shit — we counted them. “There are 23 on the hardtop, 10 on each gunwale, 10 on each pocket and 10 across the back,” he says proudly.

Powering the whole kit and caboodle is a 300HP V6 Yamaha — with HelmMaster to boot. Pair that with the beefed-up 460L fuel tank and Mark gets a 550km range at 20 knots.







**DAN DOMINATES:**  
Dan's RH770 is loaded with creature comforts, including a full hot-water system.

**AQUADEZIAC**

On board Dan's *Aquadeziac*, the options list is even bigger. "I love fitting out and customising boats," he says. "Each boat I own, I learn and improve on. I reckon I'm pretty close to perfect with my 770."

When it comes to creature comforts, Dan has it dialled. The Challenger Califont hot-water system, fed from a 150L freshwater tank, means hot showers are all systems go. The system is also plumbed into the foldaway sink, so you clean dishes with hot water on the fly. A flushable head in the bow keeps the fam happy and the bow-mounted boarding ladder makes beach landings a breeze. Powering the rig is another 300HP Yamaha, also with HelmMaster. These boys love their Yammies and we agree it's the perfect pairing.

Dan has an extensive onboard electronics package. He's wielding dual Furuno displays, with 19in and 12in units running through two transducers, a 1k/W TM275 and a DFF3D triple-beam. "The multi-beam is pretty awesome tech," he says. "It shows a swath underneath the boat at 120 degrees — 40 degrees below, 40 degrees to port and 40 degrees to starboard. If you see a school of fish on one side of the boat, you can touch the screen to drop a pin and then just make your way over."

That's not to forget the FLIR camera up top for night missions. Other electronics include an 87in Minn Kota Terrova powered by a single 36-volt lithium battery. "This set-up saves me about 70kg in equivalent battery weight if I was running AGMs," Dan says. "It's mounted low and central up towards the bow, so it doesn't alter the behaviour of the boat."

When asked what he loves most about his boat, Dan is all about the ride. "I can't fault the ride of a Senator," he says. "They're very soft into a sea, thanks to their fine entry. If you launch off the top of a wave, you don't grit your teeth waiting for a loud bang. The same goes in a following sea. They're incredibly safe and I've never had that feeling like it's going to broach on me."



"They're very soft into a sea, thanks to their fine entry. If you launch off the top of a wave, you don't grit your teeth."

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**Dan sums it up. "You just can't fault Senator, everything they build is fantastic."**



**(ABOVE) SHAKE AND BAKE:** The trip highlight for Nick from The Captain's crew wasn't the giant kingfish or the sexy Senators. It was without a doubt, Dan's baked delights.

**ONE-STOP SHOP**

It's hard to say which boat The Captain would be taking home, given the choice. Mark's is set up for hardcore fishing, while Dan's can be configured from fishing to family overnighting. We think we'll go with Dan's rig, purely because of how bad Mark's cabin stank after the stale milk incident. Sorry mate, although maybe it was worth it to catch that big kingfish!

Senator boats ride the line between a production and custom build beautifully. They can suit anyone, from the first-time boat owner, to the fastidious dude wanting a specific fit-out, or the commercial operator. The range extends from 3.8m tillers to 8.6m hardtops — and they can also make them amphibious.

Dan sums it up. "You just can't fault Senator, everything they build is fantastic. As you've seen with our two boats, they can accommodate whatever you need, based on how you use your boat. That's why I love them."

Too true, mate. Thanks for the adventure (and the PB), lads.



**Boat specs**

**SENATOR RH770**

- Length overall: 7.93m
- Beam: 2.49m
- Towing weight: 2250kg (approx)
- Fuel capacity: 310L
- Deadrise at transom: 18°
- Pontoon thickness: 3mm
- Hull thickness: 6mm
- Maximum HP: 400HP

**ENGINE SPECS**

- Model: Yamaha F300
- Type: 24-valve DOHC V6
- Displacement: 4.2L
- Weight: 263kg

**PRICE**

- 770 enclosed cabin, base overnighting spec, 300HP outboard with twin-axle trailer: \$250,000 (approx)
- Infamous: \$335,00 (approx)
- Aquadeziac: \$375,000 (approx)

**MORE INFORMATION**

Senator Boats  
21 Hamilton Place, Onekawa, Napier,  
New Zealand  
+64 6 843 6882. senatorboats.com

**THUMBS UP**

- Very nice-riding rigs with killer stability
- Awesome layout with stacks of storage
- Great dash set-ups with lots of spots for phones and keys
  - Great lockable cabin
- Options for epic creature comforts like gas ovens and hot showers — Dan's boat had both
  - Plethora of handrails
- Great Lumishore lighting set-up on Mark's machine
- Double-stacked side pockets FTW
- Massive swim platform with cages — lets you utilise the entire boat when fishing

**THUMBS DOWN**

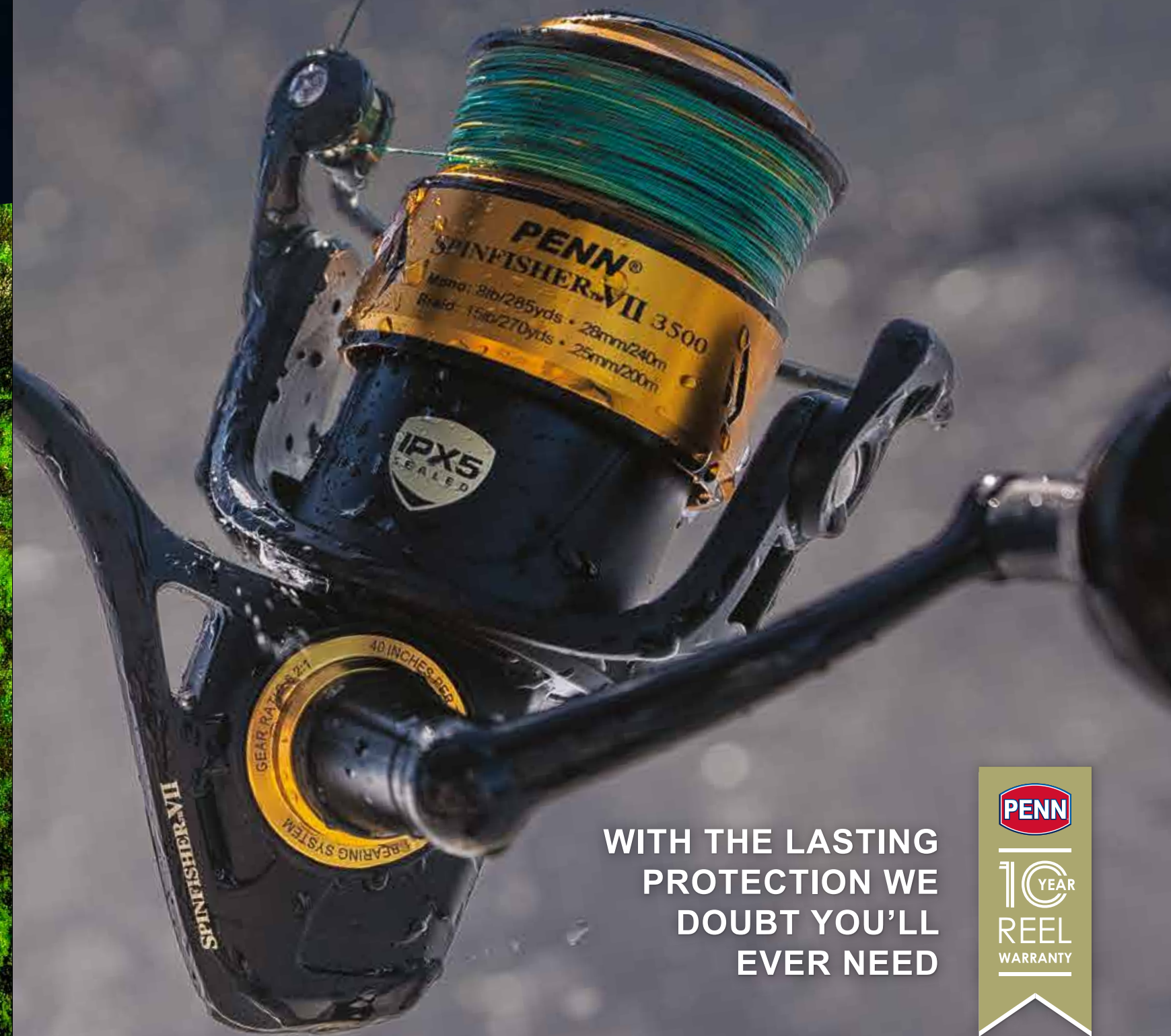
- Aesthetic design hasn't really moved with the times
- Would be good to see the speakers in the cockpit recessed into the hardtop rather than in boxes
- Weld quality was amazing in all areas, except for Dan's bait station — the manufacturer tells us that this was only the case due to it being a prototype and has since been designed out



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