

1998 WINNER

WHITTLEY SEA LEGEND 6.3

by Graham Lloyd

The Melbourne-based Whittley-family boat building company has long been recognised for its amazing cruising designs that pack enormous facilities into the chosen hull length. Construction and fit-out quality have always been strong points for the marque as well, but perhaps there was an image of conservatism in Whittley boats and a feeling that their boats were best used in sheltered waters. Having some time ago run one of their cruisers with excellent results on a very bumpy Port Phillip Bay, I already knew that the latter point was a furphy and that the Whittley team designed and built their boats to run in conditions that would typically have the crew worried before the boat started to approach its limits. The conservative styling topic possibly could be argued more persuasively (not that that's necessarily an issue) but, if it could have been argued in the past, it has certainly been blown away by the latest Sea Legend fleet.

These are good looking boats that come in a range of sizes to suit most requirements and budgets. There's 5 and 7.3 metre versions of the Sea Legend, but it was the mid-size (still looks big to me!) 6.3 metre craft that won this year's Family Class in the Boat Of the Year Awards. It's closer in layout to its 7.3 big sister than to the smaller 5 metre, and packs just an enormous amount of facilities and storage into its length.

Upfront is a comfortable cabin complete with a concealed portable toilet. Sidepockets and other storage take care of personal items, and an overhead hatch gives light and ventilation, plus provides access to the foredeck and anchor locker. The cockpit has a stack of features that take a while to absorb and appreciate. The first though is quite dominant, in a great helm position. There's an excellent array of gauges in clear line of sight and augmented by a matching



pair of Lowrance electronic units — an X85 Fish Finder and a Global Map 2000 GPS Chart Plotter. The one disappointment was a non-adjustable helm seat, although I did find the fixed position to be reasonably comfortable for driving when sitting down (it was a bit cramped for standing to drive though). Typical of thoughtful touches throughout the Sea Legend, a couple of carpeted recesses behind the screen were perfect for keeping small personal items where they were safe while cruising along and handy to grab when needed.

Both the driver and first mate seats are supportive buckets that are mounted on moulded bases containing massive storage areas. The aft ends of the bases have padded seats too that lift up for access into the storage areas. There was another pair of fold-down (or removable) quarter seats at the back of the cockpit, and a hatch in the sole (under a clip-out carpet) that revealed another big stowage space. Large sidepockets have brackets for rods, and it was good to see clever inclusions like step pads for boarding more easily, drink holders in convenient locations

and grab handles for the aft-facing and rear quarter seats.

At the back of the cockpit, beneath a hinge-forward hatch, was neatly mounted the MerCruiser 4.3 litre EFI sterndrive that gave quite lively performance. Despite all the seating and facilities, there was still room aplenty to move around in the cockpit. The transom area was laced with goodies too. Boarding platforms, stowage spaces and a food or bait prep board, a swim ladder and shower were all tucked away for handy use.

The Sea Legend lifted on plane with no trouble at all, and gave a delightful ride with nice responses to helm and throttle. The boat's manners in rougher waters were also a treat, and the design would clearly be comfortable in offshore conditions. From a family-use aspect, the Whittley has added value in its versatility. Cruising, fishing, relaxing and entertaining are obvious applications, plus it would easily pass muster as a tow boat for anyone wanting to try out a ski, wakeboard or any of the many water toys now available. The quality of construction and finish was pleasing too.