



A protected wheelhouse is just one of the reasons you'll want to take this big flagship of the Northbank range on bluewater adventures. Test report by JAMES HILL.

Northbank

The hardtop cabin is a sensible solution for offshore fishermen especially when the weather gets cold and the seas get ordinary. And you only have to look at local trawler fleets to see how the wily professional fishos love wheelhouses.

We amateur fishos have taken a little longer to adopt the hardtop concept with our boats. Part of the reason is you need a fairly big boat to accommodate the bulk of a hardtop cabin and builders prepared to do such boats!

Well, finally we are starting to see some really nice hardtop trailer boats. Northbank of Adelaide is a good example of the trend. It's a fibreglass builder that specialises in tough, practical, deep Vee boats for offshore fishing. With the fish-rich waters of Gulf St Vincent on their doorsteps, it's no surprise Adelaide fishos go for these true blue, offshore boats with plenty of enthusiasm.

Northbank Boat's released their first hardtop – the 650 HT model – last year, but have now released the much bigger Northbank 750 HT for those longer-range fishing adventures.

As the photos show, the design of the Northbank 750 HT provides an 'open backed' design to the cockpit. Combined with side-sliding windows and an overhead hatch, this provides

effective cross-flow ventilation on hot summer days.

The design works well because it gives you both good sun cover in summer, plus shelter and warmth during the colder months of the year.

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of test driving the new Northbank flagship on her home waters. The boat had been custom fitted for a local client by the dealer Christies Beach Marine, which is the exclusive South Australian agent for Northbank.

The weather was windy and rainy but as soon as I saw the big, red-hulled Northbank I knew all would be OK. No matter the sea conditions the big red Northbank would handle it with ease.

And we weren't short on power either, with twin Verado 225hp four-stroke outboards gracing the transom. With this firepower you could start Gulf War Mark III!

Frankly, most buyers won't need anywhere near this power, however, it

was still fun to take this beast out for a blast on the cold, grey Gulf waters.

As I soon found, this is a powerful craft that can handle virtually anything offshore. In water, the Northbank weighs something in the region of 2.3 tonnes so feels more like a motor cruiser than a trailer boat.

The test craft was fitted with a full suite of Furuno electronics, including a big, colour GPS chartplotter, radar and deep water colour sounder. The kit also included the advanced Mercury SmartCraft fly-by-wire steering system that delivers finger-light steering and throttle control. Fly-by-wire is in a different league to normal steering systems and ensures less driver fatigue on a long offshore haul.

There didn't seem to be an auto-pilot aboard, however, it's definitely something you could justify on a boat of this calibre. Remember, all your electronics are protected by the hardtop while below you have a comfortable, lockup two-berth cabin to stow gear out of the way.



750 HT

I was amazed that this was the fourth Northbank 750HT already built since the design was launched, and more were on order. This is quite remarkable given the price tag is anywhere from \$135,000-\$195,000!

Yet I can see why some wealthy fishos are forking out for this maxi Northbank. Being fully trailerable makes the Northbank 750 HT much more versatile than a moored sport fisher like a Bertram 26. The Northbank meets the road trailing limit of 2.5m so she can be trailed overnight to reach new fishing destinations and tournaments. And despite her size, you could moor her at home for maintenance and lower cost storage.

If you are picking up the boat ex-Adelaide, a basic BMT package with a single 300hp Suzuki kicks off at about \$135,000, while the test boat seen here with a full set of electronics and an offshore safety package comes to \$192,000.

Design: The big Northbank features a clean, classic deep Vee styling that really never ages. And that constant deep Vee underbody ensures an excellent wave-cutting shape with a transom deadrise of 21 degrees.

The high sides and cambered decks are topped by an attractive, fibreglass hardtop nicely matched to the hull.

Overall hull length is 7.6m, including the moulded bowsprit. This is matched by a 2.5m beam and quite high freeboard with built-up deck sides above the gunwales.

Whilst it looks a traditional deep Vee, the Northbank also has a modern rounded keel to ensure she comes fairly quickly to plane. There's also a wide lifting flats under the chines and several sharp lifting strakes to improve water flow and spray deflection.

A square-cut transom ensures maximises stability for fishing and also the buoyancy to support twin motors when fitted.

There are moulded landing steps at the stern plus a stainless steel ladder with grab rail. You can also order a walk-through transom, however, only on the single-engine version.

The finish is nice and includes attractive embossed decals. She is solidly built in fibreglass with plenty of hand-laid rovings in the layups it's no surprise the hull weighs in at 1650kg.

The final trail weight is up around the 3000kg mark with engines and trailer included. This demands a decent tow rig like the new Nissan Patrol, Toyota LandCruiser, Ford F250 or the Toyota Tundra, which is imported here by Performax.

With a total road height of 3.2m you won't get the Northbank 750 HT under the average garage but it could be kept outside with the right covers fitted. You can put storm boards, or cover over the cabin entrance plus a fitted storm cover over the cockpit. Alternatively, if you don't have the parking space at home you could



leave her at a nearby storage centre, or a marina rack-and-stack.

Performance: As the photos show, this wasn't the nicest day for boating, however, with that comfortable wheelhouse we had a nice place to escape the rain and enjoy a coffee.

As expected, the big 750HT is an absolute master of rough conditions and with toughened glass windows and wipers she can be pushed hard. That said, there's only so much you could do in the steep seas we encountered. In these conditions we found it best to keep top speed somewhere around 30 knots.

I gave her full throttle in the flatter water inshore and we quickly jumped to 40 knots. However, I was concentrating too hard on the steering to check if we reached 50 knots. But believe me – she is capable of that speed and is a rocket ship with power to burn.

Underway, the big deep Vee rode nicely over the swell and tracked beautifully to course steered.

Occasionally, we jumped off the back of a wave but the ride was pretty good and confirmed the Northbank is a very solid boat and the hardtop does a great job of keeping yourself and your crew dry.

At times it felt like I was at the helm of a Navy Destroyer as we dipped into one particularly large grey swell, however, never was it of concern as green water splashed over the foredeck!

It was a little wetter out of the cockpit as rain squalls swept across the water, but all the time I was glad I could escape back into the covered wheelhouse.

Like the previous test of the Northbank 600, I found this boat hard to fault on handling. I was expecting some roll effect from the wheelhouse but it never seemed to affect the craft's stability or handling.

The twin motor don't need trim tabs, however, if you buy the standard single motor rig the factory fits Lenco electric trim tabs to cater for any problems.

And talking of handling, the steering position is just great with the big well-padded pedestal seat supported by gas-assisted struts. You also get stainless steel foot-bars and a stainless steering wheel.

The helm vision is also excellent thanks to the big glass window and electric wipers.

The standard boat comes with hydraulic steering and there is a sloped instrument dash with plenty of room available for instruments. There are no less than 16 switches for all the electrics!

Smaller size sounder/chartplotters are flush mounted into the dash, but the larger size ones are top-mounted on the dash like in the test boat.

On the passenger side you find an equally comfortable pedestal seat, grab rails, lockable glovebox and two side lockers.

Power: The Northbank 750 HT is rated for motors up to 450hp, using



the twin 225hp motors. However, the normal power choice is single 300hp Suzuki DF300 four-stroke.

Another alternative would be twin 175hp V6 motors. It would great to see how the boat performed with these different motor options; however she sure is super fast with the twin Mercury Verado 225hp as the following speed readings attest:

3500rpm	26 knots
4000rpm	28 knots
4500rpm	36 knots
5500rpm	43 knots

We didn't really have the chance to run the boat for any length of time flat-out but previous tests show a speed of 50 knots at 6000rpm.

The majority of buyers won't need to go this fast so the single Suzuki 300hp V6 would be the answer. I suspect this would deliver top end speeds still up around 38 knots with a mid-cruising speed about 22-25 knots.

I didn't even bother with fuel figures because it wouldn't have been fair to record them in these conditions, however, assuming you're running modern clean tech motors you should get a pretty decent range on one fill.

As standard there's a 350-litre in-floor fuel tank, but our test boat had the optional twin tanks with a total 575-litres capacity. Sensibly, these have separate fuel lines to make the fuel supply more secure.

The Northbank is a very well equipped boat and comes with heavy-duty wiring for power feed and all electric accessories. There are also twin auto heavy-duty bilge pumps, triple battery system and a full wire harness. You also get LED Nav and cabin lights.

Deck layout: Starting from the business end you get a moulded fibreglass bowsprit with Teflon twin anchor roller. You also get T-bollard and a big anchor locker with optional Stress Free anchor winch fitted below decks.

The cambered foredeck is surrounded by a really solid stainless steel bow rail. The cabin goes virtually full width so you get access into the boat via the big, glass-topped foredeck hatch.

Meanwhile, the cabin provides a roomy living space with double-banked, padded backrest/shelves and a twin Vee berth.

You also get toughen-glass windows in the moulded fibreglass wheelhouse and sliding side windows.

The bridge area provides plenty of dash space for extra electric and or spreading out paper charts. Hereabouts you also get drink holders for the driver and passenger.

The cabin has a flow coat finish and nice black vinyl on the cushions. It's not a super glamorous interior but one that is very comfortable and will suit the keen enthusiasts.

The cockpit features a serviceable flow-coated finish plus moulded big side pockets with massive capacity for fishing gear. As standard it comes



with a folding three-seater lounge and optional snap-in floor carpet, but neither was fitted to the test boat.

Overall, there is over five metres square of free working area. This is very much a blank canvas on which to work. For instance, a sport fisho might add a game chair, or central bait-preparation bench, while a snapper fisho will possibly add the big central snapper box.

And if you are more into family boating you would most likely keep the lounge and floor carpet and may add a few other creature comforts like an extended rear awning off the back of the hardtop.

From a fishing perspective the deep, self-draining cockpit is excellent for hauling big pelagics. You get four rod holders standard but extra holders can be added. Another factory option is a Top Shot outriggers system mounted on cabin sides. And another feature offshore fishos might to add is the livebait station and optional underfloor foam flotation.

The Northbank also comes with a stainless steel overhead rod rack and recessed grab rails. There's also recessed mooring cleats and side grab rails on the cabin.

Verdict: I like the way Northbank has produced a craft that's built solid in fibreglass yet is practical and non-fussy. It's strongly oriented to serious offshore fishing yet will be quite easily adapted to general family and social boating needs as well.

The wide wheelhouse design and big, open cockpit is a very different approach to the type of boat we see from the USA but I maintain it is much closer to what suits Australian boating.

If it's really blowing dogs off chains on the ocean you can head the Northbank into the sea and keep on fishing!

The standard boat gives you very comfortable seating but this shouldn't stop an owner expanding on the creature-comforts. For starters, I'd add a small chemical loo in the cabin, a

stereo/radio sound system and a small gas cooker for heating up the soup and the coffee on cold days. You wouldn't go overboard with the 'goodies' but just a few creature comforts would make this boat a home-away-from-home on offshore fishing trips.

Verdict – if you want to have that one last crack at bluewater fishing, this is the Aussie boat to make that dream come true.

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BOAT TEST ANALYSIS

Boat supplied with twin 225hp Mercury Verado 4-strokes, SmartCraft power steering, Easy Tow dual-axle braked trailer, twin fuel tanks, foam-filled hull, custom stainless steel railing and radar tower, tripe batteries, Furuno electronics including radar. Price \$192,000 from Christies Beach Marine SA ph 08 8387 6411.

SPECIFICATION CHART

	Northbank	Haines Hunter	Sea Legend	Hooker	Bar Crusher
Brand	Northbank	Haines Hunter	Sea Legend	Hooker	Bar Crusher
Model	750HT	760 Enclosed	SL26	6.7 WRC	760HT
Material	fibreglass	fibreglass	fibreglass	fibreglass	alloy
Style	hardtop	hardtop	hardtop	hardtop	hardtop
Length	7.3m	8m	7.3m	6.7m	7.6m
Beam	2.4m	2.5m	2.4m	2.4m	2.4m
Rated power	450hp	400hp	250hp	225hp	300hp
Power as tested	2xVerado225	Yamaha300	Suzuki300	Suzuki200	Suzuki250
Hull weight	1650kg	1850kg	1795kg	1200kg	1200kg
Fuel capacity	575L	500L	250L	380L	300L

STAR RATING

Finish	★★★★	Helm Set-up	★★★★★
Fitout	★★★★★	Fishability	★★★★★
Ride	★★★★★	Safety Features	★★★
Dryness	★★★★★	Value for Money	★★★★★

*Data ESTIMATED by the TBF team when accurate information is unavailable. Maximum star rating 5 stars.