

BOAT TEST – NORTHBANK

*The 650HT at full noise off
O'Sullivan Beach*



Northbank boats originated in Port Adelaide back in the mid '90s and are now part of the Christies Beach Marine stable. Their design and build quality have undergone progressive improvement over that time and the Northbanks are now recognised as some of the best boats to come out of South Australia. They have also made a mark on the national boating scene and currently enjoy a high level of acceptance across the country.

The model that essentially shot Northbank boats into the spotlight was the 540C – a roomy cuddy cab that proved ideal for local waters. Then came the 600 series hull and ultimately the 650. All are built very strongly and are quite heavy boats for their size. We had tested the 540 and 600 on several occasions in their various configurations, but not until just after this year's Boat Show had we set foot in the 650. This is a big, beamy trailer boat that will interest those who are into serious offshore fishing.

It's available as a cabin boat (650C) and, more recently, as a hard top (650HT). We tested the hard top version off O'Sullivan

Beach in early August and were as impressed with the boat's performance as its big, bold lines. There is no doubt about its credentials to handle long range tuna fishing off Port MacDonnell, snapper fishing on Tapley Shoal and practically every other scenario in between.

The 650HT has an enormous cockpit with higher than average sides. Fishing four for snapper wouldn't be an issue and there's plenty of beam (2.44m) to carry several trolling rods across the transom. The addition of a hard top really increases this boat's appeal, particularly in offshore situations. The Northbank hard top is quite high -- certainly high enough for the average guy to stand under without fear of banging his head – and this provides the ultimate in protection from the elements. Copping a face-full of spray on a cold day offshore while trolling for tuna isn't much fun, but this is something you'll never have to worry about with the 650HT.

All round vision through the tinted, multi-panel toughened glass windscreen is excellent and the dash layout is simple,

clean and user friendly. Fitting large screen electronics presents no problem, as well as flush-mounted radios and a stereo unit if so desired. The forward V-berths are long enough to sleep on in comfort and the standard of upholstery work was certainly impressive. You could overnight a couple in this rig with ease, which can be handy in some snapper fishing situations or if you decide to camp in the lee of an offshore island like Greenly or Pearson.

Power for the test boat came in the form of a 200hp Mercury Verado. These are quite unique engines, as, unlike other four strokes, they are supercharged. With a hull weight of just under 1.5 tonnes, the Northbank needs this sort of grunt to get up and boogie and that's exactly what it did outside of O'Sullivan Beach Harbor on a choppy Friday morning in late winter. We had a 15-20 knot northerly building ahead of a strong west to south-west change and I was quite happy to have the hard top around me as I blasted out toward Port Stanvac.

Acceleration from rest with the Merc Verado was very impressive. Electronic

NK 650 HARD TOP



The dash/helm set up is clean, neat and user friendly

controls provide instant throttle response and make the whole acceleration process smooth and predictable. This hull jumps onto the plane with sufficient horse power, even with four on board, and our top speed over a limited stretch of calm water was over 40 knots at around 5900rpm. The Northbank cruised very comfortably at 27 knots and 3900rpm, which is where optimum fuel economy would be achieved.

Once clear of Port Stanvac and out in open water, I was able to push the 650HT hard at all angles to the metre-plus sea. There were plenty of whitecaps and we did cop some water on the 'screen, particularly while running with the sea on the starboard quarter, but with the hard top fitted, this was scarcely an issue.

The Northbank hull rides nicely and feels safe and predictable from the helm. You can

tell you've got plenty of 'glass under and around you, which is exactly the way things should be in any rig designed to fish well offshore. It proved exceptionally capable in a following sea, enabling me to push along at better than 30 knots without a hint of running off line. The hull needs plenty of out-trim with the waves up its tail, but it's a snack to drive and would inspire plenty of confidence if you were unlucky enough to get caught out in unfriendly conditions.

The standard features list for the 650HT is quite impressive. Included are hydraulic steering, plenty of underfloor storage, toughened glass sliding windows under the hard top, 250 litres of sub-deck fuel, rear folding lounge and walk-through transom with bait tank. 250 litres of juice will take you a long way with the four stroke Mercury Verado – certainly far enough for a day's offshore trolling or over to Tapley Shoal and back when the big snapper are on.

Northbank also offers a comprehensive list of optional extras, including sterndrive and dual motor transoms, swim platform, stainless rocket launcher, bait board, clip-in carpet, deck wash, plumbed live bait tank, Stress Free anchor winch, bunk in-fill and

There's still plenty of fishing room aft of the hard top





Hard top height is spot on

coloured hull. You can also opt for a larger fuel tank, but I doubt you'll need more than 250 litres unless you plan to run well offshore and stay for a couple of days.

Naturally, a boat of this bulk requires a substantial tow vehicle. The Christies Beach Marine crew pulls the big Northbank with a Ford F250, but any four wheel drive with

3 tonne capacity will do the job. As tested, with dual battery system, 27MHz radio, registration and offshore safety kit, the Northbank 650HT/Verado 200 package retails for \$96,990. You can naturally prune quite a few dollars from that figure by selecting a cheaper engine option; in fact, packages with EFI motors begin at \$84,990.



The Merc Verado packs plenty of punch

There can be no doubt this is a superb boat and one that fits nicely into what's becoming a very significant section of the market. As our blue water fishing aspirations become greater, so does the need for big, fast and capable offshore boats. Northbank's 650HT certainly fills those criteria nicely.



NORTHBANK

FIBREGLASS BOATS



GET ONBOARD



For over a decade the name Northbank has been synonymous for building offshore fishing vessels for local South Australian waters. Distinctive style, high quality production, generous freeboard and exhilarating dry riding performance make our range of 650 models the choice for offshore anglers. Get Onboard and support a local company producing a world class product.



650 Hard Top



650 Walkaround



650 Cuddy Cabin



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