

Taking the plunge

It takes courage to commit to a completely new design in a very tough retail environment, especially when it's a design that departs so far from the production aluminium trailerboats your company is known for. But McLay Boat's gamble appears to have paid off.

Words **John Eichelsheim** Photos **Wil Calver**



It was a beautiful winter's day when we joined Steve McLay, owner of Milton-based McLay Boats, a Mercury technician, a McLay dealer and a potential customer aboard the new McLay 1100 Walk Round a few days after the Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show.

Auckland's weather promised great pictures but little in the way of sea conditions to challenge the big McLay. Fortunately, Steve and the crew had trialled the boat the day before in much less pleasant conditions, trying out propellers and putting the boat through its paces. The crew that day said the 1100 handled the wind and short, steep seas so typical of the Hauraki Gulf with aplomb.

Steve McLay is justifiably proud of his team for finishing the boat in time for the show.

"It took just four months to build, most of that time with just one guy on the job," said Steve. He designed the boat to incorporate

ideas he'd been thinking about for years, with the view to filling a gap in the market that, until now, McLay Boats hadn't been in a position to meet.

"For years we've been building big hardtop trailer boats up to eight metres, most of them to order, but never anything to this scale," says Steve. "I wanted to build something outside the square: the biggest trailerboat possible, one that would take us into another market."

One of Steve McLay's team drew the 1100 using a CAD (Computer Aided Design) program

so modifications are easy to make. McLay Boats also has its own computer router-cutter so the team can maintain control of the whole design and build process.

This boat is a demonstrator model in every sense since Steve wanted to pack as many of his ideas into it as possible. Boats commissioned in the future may have all of the features detailed here, just some of them, or completely different ones altogether.

"We can work with the client to give them whatever they want based around this hull," Steve says.

This boat is built to meet MSA survey requirements and can easily be put into survey to suit a customer's needs.

"One of the appeals of this model is its ability to be towed from coast to coast, or inland to the lakes," says Steve McLay. "This is particularly relevant for our South Island customers."

Although it's over-width at 3.095m beam, the boat can be legally towed behind a suitable vehicle. On the day of the review a two-axle flatbed truck was used, with a couple of water-filled tanks strapped to its tray to provide weight, stability and traction.

The boat rides on a triple-axle Toko trailer and is braked on all six wheels using a driver-activated, electric-hydraulic braking system.

The six-tonne-plus rig carries a COF (certificate of fitness). There are some restrictions as to when and where the rig may travel and the driver needs to have a Heavy Trade truck and trailer licence. Multiple rollers ensure easy



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The McLay 1100 comfortably sleeps five and has a well-equipped galley, a good-sized heads, 515-litres of fuel capacity, 120-litres of freshwater and a 120-litre holding tank, making it a good proposition for weekends away or longer. Its fisher-friendly deck plan would suit sportfishing charter work.

The review boat's spectacular paint job is impossible to overlook and the big McLay certainly turned heads at the Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show. The boat attracted the attention of the boat show judges, who awarded the McLay 1100 'Fishing Boat of the Show Open'.

This is a big boat, both on the trailer and in the water. It's a wide-bodied design that carries its maximum beam through to its broad shoulders. Wide chine flats, plenty of beam at the waterline and a moderate deadrise ensure exceptional stability – useful in a charter fishing situation with eight or ten bodies lined up along the rail on one side of the boat.

There's the suggestion of a raised sheer and a portafino-style transom incorporates the swim platform which is enclosed by a welded aluminium cage. The 1100's high sides provide plenty of freeboard. Wheelhouse proportions work well, with plenty of headroom inside, but the house doesn't appear disproportionately tall or too narrow, especially considering the boat's generous side decks. Overall, the McLay 1100's lines are purposeful rather than elegant, but there's no way you'd miss it.

ON THE WATER

The McLay 1100 handles more like a launch than a trailerboat, as you'd expect for an 11m craft. A Vetus bowthruster offers some assistance dockside, but the Bravo III XR leg's dual propellers (one three-bladed, one four-bladed) offer plenty of purchase on the water for close quarters manoeuvring. The XR is the beefed-up version of Mercury's Bravo III leg, to cope with the VW-built twin-turbo V8 engine's 700nm of torque.

Mercury Marine's Steven Grey had spent a bit of time the day before changing propellers, settling on a 19-inch pitch for best all-round performance.

"We dropped a knot off the top end, but these propellers give the best average fuel economy through the rev range and a bit more urgency getting onto the plane," says Steven.

The boat is definitely no slug out of the hole. The 4.2-litre diesel V8 spools up its twin VTG (Variable Turbine Geometry) turbos quickly, a river of torque propelling the McLay onto the plane. The boat takes just six seconds to get onto the plane (13 knots) from a standing start.

Its long waterline length means the boat rides level, cruising anywhere from 15-25 knots. We had no need for the trim tabs and we were told they had hardly been touched in 15-20 knots of wind and sloppy seas the day before. The chine flats direct spray well away from the boat, but the water leaves the hull at the shoulders rather than amidships so I suspect you

may need to use the windscreen wipers on a rough day with a crosswind.

The McLay 1100 certainly feels solid, and like all McLays she is strongly built and well-finished. The hull is 6mm plate with 5mm used for the boat's sides, decks and wheelhouse, and some 4mm plate used sparingly for non-structural elements of the boat. All the aluminium is marine grade 5083, coated with Nyalic on unpainted exterior surfaces.

The hull features a full-length welded keel plate for extra protection and is supported by seven longitudinal girders and 6mm stringers, supplemented by transverse bulkheads. The decks are fully welded and sealed, draining aft through cockpit doors, each of which is fitted with spring-loaded one-way scuppers to let water out when the doors are closed.

Performance is very respectable for a boat of this size: 30 knots-plus top speed and a comfortable 'go anywhere' cruise speed of 20-22 knots burning less than 50 litres an hour. It returned these figures on



test day full of fuel and water with a crew of six adults aboard. The day before, 22 knots gave a fuel burn of 44lph or two litres per nautical mile.

WONDERFUL WALK-AROUND

There's a lot of cockpit in the McLay 1100 but it feels even bigger thanks to the stern platform and wide, useable side decks. These extend forward to the front of the wheelhouse, then two steps lead up to the foredeck which is a proper fishing station complete with bait board, removable catch bin, washdown hose and wrap-around railings.

Side decks and foredeck are designed to fish from. Rodholders are welded to the railing right around the foredeck, with more across the back of the removable bait board. Anglers can spread themselves right around this boat or line up along one side to drift-fish.

The engine box is relatively low and fitted with an optional game chair, but I don't think you'd be able to reach the rod around the boat's corners while sitting in the chair. The Reel Rods game poles look the part, but in the down position they restrict access to the bow, and in the up position it's easy to catch a shoulder or arm on the mounts as you pass.

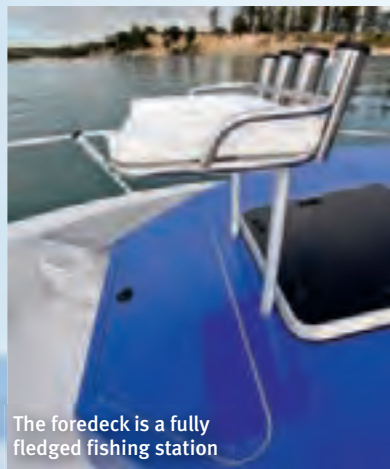
Behind the engine box, the transom

island houses a sink, livebait tank and a locker for batteries and fuses. Across the back are additional rodholders and a pair of plumbed tuna tubes that can be accessed from the platform. The platform also features a removable baitboard and drop-down gates/ladders on either side. It's the natural place to fish from if the boat is at anchor but may be an option you'd leave out or modify if you intended to use the boat primarily for gamefishing.

There's no shortage of rod stowage: 10 through-gunwale cockpit rodholders, four on the baitboard, another four across the transom and another eight in the rocket launcher, and the rodholders in the bows. Through-gunwale holders are angled for trolling.

Forward of the engine box is an aluminium fish box/dry storage bin/seat with a padded top. It needs to be removed to fully open the engine box cover, which tilts forward, but there's no need to open it right up for routine engine monitoring. An automatic bilge pump under the engine drains the hull.

The cockpit sole has three large underfloor bins, two of which can be used as wet lockers or ice/slurry bins. Side shelves are to McLay's usual design: long enough for rods, gaffs and tag poles, wide enough for dive bottles. LED cockpit lights supplement floodlights mounted on the



The foredeck is a fully fledged fishing station



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Performance – Garmin 7015

Fuel use, litres per hour; litres per nautical mile; noise at helm cabin doors closed

RPM	Speed (knots)	Fuel (lph)	(l/nm)**	Noise (dB)
600	3.2 (1.0)	1.3 (1.1)	(1.1)	71
1000	5.1 (3)	2.0 (3.0)	(1.0)	68
1500	6.6 (6.2)	5.6 (6.2)	(1.0)	72
2000	8.6 (8.2)	13.4 (12.8)	(1.57)	75
2500	10.9 (10.5)	23.2 (23.3)	(2.22)	77
3000	13.4 (16.5)	33.6 (33.0)	(2.0)	81
3500	20.8 (22.0)	48.4 (44.0)	(2.0)	81
4000	26.8 (27.0)	60.0 (65.0)	(2.41)	82
4300	30.7 (30.5)	77.0 (77.0)	(2.52)	82

* Data in brackets supplied by Mercury Marine detailing the average of a series of runs in 15-knots of breeze with a boat weight of 5070kg. Other data collected by BNZ on test day during a single run in calm conditions.
** litres per nautical mile



cockpit overhang and the boat is well endowed with Tallon receptacles. There are two washdown pumps with Hosecoil hoses and a third in the bows. With no lip under the transom doors, it should be easy to flush sand, dirt, shell grit or fish blood out of the cockpit and over the platform.

SHELTER INSIDE

While there's seating outside on the cockpit fish bin and on the squabs covering two bulkhead lockers in the shelter of the cockpit overhang, if the weather is bad you'll want to be inside the lined wheelhouse with its aft cavity windows,

sliding side windows and bi-fold doors firmly closed.

McLay have made good use of what is really a fairly limited space. To achieve the boat's wide side decks, the wheelhouse is necessarily quite narrow but it still offers seating for two or three, plus the helmsman, and standing accommodation for several more. Handholds along the ceiling are well placed and there's more in the companionway. Passengers could also sit in the cabin below, depending on sea conditions.

There's a good-sized helm console with a 15-inch Garmin GPSmap 7015 display, but the main feature of

the wheelhouse is the galley. It's fully workable with an oven and grill, four-burner hob (the gas bottle is outside in the bulkhead locker), under-bench fridge and sink with a cover. There's reasonable storage for culinary odds and ends under the oven and in shallow cupboards over the bench, with bulky items likely to be consigned to the under-seat lockers opposite.

The helm position is comfortable, the bucket seat fully adjustable and visibility forward is good, except when the removable fish bin is slotted into its receptacle in the bow. You can't see the anchor from the helm with the bin in place



McLay have made good use of limited space inside the wheelhouse



Engine access is fine



The length of the trailer is an indication of the size of this rig

either – best to remove the bin before motoring or anchoring.

Hydraulic power steering is effortless and I liked the throttle position and bulkhead footrest. Communications equipment and the stereo are mounted overhead in a ceiling console, which also conceals the wiper motors. Yacht-style ceiling ventilators ensure fresh air even when the windows are closed.

While the wheelhouse is relatively narrow, the forward cabin is anything but. It takes full advantage of the boat's wide shoulders to provide generous v-berths with clothes storage tucked into the spaces under the side decks and stowage under the bunks. Above, a pair of pipe berths accommodates two more sleepers and the wheelhouse table drops down, converting the seats to another single berth for a total of five.

A hatch provides ventilation and light to the windowless cabin, along with the open companionway bulkhead. Access to the anchor locker is via the hatch in the collision bulkhead forward.

The 1100's heads are tucked in under the helm station but offer full head height with room to stand up and shower (hot water is engine-heated). A sliding plastic door ensures privacy, and separate holding tanks serve the toilet and waste water outlets. It's a very workable arrangement for overnighing with small parties, or for day trips with much larger groups, and although crew/customers tracking through the boat to use the toilet is perhaps not ideal, I can't help thinking the McLay 1100 will find favour with charter operators.

BOATING'S VERDICT

The McLay 1100 stretches the limits of what's possible for a trailerable craft, but despite its imposing bulk it works well both on the water and on the road. Mercury Diesel TDI power, courtesy of the Audi/VW Q7/A6/Touareg family of V8 engines, provides brisk performance and admirable economy while keeping weight down.

The McLay 1100 is fully customisable and can be developed for any number of specialist applications. The boat's walk-around wheelhouse configuration screams fishing and as reviewed, the boat is packed with angling features: plenty of deck space, high sides, copious rodholders and sealed, easy-clean, non-slip decks should make this a practical sportfisher for recreational or professional charter applications.

Building such an ambitious boat on spec was a gamble for McLay Boats, but judging by the 1100's reception, it was worth taking. There's no doubt this new model takes the company into completely new territory, introducing an important player to the so-far relatively uncrowded maxi-trailerboat sector.

McLay 1100 technical

- ▶ **loa x beam** 11.4m x 3.095m
- ▶ **draft** 0.5m (leg raised)
- ▶ **weight** 4200kg (dry)
- ▶ **engine** Mercury Diesel TDI 350hp V8; Bravo III leg with stainless steel 19-inch pitch 3 and 4-blade propellers
- ▶ **deadrise** variable to 18° at transom
- ▶ **fuel** 515 litre underfloor tank
- ▶ **water** 120 litres
- ▶ **holding tank** 120 litres
- ▶ **cruising speed** 18-22 knots
- ▶ **max speed** 31.0 knots
- ▶ **price as reviewed** POA
- ▶ **designer** Steve McLay/McLay Boats
- ▶ **manufacturer** McLay Boats Ltd, www.mclayboats.co.nz 03 417 8135

PROS

- Walk-around layout, high sides and massive deck area great for fishing
- Comfortable, economical cruiser
- Trailerable with HT licence and suitable vehicle
- Strongly constructed and well-finished
- Built to survey standard

CONS

- Wheelhouse only seats four comfortably
- When in place, the fish bin on the bow impedes vision ahead
- Gamefishing setup may not be ideal as presented
- Heads below perhaps not ideal for charter work

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