

## BOAT TEST

### MCLAY 651 CROSSXOVER HT

*'Steve describes a crossXover boat as one that offers all the extra buoyancy and security of a pontoon boat but doesn't look like one.'*

# PERFECT BALANCE

*McLay doesn't build pontoon boats, but designer and MD of McLay Boats, Steve McLay reckons his crossXover models are as good as or better. They incorporate all the aspects of pontoon safety while retaining great looks. Barry Thompson went to Queenstown to check out the 651 crossXover, the latest addition to the expanding crossXover range.*

McLay Boats have always been at the forefront of alloy boat design and throughout the years the company has come up with some very innovative and interesting new models. They have never been afraid to be different, such as years back when they produced lime green and purple boats, when the rest of the industry was unpainted or at best, dark colours. However, surprisingly there has never been a McLay pontoon boat, despite the huge market this style of boat represents. According to Steve, he prefers to concentrate on the conventional vee bottom, flat sided monohull in all its various forms; runabout, console, cabin, cuddy and hardtop. But he is not unaware of the advantages a pontoon boat with its semicircular hull design offers and has incorporated them into his crossXover design.

So what does crossXover mean? Steve describes it as a boat that offers all the extra buoyancy and security of a pontoon boat but doesn't look like one. First released in 2014 at the Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show, the McLay crossXover incorporates hundreds of litres of closed cell foam under the gunnels from the transom to the anchor bay as well as having underfloor buoyancy. The result is a boat the boat has level flotation when flooded and in fact exceeds most survey and compliance flotation regulations, both in New Zealand and overseas. Another aspect of the crossXover is that there is no space compromised by the 'tube' shaped hull profile in the cockpit or



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*The 651 is the latest and largest addition to the crossXover range.*



*Seating layouts in the wheelhouse are variable, with the most popular being a pair of box seats.*

it's always nice to have a strong handrail to grip. The rear of the wheelhouse on the 651 CrossXover is surrounded by them and they are a real bonus when you are standing for the trip home.

### **CUDDY STYLE**

This isn't a boat really designed for overnighting but as I said before you could set it up as such. The cuddy is more likely to be used for stowing gear and somewhere for the kids to go. Our boat had the optional plumbed in head under the forward squab and a sliding door for privacy. Seating layouts in the wheelhouse are variable, with the most popular being the standard arrangement of a pair of box seats with swivelling buckets and rear squabs. They are individual alloy units, so when you are washing the boat you don't get

any water into the dry spaces beneath. A pull out 80-litre chilly/isky bin can be fitted under the port squab. However, seating is your choice and there are plenty of variables. With seating for seven in the standard package, I reckon that's plenty for a boat this size.

The dashboard is large and covered in fabric. The layout is determined by the size of the MFD, which on the test boat was a Simrad NSS9. If this isn't big enough for you, then you could upgrade that to a 12" or even a 16" as there is ample space available.

The hardtop windows are all toughened glass (sliding side windows) so you can add wipers. To port are separate storage areas, both lockable and open and again good solid handrails should you require them. A feature of the McLay 651 crossXover is

the extra large deck hatch, which makes access forward easy when you are using the fold-out alloy bow ladder. Not something you see on North Island built boats, but very common in the South. A flush deck panel hides away a Sav drum winch or you can choose a deck capstan.

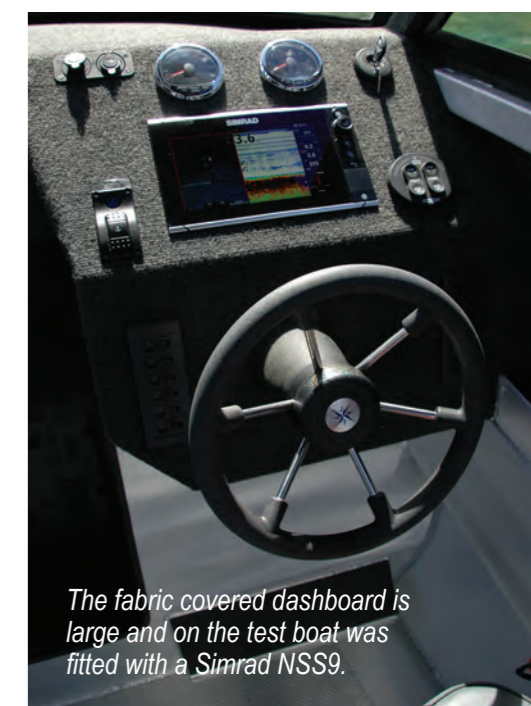
### **SMOOTH & QUIET**

The 651 crossXover is rated up to 225hp and for the test we ran a Mercury 200 Pro with electronic controls and power steering. The instant boost of an intercooled supercharged system delivers tremendous hole shot, great mid-range punch and excellent top speed.

Our 651 crossXover topped out at 40.5 knots @ 6000 rpm, burning 80 lph, which still gave the boat a range around 85 nm. However, if you want to be a little more



*A very workable transom area with fold down seat and extra large bait station.*



*The fabric covered dashboard is large and on the test boat was fitted with a Simrad NSS9.*

cabin, something that is often an issue with pontoon boats.

When McLay Boats introduced the first of the crossXover range they did it with not one but three models. There were three, 561, 581, 601 in cabin styling and then the 611 as a hardtop was released a few months later. They were also loaded with features that were new to McLay Boats.

So popular has the crossXover range been, that a new and larger model, the 651 has been added. Released at the 2016 Hutchwilco NZ Boat Show, as a wheelhouse option with an enclosed bulkhead, the second of the hardtop crossXovers, the 651 shares a lot of the layout and features of the 611, but is a little larger. It is also available without a rear bulkhead, a layout that I favour for a boat of this size.

The 651 at 6.60m LOA is 500mm longer than the 611, although both have the same 2.30m beam. With the 651 having the same size cuddy cabin as the 611 crossXover, but with a slightly longer wheelhouse, this allows you to fit the optional bulkheads with a door so that you can have a lockable hardtop.

The extra size obviously means the boat only (less engine and equipment) comes in heavier at 780 kgs for the 611 and 900 kgs for the 651. Hardly significant when

it comes to towing and power options, although the 651 is rated 135-225hp single outboard, whereas the 611 is 115-200hp. Price wise there is about \$NZ5500 upcharge for the base 651 crossXover; \$NZ45,074 against \$NZ50,670. However, what your total package ends up at is going to totally depend on your power of choice and options you add.

### **VERY ADAPTABLE**

The crossXover range is designed to be as adaptable as possible, with the versatility to be used for family, fishing, diving or towing water toys. The 651 does all that and more and is big enough to be run as an overnighter or small weekender. There's enough space for a head in the cabin and a handheld shower in the cockpit, plus a camper pack canopy off the rear of the hardtop transforms the boats all-weather space.

Essentially this boat is going to be destined to do a lot of fishing. It's just the nature of the aluminium hardtop and every effort has been made to cover all the aspects of making this a superior fishing machine. The transom area is always a focal point when fishing and the 651 crossXover has not been sold short in this department. Central is a huge custom made boat

station complete with cutting board, tackle storage drawer and rod holders. This isn't a permanent fixture, so if the afternoon is going to be all about towing water toys, then you can detach it and leave it at home. Underneath is a couple of large lockers, one for the batteries, all hidden away behind a fold down transom seat. Great idea and there when you need it for a couple of passengers and tucked up out of the way when you need the fishing space. To port is a live bait tank set into the step through onto the transom. A large two step ladder drops down for ease of access from the water.

The platform aft of the transom is a generous size and if you added a rear safety cage, you could turn this area into a dedicated fishing space. Might help to keep some of the fishing mess from inside the boat, but then this is a boat that is meant to have some blood and guts across the floor. There are two welded in rod holders in each wide coaming, plus rods can be stowed in side trays or overhead in the rocket launcher. It's a great fishing cockpit and the open plan through to the wheelhouse means you have some protected area when fishing. The overhang is short enough, so it doesn't intrude on your rods when fishing. If you are coming back in rough weather,



*A very clean and practical layout for fishing.*



*The cuddy is more likely to be used for stowing gear and somewhere for the kids to go.*

conservative, then by dropping the rpm back to 4000-4500 rpm, the speed hangs around 25-28 knots and the fuel burn dips to the mid 30 lph zone. Your range is also up more than 100nm.

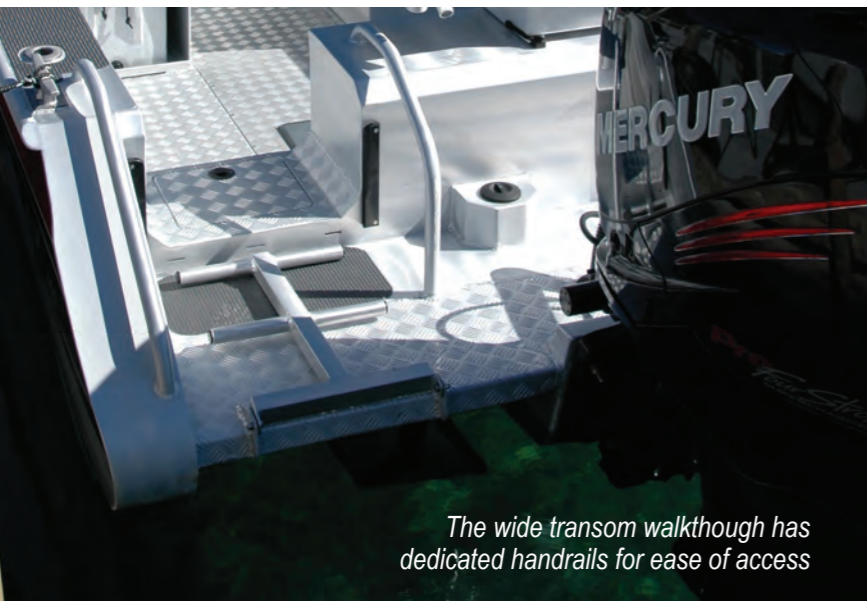
If trolling's your thing, then you will love the Mercury 4 stroke Verado, a silent, smokefree and smooth an outboard as ever made. At around 1000-1500 rpm the engine is going to burn less than 6-7 lph and you could troll all day from Auckland to the Bay of Islands on a tank of fuel.

What I liked about the Mercury 200 Pro was how vibration free it is and the smoothness of the SmartCraft Digital Throttle & Shift (DTS). It provides instantaneous, predictable and quiet shifting, as well as ultra-responsive throttle control, while the standard power delivers precision steering without any steering torque.

Queenstown's Lake Wakatipu was flat calm, so apart from experiencing how well the boat rode and tracked on the mirror-smooth lake, I can't comment on the rough water handling. What was noticeable was the quietness of the ride, helped along by the 5mm thick foam filled hull. I have run a smaller 581 crossXover in a 1m sea on Auckland Harbour and it performed well. I said then that I was impressed with the solid feel of the boat, although like any boat the size of the 651 crossXover you will feel the occasional knock when the conditions deteriorate. Overall a well balanced and effortless boat to drive.

### **BIG BROTHER**

As always, McLay's recreational and fishing boats have lots of standard features that are normally extras on other brands. The big brother of the 611 crossXover Hardtop, this brand new model shares all of the great features that has made the crossXover's McLay's top selling range of boats for 2016. Don't be surprised if you see something even bigger added to the crossXover range this year. ↕



*The wide transom walkthrough has dedicated handrails for ease of access*



*A feature of the McLay 651 crossXover is the extra large deck hatch, and the fold-out alloy bow ladder.*

### **SPECIFICATIONS**

**Model & Model:** McLay 651 CrossXover HT  
**Priced from:** \$NZ 88,500  
**Price as tested:** \$NZ 117,000  
**Type:** Hardtop  
**Construction:** 5mm/4mm Alloy  
**LOA:** 6.60m  
**Beam:** 2.30m  
**Deadrise:** 18 deg  
**Trailerable Wght:** 1850 kg (full fuel)  
**Height on Trailer:** 3.05m  
**Test Power:** Mercury 200 Pro  
**Propeller:** Inertia 15" SS  
**Power options:** Outboard only  
**HP Range:** 135-225-225hp  
**Fuel capacity:** 175 litres  
**Trailer:** Toko Trailers

**Notable Options:** Sawwinch Drum Winch, Fusion MSRA70 stereo, GME VHF, Hella Lighting, Painted hull, Simrad NSS9 MFD, Electotabs.

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### **FUEL & PERFORMANCE DATA**

#### **MCLAY 651 CROSSXOVER**

Fuel capacity: 175 litres

<b>RPM</b>	<b>Knots</b>	<b>L/h</b>	<b>L/NM</b>	<b>Range (NM)</b>
1000	3.8	4	1.100	140
1500	5.4	6.4	1.200	130
2000	6.8	9.9	1.500	100
2500	7.6	13.5	1.800	87
3000	14.3	18.3	1.300	120
3500	19.5	23	1.200	130
4000	24.3	31	1.300	120
4500	28.0	41.5	1.500	100
5000	32.3	54	1.700	92
5500	36.0	65	1.900	82
6000	40.5	71	1.800	87

This boat could be protected against the effects of corrosion, oxidation and discolouration.

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