

HAINES SIGNATURE 543SF

Specialised inshore sportfishing boats are currently enjoying a huge wave of popularity, both here and around the rest of the country. Most leading manufacturers now offer several in their respective ranges, and recently we were invited to test the Haines Signature 543SF – one of the most specialised craft of its type ever built in Australia. This boat is proving extremely popular in the eastern states, particularly with the estuary flathead/bream/mulloway fraternity, and it's expected to create similar interest here.

The 543SF is a console rig that offers maximum floor space and heaps of dry storage area. The hull is quite low in profile, but sports the substantial deadrise aft that the Signature brand is renowned for. The deadrise, in fact, varies from 21 degrees at the transom up to 33 degrees at the forefoot to optimise ride in a bumpy sea. It's a hull that likes some power on the back, which is why it had been factory fitted with a Suzuki 150 four stroke – the manufacturer's maximum rating for this model.

As soon as you climb aboard the 543SF, the vast amount of uncluttered fishing space becomes immediately obvious. It's a big estuary sportfishing rig for sure, and ideal for so many situations in SA. Coffin Bay or Port Augusta kingfish, Port River mulloway, Port Pirie bream and even River Murray cod would all fit nicely into its list of potential target species across the state.

Like all Signature boats, this one is superbly built and finished. Fibreglass



work, deck fittings and general construction are all world class, which is what you'd expect in a boat that definitely doesn't sit in the 'budget' category. The old adage of "You get what you pay for" most certainly applies here.

Starting up in the bow, there's a full width transverse live tank beneath the casting deck that can be used to keep either bait alive or the catch in top condition. This tank is baffled to

minimise water 'slop' when it's full and you're travelling over a bumpy sea. There is plenty of locker storage up in this area, too, which is always significant in a console boat. Fitted up front is a 'lean bar' with upholstered cushion that provides handy support while lure or fly casting from a standing position. Those who cast regularly in boats of this style will appreciate this inclusion from the extras catalogue.

It should be noted that the 543SF can be ordered with either side console or more traditional centre console. Personally, I prefer the side console as tested, as it provides the most convenient stern-to-bow access. The only drawback with the side console option is that when fishing solo, the operator's weight on the starboard side will cause the hull to lean in that direction. This is particularly obvious in a

deep vee hull. To counter this, Signature offers electric trim tabs as an optional extra; you simply hit the trim tab button set near the helm and the hull levels itself in an instant. It really is the obvious solution to an age-old problem.

The boat's console is simple, neat and comfortable to sit behind. It's a twin-tier design that will easily handle a large display unit on the main panel and a heap of switches below. A marine



The lean bar option is worth considering



The console is neat and compact



Trim tabs are a great inclusion

The Signature is a hoot to drive



The 543 hull loves the Suzuki 150

radio is set into the port side of the console. A moderate-sized polyethylene windscreen protects electrical equipment, and there's limited storage space beneath. The operator's position aft of the console is excellent for both standing or seated driving.

There is horizontal rod storage along the port side of the boat, and vertical storage down low just aft of the casting deck with six stainless steel rod holders. All up, you can carry a dozen rods securely and accessibly. Dual storage lockers are set in each transom corner, and there's a compartment beneath the short aft deck that provides access to batteries and bilge pump.

Handy standard features in the 543SF package include an electric motor bracket (with pre-wire), auto bilge pump, dual battery system, hydraulic steering and THG bolster bucket seats. The optional extras list is about as comprehensive as you could imagine. You can fit blue underwater lighting, a deck wash system, X-Deck foam flooring, Simrad autopilot and a Savwinch electric anchor winch - all of which would make the 543SF a bit more comfortable and efficient.

It was unusual to test a boat through Pacific Marine with a Suzuki outboard on the back, but this one had been ordered from Haines Signature with the engine already fitted. As mentioned earlier, the Suzi' 150 is top power for this hull, and I can tell you it really flies. Haines quotes an outboard range of 90-150, and there's little doubt you could get away with a 115



All fittings are top quality

and still enjoy sparkling performance.

Tim Hearse and I launched the boat at North Haven on a delightful late autumn morning, and it took only a couple of minutes to work out that the 543SF is quite a special rig. It's lightning fast off the mark with the Suzuki 150, planing in the blink of an eye and flying up to a maximum speed of around 46 knots at 5900rpm. The hull cruises comfortably at 30 knots and 4000rpm, which is where optimum fuel economy would be found. At trolling speed it's easy and safe to move around.

An 80 pound Minn Kota Riptide electric outboard had been fitted, with dual batteries housed up front beneath the casting deck. This optional extra opens up a host of estuary/river situations, with the spot-lock feature invaluable for those wanting to fish a specific location without having to deploy a noisy anchor and chain. It's also great, of course, for moving from snag to snag while lure casting for Murray cod.

One of the major benefits of owning a boat like this is the rough water capabilities it offers, should you get caught out in unpredicted weather on a lake or a large estuary system. A bit of white water won't worry the variable deadrise hull at all, which has to be an appealing feature.



An electric motor increases versatility

HOW MUCH?

Packages start at \$70,000 plus options

GENERAL INFO'

Length - 5.33m
Beam - 2.13m
Dry weight - 836kg
Storage height - 2.30m
Deadrise - variable 21 - 33 degrees

CAPACITIES

Fuel - CC 150 litres, SC 180 litres
HP - 90 - 150
Load - 5 adults

SUPPLIED BY

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There can be no doubt Haines Signature's brilliant 543SF is up there with the very best inshore sportfishing rigs ever produced for the Aussie market. As alluded to earlier, it's by no means a cheapie, but I can guarantee it's an exceptional unit.