

21 ALLOY DEBUTANT

Words by **John Eichelsheim** photos by **Gareth Cooke**



Ultimate Boats is a new arrival on the New Zealand boating scene, though the company's principal Mark Presnall has been part of the marine industry for many years, most recently representing Suzuki outboards in New Zealand.

Mark's first boat building venture draws on his experience with trailer boats of every description. Mark worked with Hall Marine Design to come up with the first of a planned range of Ultimate Boats. Jarrod Hall's design skills underpin aluminium boats from many well known New Zealand boat builders, including White Pointer and Marco.

Boating NZ stepped aboard the very first Ultimate 21 in late September. It had left Ultimate's Tauranga workshop just the day before, travelling up the motorway to Westhaven on an Enduro dual-axle braked trailer with smart back mudguards. Mark reckons the rigs weighs-in at around 2000kg on the road.

NICELY APPOINTED

The Ultimate 21's design pedigree is evident when seen bow-on, but the sheerline is quite different to other boats on the market. Ultimate Boats have opted for plenty of beam, a moderate 18° deadrise at the transom and a relatively fine entry combined with 6mm thick hull plates to provide a soft, quiet ride. The boat's sides, cabin and decks are 4mm aluminium while 3mm is used for the hardtop roof.

The Ultimate 21 is a handsome boat, faired and painted to a high standard. The hardtop's roof projects over the windscreen forming a noticeable brow, a design feature common to many of Jarrod Hall's designs. It gives the Ultimate 21 a purposeful look and shades the helm when the sun's overhead.

The cabin and cockpit are lined with Frontrunner with black vinyl used inside the hardtop, on the dashboard and for the hardtop ceiling. A pair of fully adjustable upholstered pedestal seats are comfortable and supportive, but they were the only seating option aboard the boat, unless you wanted to sit inside the cabin. However versions such as King/Queen, and padded iceytek bin seating are optional. The seats have fold up bolsters for excellent back support when standing up and there are plenty of hand rails, including on the hardtop ceiling, so standing passengers remain secure when the boat's underway.

The forward cabin feels spacious. There are no windows or ports, but the bulkhead is completely open, including under the helm console, and there's a large hatch in the foredeck, so the cabin's flooded with light. The vee-berths are long enough to lie down on, unless you are really tall, there's generous seated headroom, and provision to plumb in a marine toilet with a curtain for privacy.

The hardtop feels spacious too, taking advantage of the Ultimate's beamy nature and wrap-around frameless windscreens. Mark is a tall man but the hardtop ceiling leaves him plenty of headroom. Somewhat unusually, the side windows are fixed rather than sliding, but Mark pointed out that sliding hardtop side windows seldom open wide enough to stick your head out. A couple of opening hatches overhead admit light and air and LED lighting brightens things up at night.



The Ultimate 21 is nicely appointed inside with a comfortable helm position. It's an easy boat to drive and has a generous cockpit.



Access to the foredeck and the Maxwell RC6 remotely operated capstan is either around the hardtop – the neoprene covered side decks are wide enough to negotiate easily with rails on the hardtop roof to hold onto – or through the foredeck hatch from the cabin. The tall bow rail provides a measure of security.

With only two pedestal seats the cockpit is completely uncluttered. So far there's no bait station, but Mark is considering options. He's not a big fan of large, built-in bait stations on the transom, because they can get in the way when fishing, but may fit a removable station. King and queen seating is an option, as is a rear lounge or a padded chilly bin.

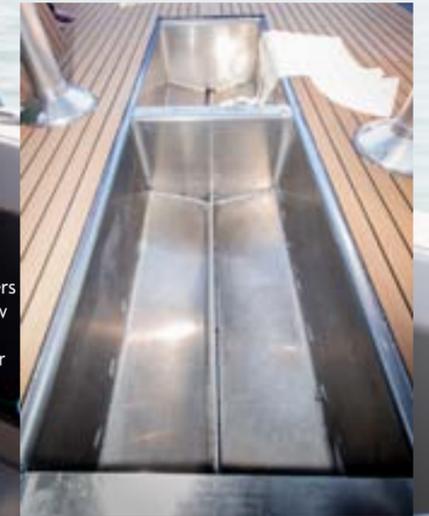
The hardtop is furnished with a six-position rocket launcher for rod storage and a tow point for tow sports. Drink/sinker holders are set into the coamings, which covered in grey neoprene for grip,



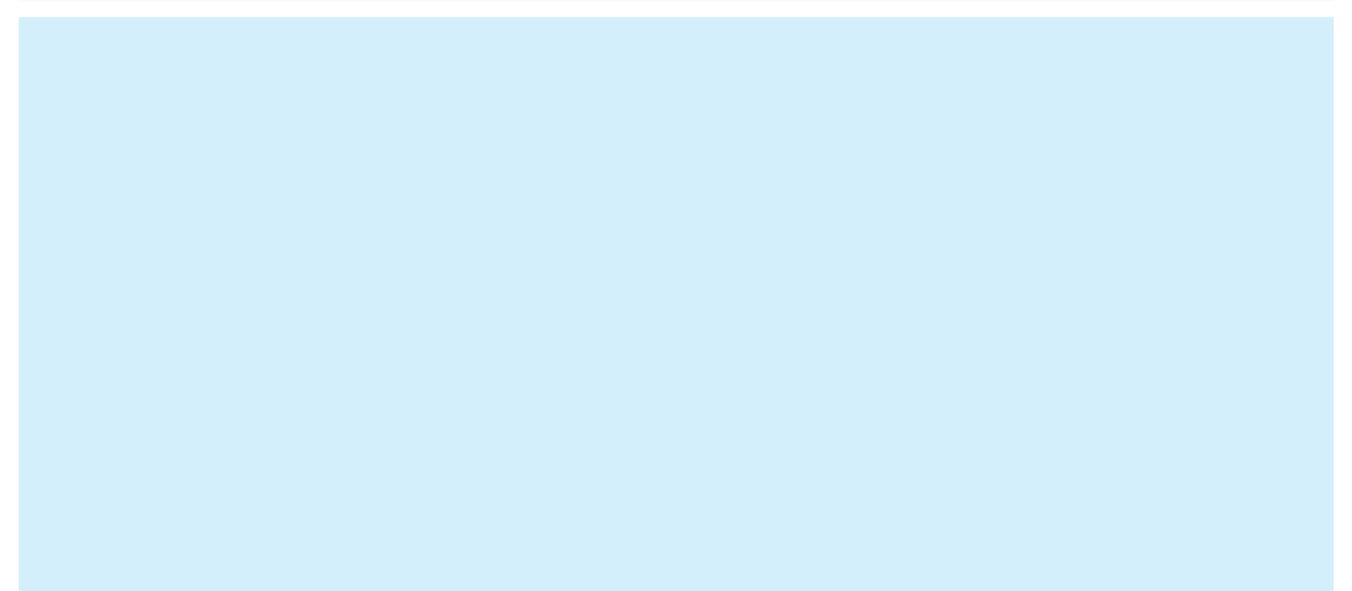
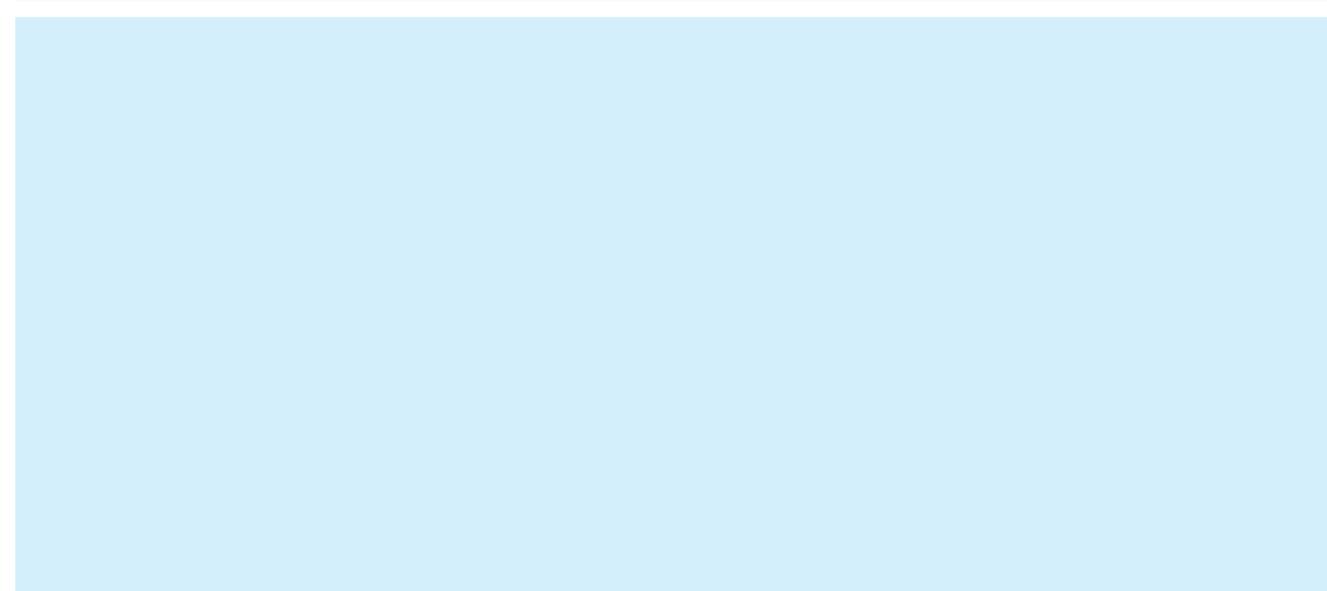
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softness and warmth. Teak-look brown Seadeck is used on the cockpit sole and in the cabin well. It feels good underfoot, probably contributes to how quiet the boat is, and offers excellent grip, wet or dry.

Four through-coaming rod holders complement full-length cockpit side shelves, wide enough for dive bottles, though there's good space under the cockpit sole in a pair of long, deep lockers, one dry and the other wet. Across the transom a removable acrylic panel is engraved with the boat's Ultimate 21



Underfloor lockers will easily swallow dive bags, dive bottles and other bulky gear.





The 150hp Mercury four-stroke is a good match for the boat. Bunks are long enough for a nap and the open bulkhead lets light and air into the cabin.

branding. Once removed it reveals the battery(ies) on a shelf, fuel filter and stowage.

A 185-litre underfloor fuel tank is positioned under the floor aft and there's a live bait tank under the transom step-through awaiting plumbing. Tuna tubes can be installed in the transom corners; inspection hatches are already in place to facilitate the plumbing and electrics, and there's another inspection hatch on the swim step.

EASY TO DRIVE

The Ultimate 21 has benign handling characteristics. With his waterski-racing experience, Mark wanted a boat that was easy to

drive, which for him meant no outboard pod. There's neither a pod nor an outboard well. Instead the engine is bolted to a bracket welded to the hull which extends back under the swim platform. As a result the boat is not too fussy about engine trim, though getting the trimming right offers the usual benefits of improved fuel consumption and more speed.

Power came courtesy of Mercury's lightweight, compact four-stroke 150hp. This is a large displacement, inline four-cylinder with electronic fuel injection. Although the hull is rated to 200hp, the 150hp Merc is plenty grunty enough and Mark thinks it would perform just fine with a 115hp outboard, though he says the hull

likes a bit of weight on the transom.

The Mercury 150hp benefits from its 3.0-litre displacement, quickly propelling the Ultimate 21 onto the plane and holding it up there right down to 10-11 knots. This with four adults aboard and a full tank of fuel. Steering is light, thanks to Ultraflex hydraulic system, the helm position works well and Mercury Smartcraft gauges provide plenty of useful engine and navigation data, or use the Garmin GPSMap 1020XS to display the same data.

The Mercury is quiet, especially at idle, complementing the Ultimate 21's soft-riding hull. There was very little slapping and no slamming and even the usual sound of water running past an aluminium hull was muted. There wasn't too much chop to contend with during our demonstration, except where wind and tide clashed around North Head, but we did find plenty of boat wakes from which to launch the Ultimate into the air. Landings were soft and the ride was smooth and dry.

Transitioning onto the plane is very smooth, the boat riding level all the way. Trim tabs were not fitted, but any six-metre hardtop benefits from tabs and the Ultimate 21 is no exception. In a crosswind hardtop boats naturally lean into the wind. We

compensated by shifting passengers around, but trim tabs would be better.

The boat's stability was more affected by shifting passenger weight than I had expected. It's a beamy but it moves around quite a bit at rest. Since writing this story QL trim tabs have been fitted, along with a 100-litre bladder under the floor to feed a fresh water wash down. The water bladder has noticeably improved stability at rest, reports Mark, and the tabs do their job nicely in a crosswind.

At 3600rpm the Ultimate 21 cruises comfortable at 23 knots burning 20 litres of fuel per hour; at trolling speed, 7 knots, fuels consumption is a miserly 6.7 litres per hour. Top speed is around 37 knots.

Ultimate Boats are pitching the Ultimate range at all family members wanting style with a quality finish as much as performance and utility, but still with the ability to catch fish and make a mess. The Ultimate 21 is well mannered and comfortable with plenty of interior volume and enough range for big days on the water. It's nicely appointed inside and out, so it should have as much appeal for the woman of the house as it does for the man. Base packages start at \$87,000. ■

Ultimate 21

- ▶ **loa** 6.35m
- ▶ **beam** 2.4m
- ▶ **draft** approx 0.4m
- ▶ **deadrise** 18° at transom
- ▶ **construction** aluminium
- ▶ **towing weight** approx 2000kg
- ▶ **engine** Mercury 150hp four-stroke outboard
- ▶ **propeller** Enertia S/S 14.25-inch x 17-inch
- ▶ **fuel** 180 litres
- ▶ **cruising speed** 22-30 knots
- ▶ **max speed** 37.0 knots
- ▶ **packages from** \$87,000
- ▶ **price as tested** \$120,000
- ▶ **manufactured by** Ultimate Boats, www.ultimateboats.co.nz
- ▶ **boat supplied by** Mark Presnall, Ultimate Boats sales@ultimateboats.co.nz, 021 138 0870