



DINKUM KIWI

KIWI-KRAFT 740 HTE

With a background in the great Kiwi outdoors and hobby boat building, restoration and repair, Southlander Rodney Harris had somewhat of an epiphany when he encountered his first aluminium pontoon boat back in the late 1980's, writes Sam Mossman.

Harris could see the advantages for fishermen, divers and other outdoorsmen and by the end of July 1988, he had built, and quickly sold, his first aluminium Kiwi-Kraft in the shed behind his house. His plan was to design and build a range of world-class boats to meet the needs of the recreational market, as well as for commercial and rescue use. Safety, performance and styling would be paramount in their design.

Harris, the founder and director of Kiwi-Kraft, has stated that he has “no intention of becoming a mass producer of boats”, enjoying the interaction with his customers and dealers as he and his small group of tradesmen design features and

customise boats to suit individual requirements. These days Kiwi-Kraft operates from a modern 2000 square-metre workshop equipped with the latest technology in alloy welding, CNC cutting, bending and fabrication.

My first hands-on encounter with a Kiwi-Kraft was back in April 2005 when *Fishing News* ran one of its boat ‘Shoot-outs’, putting a range of like-sized hulls on the water in the same place at the same time. I drew three pontoon boats of the same class, one of which was a Kiwi-Kraft 550. Against big-name opposition, the Kiwi-Kraft was streaks ahead in its ride and handling, although it suffered a little from the lack of a fishing-oriented layout. Now, 15 years later, I was excited to hear that Auckland Marine had picked up the Auckland

Kiwi-Kraft agency again, and invited me out to review a couple of Kiwi’s latest models, the 740 HTE, and its larger brother, the 795 (the test of this larger model will be run in a future issue of *Fishing News*).

HUSH Technology

Kiwi-Kraft put the excellent performance of their boats down to the hull design, and what they call HUSH technology. HUSH is an acronym for Hi-performance, Ultra-Smooth-riding Hull. The pontoons are not tapered but are curved upwards to present what amounts to a rising sheer-line. The bottom hull plates form a deep-V of 22 degrees, stiffened by pressed-in strakes, producing a fine entry which cuts through the water easily.

The chines are formed by the shape of the pontoons and their



Inserts from top: Larger outboards require some muscle and a Maxtek Hydraulic steering system is fitted; Storage space under the bench seating can be reached under the squabs or through gates in the front face.

meeting with the bottom plates. This rounded, down-turned section forms an air cushion as the hull comes down, helping soften the ride even further.

The pontoons are constructed from strips of longitudinal extrusion, three and four millimetres thick. These are seam-welded together, forming a very strong construction. With ten individual sealed buoyancy chambers, there is a good amount of positive buoyancy. The 740 is CPC-rated for nine passengers

plus 675kg, or a maximum of passengers, engine and cargo weighing 1100kg.

The Kiwi-Kraft team take a lot of care over their welding, with the finished product having that smooth, flowing look reminiscent of a stack of silver coins that have been tipped over. This allows the welds to be left unground, retaining full strength. All Kiwi-Kraft models are built to Coastguard specification.

Stem to stern

The bow is best accessed from the hatchway in the forecabin roof. Bow rails are fitted. The fairlead is set up for a permanently-mounted anchor and there is space for an anchor winch to be fitted, although neither of these were set up until a buyer had made their requirements known.

The forecabin has a spacious entry, is fully lined and has plenty of head-height, and with the berth-infill fitted has space for three kids to take a nap. There are two levels of side shelving in the forecabin and further storage space is provided by hatchways into lockers in the pontoons, and under-berth stowage. A hatchway in the forward bulkhead gives access into the anchor locker. A modest round table is stored here out of the way on a mount on the front of the cabin bulkhead, and when wanted, can be deployed in the wheelhouse in front of the passenger bench seat on a screw-in pipe stand.

Out in the wheelhouse, the upside-down 'L'-shaped passenger bench seat has a fold-out section which extends into the forecabin, forming an adult-length berth. The section of the seat across the rear of the cabin features a reversing bolster and with the aluminium and toughened-glass bi-fold doors open, forms a great spot to watch lures in the wake. (Five- and six-millimetre toughened glass is used throughout.) The helmsman is treated to a comfortable, upholstered bucket seat with a roll-down bolster and pneumatic base. An Exalto wiper helps keep forward vision clear.

Although an electronic multipurpose gauge and a smooth Smart Craft throttle and shift



The transom wall houses a hatched battery locker tucked away behind a fold-down bench seat.



The power-plant on the test boat is a Mercury 225 V6 Fourstroke in white.



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The bottom hull plates form a deep-V of 22 degrees, producing a fine entry which cuts through the water easily.



Quality Hella lighting is used throughout, including the cockpit floodlight; Cockpit sides are formed by a built-up section on top of the pontoons providing stowage space, and fitting through-gunwale rod holders without piercing the sealed pontoons; The KiwiKraft is fitted with twin batteries and isolation switching.

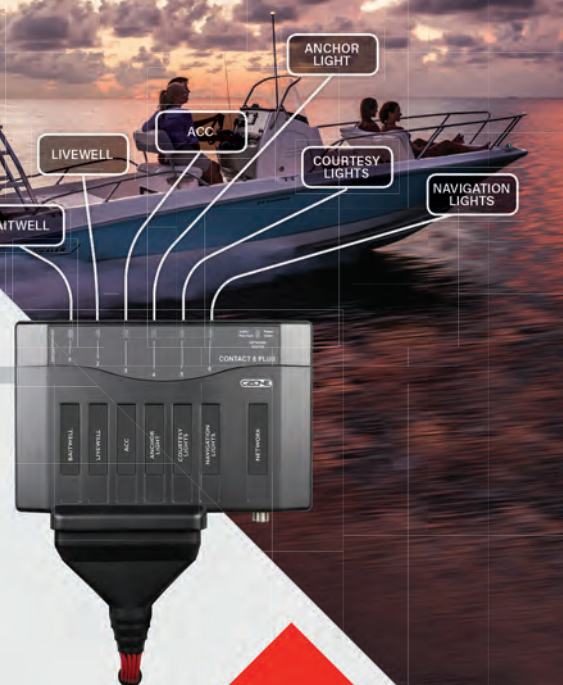
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A modest round table can be deployed in the wheelhouse. Mark Presnall kicks back.

had been fitted for the Mercury outboard, the rest of the dash was a cleanskin, again, waiting until the requirements of a potential buyer are known. After all, it is easy to cut a hole, but harder to fill it in again if it is the wrong size or shape for the electronics you want.

Handrails are fitted under the cabin top and two thirds of the way across the dash. Side stowage is supplemented by storage space under the bench seating (which can be reached under the squabs or through gates in the front face; a hold is reached through a hatch in the deck).

The double bi-fold glass-and-aluminium doors open up the whole of the rear of the cabin, great for gamefishing, ventilation, and communication. Quality Hella lighting is used throughout, including a cockpit floodlight and two cabin lights.

The cockpit is decent sized,

with high sides and nice flat faces to brace the top of your thighs against. These are formed by having a built-up section on top of the pontoons which provides plenty of stowage space, and also allows the fitting of through-gunwale rodholders without challenging the integrity of the sealed pontoons.

The treadplate deck is sealed and drains to a grill-protected sump under the transom. Any water is removed by bilge pump.

The transom wall houses a hatched locker for the twin batteries and isolation switching, tucked away behind a fold-down bench seat. A washdown hose is fitted underneath. A step-through with drop-door is on the port side of the transom wall and grabrails and a fold-down 'T' boarding ladder are mounted on the treadplate boarding platform.

Fitting up for fishing

Three through-gunwale rodholders

Performance

740 HTE KiwiKraft and Mercury 225 V6 (figures provided).

Revs (RPM)	Speed (MPH)	Fuel (l/hr)
1000	6.5	3.7
2000	9.8	10.4
3000	20.5	18.0
4000	32.5	30.4
5000	42.0	59.2
5900	44.3	71.0



A mackerel-sized livebait tank with a viewing window is built into the transom step-through.

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Specifications

Material:	aluminium
Configuration:	pontoon hull, enclosed hardtop
LOA:	7400mm
Beam external:	2500mm
Beam internal:	1850mm
Pontoons:	3-piece extruded, 3 and 4mm
Bottom:	5mm
Transom:	5mm
Top sides:	3mm
Deadrise:	22 degree
Floor to Gunwale height:	800mm
Deck:	4mm
Maximum HP:	300hp
Maximum engine weight:	290kg
Test engine:	Mercury 225hp V-6
Fuel capacity:	250 litres
Tow weight:	1970kg
Price as tested:	\$142,990*
Test boat courtesy of:	Auckland Marine
*(without electronics and winch)	

The pontoons are not tapered but are curved upwards to present what amounts to a rising sheer-line.



are fitted along each side of the cockpit, along with matching lure/sinker/drink holders. These have movable gimbal pins which can be adjusted for trolling, bottom fishing etc. Eight more rod holders are mounted across the back of the hardtop, and a further four across the back of the bait station for a total of 18.

A mackerel-sized livebait tank with a viewing window (to check baitfish health and amuse the kids) is built into the transom step-through. As mentioned, a bait-station is mounted on the transom top. This is removable and can be replaced by a ski pole. Besides the rodholders, it features a cutting board, knife gutter and a

storage drawer. The catch is easily stored in an after-market ice bin.

With a decent-sized cockpit providing a stable work platform, good support at the top of the thighs when leaning on the gunwale faces and secure footing on the treadplate decking, the Kiwi-Kraft 740 is a pretty useful rig for most



Models range from 4.35m to 9m
and are available from:

Auckland Marine Centre
277 Ti Rakau Drive
East Tamaki
Auckland
Ph: 09 271 1575

Boat City
Main Road North
Paraparaumu
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Bi-fold cabin doors form a lockable cabin.

fishing tasks up to, and including, gamefishing. Divers are catered for with a fold-down 'T'-style dive ladder, grabrails, boarding platform and transom step-through.

Engine and performance

The 740 is rated for engines up to 300hp or 290kg in weight. The power plant on the back of the test boat is a Mercury 225 V6 Fourstroke in white. Quiet and smooth, it produced plenty of power (see the performance chart on Page 146). On test day, Gary Hatton and Mark Presnall from Auckland Marine picked me up at Okahu Bay, having launched at the Half Moon Bay ramp nearer their base. They reckoned it was easier to come around the coast by sea than tow boats through the Auckland traffic.


It was a little windier than we had hoped, blowing 20 knots from the south-west, pushing up a short, steep chop of a metre as we headed across to Narrowneck for the photo shoot.

Larger, powerful outboards like the Mercury 225 V6 require some muscle and the 740 rig had a Maxtek Hydraulic steering system fitted. This, and the SmartCraft Digital Throttle and Shift

(DTS), made the boat easy to helm, even in the sloppy conditions. A soft rider and dry traveller.

Back on the road again

A substantially built boat needs a substantial trailer. The one that carries the 740 is made by Mudgway Trailers in Kaikoura. It is the now traditional cradle A-frame design with tandem axels, zinc-protected leaf spring suspension, 10 pairs of wobble rollers per side and an entry roller for the keel. The trailer is hydraulically braked and also has a parking brake, wind-down jockey wheel, dual-ratio manual winch and submersible LED lights. Tow weight of the rig is around 1970kg.

I was impressed by the quality of the welding, construction, finish and the fittings used. Pontoon boat designs have built-in advantages in stability, load-carrying and safety (having a high level of reserve buoyancy) and KiwiKraft's 740HTE is no exception. It is well suited to most fishing and diving tasks, definitely blue-water-capable and a good performer in the rough. What more could you ask for? A quality product from the deep south. 



The section of seat across the rear of the cabin features a reversing bolster forming a great spot to watch lures; The welding has that smooth, flowing look reminiscent of a stack of silver coins that have been tipped over.



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