

review

**OceanPro 533  
Cuddy Cabin**

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OceanPro is not really a name that springs to mind when thinking about New Zealand-built aluminium trailer boats, but if the impressive OceanPro 533 Cuddy Cabin is anything to go by, it might soon be, and more quickly than you might imagine.



# A RIB FROM



OceanPro boats are manufactured by Pauanui Marine & Engineering, owned by Mike Bush, who designs and builds the boats with a small team. Mike's background is in mechanical engineering, but some years ago, he

embarked on a new path, with the ambition to design and build boats. Mike did the rounds at a boat show trade day when there were still such things, talking to boat builders and designers and putting himself forward as someone who wanted to learn. Steve Schmidt, now world-renowned for his Naiad RIBs, decided to take him on, training him as a designer. Bush eventually spent five years working for the company in the USA, plus a stint in the UK. Schmidt has now retired, Naiad is part of the Australia-based but US-focussed Whiskey Project group, and Bush is busy with his own boat-building business.

OceanPro's current range comprises six models between 4.2 and 6.2 metres, all of them customisable, with a seventh, a 480 centre-console, awaiting its first order, which is imminent, says Bush. OceanPro is building a strong dealership network, which so far includes Bay Marine in Tauranga, Family Boats in Auckland, and Peninsula Marine in Kopu. Bush is also talking with a leading marine dealer in Whangarei.



We've featured OceanPro centre-console models in *Boating NZ* before, but this is the first (cuddy) cabin version we've tried and the first OceanPro I have personally reviewed. It's the new OceanPro 533 Cuddy Cabin, using the same hull design Bush has employed for the last five years. Based on his original 520 model, it is used for OceanPro's 535 centre console and 545 Hardtop (extended), as well as the new 533.

As reviewed, the 533 is a fairly basic cuddy-cabin runabout with a sturdy bimini top, heaps of cockpit space,



# ALUMINIUM

a useful gear stowage area in the forepeak, and a large swim platform aft. It's a pontoon design and, to my eye, more stylish than most, with really pleasing proportions.

That Bush has gone down the road of building pontoon-style aluminium boats – rigid, welded aluminium buoyancy tubes wrapped around an aluminium hull – should be no surprise, given his background designing RIBs. Indeed, Bush describes his design philosophy for OceanPro as “RIBs built from aluminium.”

While I've represented this 533 as 'basic,' it nonetheless comes fully equipped, including a seven-inch Garmin display, Yamaha digital gauges, a GME VHF, a rocket launcher, bait table and four through-coaming rod/cup holders, as well as Ultralon Nano-Dot on the coamings, side deck, and across the transom. It's also presented on an OceanPro aluminium trailer, at the request of the dealer, Bay Marine, but available on a slightly cheaper DMW steel trailer as well, and with painted topsides.

There's a Savwinch drum winch inside the anchor compartment in the bow, a Maxset anchor, a decent bilge pump in the sump aft amidships, and provision for a 75-litre underfloor fuel tank – this boat sported two 27-litre tote tanks, again at the dealer's request. For some owners, tote tanks are more



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**LEFT** The cuddy cabin has no v-berths, only storage – bulky items on the floor and smaller ones in the side shelves. There's room under the seat bases for chilly-bin-seats.

**RIGHT** The 533 weighs just 900kg on an OceanPro alloy trailer. The transom is simple but functional.

convenient than towing the boat to the nearest petrol station, especially in remote areas.

Power is provided by a 90hp Yamaha four-cylinder four-stroke outboard, with cable controls and SeaStar mechanical steering. According to Bush, this hull performs well enough with less horsepower – he's fitted a centre console 535 with a three-cylinder Yamaha 70hp – but the 90hp's larger cubic capacity and extra horsepower are definitely a better match.

The 533's cockpit is a good size, since with a relatively short cuddy, the helm is positioned fairly well forward. Side pockets, lined with Nano-dot, are long enough for fishing rods and other long items, and there's additional storage in shelving on either side of the seats (two-tier) and inside the cuddy cabin. The gunwales are a decent height all round, providing support when fishing and security at sea.

This boat has a removable transom bait board option incorporating a couple of rod holders. There's a simple transom shelf running all the way across the back, with the battery box and isolation switch on the starboard side, but the model can also be specified with an underfloor fuel tank, in which case the transom shelf is lower; with an enclosed transom with lockers; and/or a walkthrough transom.



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**ABOVE** The wide swim platform is great for divers gearing up and useful for fishers as well.

**OPPOSITE** Gunwales are high enough for safety and the boat is stable at rest. The dash console is neatly laid out. unusually stepped pontoons give a soft, dry ride.

Although we didn't have any fishing rods on hand for testing, I suspect rods stored in the rocket launcher on the back of the Bimini would risk getting in the way of anglers fishing and casting from the cockpit. I'd prefer the rocket launcher to store the rods more vertically, but it's a minor criticism.

For a pontoon-style boat, Bush has achieved a commendably flat floor all the way to the sides for most of the cockpit, with the sort of toe-room at floor level fishers will appreciate. Of course, internal beam is slightly compromised, as is true with pontoon boats across the board, but on the plus side, the pontoon design means that stability at rest is excellent, and the boat is an exceptionally dry runner, too.

A pair of swivelling bucket seats are mounted on welded bases with room underneath to slot fish bins or chilly bins – a 42-litre Cool-Ice bin with cushion slides under nicely and serves as another seat. The upstand preventing objects stored on the floor inside the cuddy cabin sliding back into the cockpit is utilised as a footrest for occupants of the front seats, and there are strategically positioned handholds for the front seat passenger.

A fine entry, unique hull design below the chine, and unusually stepped pontoons give a soft, dry ride.







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**With obvious appeal for fishers and divers, this versatile model should also ably discharge family boating duties.**

So, while the 533 as reviewed was a fairly simple boat on the inside, its layout works well, with plenty of scope for owners (or dealers) to kit it out how they like. Wherever you look, the boat is very well built, without shortcuts, using high-quality materials and components. The standard of the welding and finishing in general is very good indeed.

So is the way the 533 goes. Mike has transferred his expertise designing RIBs to his aluminium boats. Consequently, the 533 features a RIB-like, very fine 55° deadrise entry and a moderately deep V-hull (17° deadrise at the transom), supported by OceanPro's unique pontoons, which, unlike a RIB's, are aluminium rather than fabric. These largely clear the water when the boat's planing, but provide extra buoyancy for enhanced safety, stability at rest, and dry operation in most conditions.

The fine entry makes for a very soft ride, especially considering the short cuddy, while the deep-ish vee means a fair bit of banking in sharp turns – but nothing alarming, and only so far before the pontoons come into play. One of the benefits of the hull and pontoon design, according to Bush, is that OceanPro boats track well and show no tendency to misbehave in a following sea. The handling overall feels quite RIB-like – sporty and assured, with the 90hp Yamaha ensuring spirited performance and good load-carrying ability.

The pod-mounted engine was possibly rigged a tad high – there was a bit of ventilation in some of the turns unless the



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**ABOVE** It's a good-sized cockpit for a 5.5m boat. The transom can be configured in several ways, including with a walk-through. Nano-Dot covering the transom and coamings/side decks is nice to sit on.

motor was trimmed well in – but the 533 certainly got up and boogied in a straight line with the outboard trimmed out. We easily managed 30-plus knots with performance to spare. The Yamaha had less than an hour on the clock, so we didn't want to push it too hard. A comfortable cruise speed is anywhere between 18 and 25 knots, depending on the conditions.

A 5mm toughened glass windscreen does a good job of deflecting the slipstream over the helmsman's head and the standard heavy-duty Bimini's canvas top offers weather protection and shade.

The OceanPro 533 Cuddy is an impressively capable, modest-sized

aluminium trailer boat that's easy to handle, easy to tow, and easy to store. With a long list of factory options available and plenty of scope for making a base boat your own, the OceanPro 533 is well built, performs and handles better than most, and is arguably more pleasingly proportioned than similar designs from many other manufacturers.

With obvious appeal for fishers and divers, this versatile model should also ably discharge family boating duties. Based on my impressions of the 533 Cuddy Cabin, I expect the OceanPro brand will become a lot more familiar to New Zealand boaties over the next few years. **BNZ**



## OceanPro 533 Cuddy Cabin

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### HIGHLIGHTS

Pretty looking aluminium boat that's well engineered and nicely finished

Useful cockpit, wide swim platform and various transom options. Light to tow.

Smooth and dry-riding hull with unique pontoon design

### SPECIFICATIONS

**loa** 5.50m  
**beam** 2.15m / 1.53m (internal)  
**deadrise at transom** 17°  
**hull weight** 730kg incl fuel and outboard  
**tailer weight** 900kg (aluminium trailer), (1000kg, steel trailer)  
**construction** 4mm hull, frames, deck; 3mm topsides & pontoons  
**engine** Yamaha F90 four-cylinder four-stroke O/B  
**reserve buoyancy** 1310 litres  
**fuel** 75 litres optional underfloor/ 2 x 27L tote tanks  
**power** 70-100hp (170kg max)

