

Kingcat 170

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Monday, 26 June 2006
Last Updated Wednesday, 08 November 2006

Boat Test - Kingcat 170 — A 5,4m craft by Z-Craft (November/December 2005)

Tested by Erwin Bursik

AT A GLANCE

LOA: 5.4m
Beam: 2.48m
Construction: GRP
Flotation: Bottles and foam
Hull weight: 560kg
Trailer weight: 1 700kg
Max rated hp: 2 x 90hp
Min rated hp: 2 x 60hp
Ideal motors: 2 x 70hp

Includes windscreen with stainless-steel rail, 2 x anchor hatches, 2 x sunken fish hatches with drains, raised centre fuel hatch for 4 x jerry cans, motorwells incorporating battery hatch, SST keel strips, moulded boarding platform, storage lockers, tackle drawers, bow roller and bollard, STD non-skid deck finish.

ENTHUSIASM in the voice of a man telling you about his new boat conveys a great deal to the listener. When Peter Motzouris, MD of Z-Craft in Empangeni, phoned to ask me to test his most recent model Kingcat, due for launching in early 2006, his voice told me in no uncertain terms that he was ecstatic with his new creation.

The new Kingcat 170 was conceived and created for a specific market. It was to be big enough for serious offshore fishing, yet small enough to be towed with ease and handled both on and off the water without excessive amounts of motor horsepower or human muscle power.

As it had been some years, since I last tested one of Z-Craft's smaller boats, I wondered what Peter had packaged into the new Kingcat 170, and I was eager to see her on the water.

GENERAL IMPRESSION

Seeing two craft parked on their trailers at the top of the Meerensee Ski-Boat Club slipway, I was in no doubt that these were the boats I had driven to Richards Bay to test. Looking at their port bow profile, they were unmistakably Z-Craft Kingcats.

The Kingcat 166, 180, 200 and so forth have a certain shape that undeniably stamps them as sisters — and very good looking sisters at that.

CONDITIONS FOR TEST

The north-north-westerly was howling on the day of the test. In fact, we seldom see it that strong, and on this day it was whipping the spray off the small chop in the Richards Bay harbour, and driving it airborne for quite a distance.

When we eventually got out to sea, although the wind had not decreased in strength, the easterly swell seemed to control the size of the chop in a somewhat turbulent sea. However, the sea became rougher and rougher as we ventured further away from the protection of the large dunes that run along the coastline north of Richards Bay harbour.

With the flat-water trials having been undertaken inside the harbour, I now had much more interesting waters awaiting me beyond the breakwaters. We exited the harbour through what only can be described as a washing machine, and had very rough seas to contend with for the rest of the trials.

LAUNCHING AND TRAILERING

Peter says the only trailer troubles any of his clients have had is when they've made their own or have had them made by someone else. "My trailer works," he says.

I would certainly agree with that. During all the boat tests I have carried out for Z-Craft over the last ten years, the loading and unloading of their craft — both from the beach as well as on slipways — have been very straight forward exercises.

Two years ago I towed the Z-Craft prize boat for the Guinjata competition from Empangeni to Guinjata, Moçambique, so I can truly say I have tried it and it works. In fact, at the time I was amazed at how easily the rig towed behind my rather underpowered 4x4.

On this occasion I left the retrailering of Brett Hume's Cane Rat to Peter because the NNW was screaming down the channel from which we had to load the craft, with the wind blowing side-on. Peter made it picture-perfect. No fuss, no charging the trailer at speed, just a minor steering adjustment. Within thirty seconds the Kingcat 170 was perfectly positioned on the trailer and the bow cleat was snatched up tightly.

MOTORS AND CONTROLS

Once I got closer to the two craft I saw Peter had thrown me a bit of a curved ball. I said earlier there were two identical

craft, and indeed, they had identical hulls, but with two wildly differing power sources. The test boat had a pair of Yamaha two-stroke 70hp motors swinging 17-pitch props, and the other craft had a pair of 4-stroke 60hp Yamahas with 13-pitch props.

Another difference between them was that the test Kingcat 170 had a stainless-steel toga bar with a collapsible canopy, whereas the other craft did not have a canopy.

I will refer to both boats when I describe this craft's handling abilities, but as all the out-at-sea work was done with the twin 70 Yamahas, I need to elaborate a little on the KingCat 170 with the twin 60hp four-strokes.

Spinning 13-pitch props, this craft was amazingly quick out of the hole, but tended to over-rev up to 6 000 rpm. During straight, high-speed runs she was marginally slower than the other craft, but over a one kilometre run was not much more than a boat-length behind.

I would actually prefer to see 15-pitch props on this setup because, when running a distance at "travelling speed", even without looking at the rev counters or GPS, I could sense the motors were working harder than they should. I am convinced that 15-pitch props would bring her in line with expectations of running at 4 200 rpm and getting an SOW of 18-20 knots.

The new hydraulic steering system Peter had fitted to these craft was not only extremely neat, but also exceedingly smooth, even in very tight turns. It was even able to hold the craft (hands-free) on a steady course when quartering the big running sea on the way home. This led Peter and I to discuss at length the incredible improvement in boating accessories like this hydraulic steering system, as compared to what was available even ten years ago.

HANDLING

From the word go I knew this was going to be an interesting test, with all the elements stacked against me. Firstly, we had to wait ages for the sun to break through to facilitate good photographs. Then when the sun came, the wind was carrying spray far and wide, making photography rather difficult from the transom-end of the other Kingcat 170, Rest Assured, belonging to Theo van der Merwe.

During the photoshoot, I was most impressed by the position of Cane Rat's ride. She used her pronounced bow area — the mark of a Z-Craft — to find and cleave her path in the unstable water, and also to maintain an almost stately pose during the runs and turns Peter put her through.

With this in mind, I took her controls. After receiving clearance from Richards Bay Port Control, I eased up the throttle to head her into the turbulent water at the harbour entrance where the easterly swell was pushing against an outgoing tidal stream coming out of the large bay area.

It's not fair to take any new boat through that rough stuff, and I was pleased to get out of it and into the other rough stuff that at least had direction to both the chop and swell.

One of the first aspects I appreciated was that the Kingcat 170 does not puff spray. The bane of my life is the fine mist that gets blown back and covers my glasses when playing with boats. On this day I only got them wet when I purposely angled the starboard bow quarter into very heavy water to see how much spray I could get her to generate.

Again the Kingcat's bow profile comes into its own and almost stops spray coming over those standing at the forward console. I say almost, because in the wrong sea, at the wrong time and in the hands of an inexperienced skipper, any craft will take some water.

With the wind coming off the land, I had to get out far enough in a beam sea so that I could swing her bow into the big chop and ride side-on to the prevailing swell that was coming in from the north east. It reminded me of the advert about

some drink that gives you wings. With the stormy wind blowing on Cane Rat's transom — plus a minimal amount of bow-up trim and lateral support from the trimming of the starboard motor — it felt as if Cane Rat had wings. The long, fast and stable ride excited me as we covered a lot of distance, very comfortably and at a reasonable speed.

By this stage we were approaching the beach and water protected from the land gale from where I had to turn about and go back into the rough stuff. With the wind on the port transom and the bow taking on the north-easterly swell, the going was bound to be a bit tougher. Yet at 15 knots we made good, reasonably comfortable progress until we were well out to sea and in water totally unprotected from the wind.

Trolling at lure speed of 5/6 knots in conditions like these in a 17ft craft is never easy. Even a 24-footer wouldn't have flattened the sea much. But while we all agreed that under normal fishing condition it was long past going home time, I still had a lot more playing to do with her. Travelling at marginally under 5 knots at 1 800 rpm, we trolled at various angles to the wind and with the wind, generally most comfortably. On slow, one-motor troll, conditions didn't allow for the full range of trials, but on the drift I was impressed at how stable she lay in the water.

Ever since the days of their first Invaders, Z-Craft have been producing craft that are good in the surf. For decades their craft have been known for their turning ability, lack of cavitation and speed out of the hole. With all the trials, I did with the Kingcat 170, all I can say is that she has inherited the best traits of all the models that have gone before her. She was a pleasure to skipper in these circumstances.

However, it was on the way home, far out to sea, north of the harbour entrance, that she really came into her own.

With the wind on her starboard bow and the swell rolling in on the starboard side of her transom, we had all the ingredients for a terrible ride home. I trimmed her bow up a fair bit, gave the starboard motor an additional up trim to hold her transom into the run of the sea, and pushed up the throttles.

It was a long run, so I had lots of time to get her perfectly trimmed to the point where I could let go of the steering and just watch and feel how the hull tracked and rode this bad sea. For at least two kilometres she was on "auto-pilot", and she displayed an incredible ability to ride the sea while also giving us a comfortable ride.

At 4 200 revs, the 70hp Yamahas swinging 17-pitch props provided us with an SOG of just on 20 knots at very even thrust.

The motors were just out the box and still very tight, but with a crew of three aboard I still almost managed to get her on the plane on one motor. Given run-in motors and 15-pitch props, I have no doubt planing on one motor would be possible.

DECK LAYOUT

Peter has followed the conventional Kingcat helm station design on the Kingcat 170 — curving the face of the station so that gauges and instrumentation are clearly visible. The skipper feels part of the craft.

He has also tried to enhance the fishability of the Kingcat 170 over the 166 by increasing her overall size, not just her length. The net result is that the gunnels are higher and there is a lot more fishing deck area.

Upfront in the console area a lot of cupboard space for tackle has been provided, with the plastic tackle boxes being slipped into a rack system that seems to work well. The large port-side door provides easy access to a large front locker. But as we all know, doors and hatches on ski-boats don't make access all that easy, especially in rough seas, so Peter has had this door designed so it can be slipped off its hinges and left ashore, if the skipper so desires.

The craft also offers below-deck fish hatches and a large livebait well with circulatory pumps that can be attached to a deckwash. The latter was designed especially for Brett Hume's needs when livebaiting for tigerfish out in Josini

Dam.

A centre deck hatch holds six cans of fuel. As this is also designed to support a fighting chair, the side of this hatch opens outwards to allow access to the fuel tanks, even if there is an angler in the chair.

FINISH

In my humble opinion, the finish of each new Z-Craft that comes out of the factory is better than the previous one, and that's quite a statement considering the first craft were top class.

Peter and Dustin Motzouris have made it a priority that every aspect of the craft — from design to final finish — is as perfect as they can make it. In fact, Peter tells me that Dustin can be a pain, because he is besotted with finish and attention to the smallest detail. This shows both in the hardware and glassing, as well as in the presentation and signage.

CONCLUSION

This craft is small enough for a crew of two to easily handle in protected launches, and any 4x4 with a 2,5- or 3 litre engine will tow her with ease, even to the furthest reaches of Moçambique.

Has Peter succeeded in designing a craft for his specific market? I think so. If you're a light tackle angler who occasionally wants to fish 50-80 lb class tackle for big fish, I believe the KingCat 170 is well worth considering.