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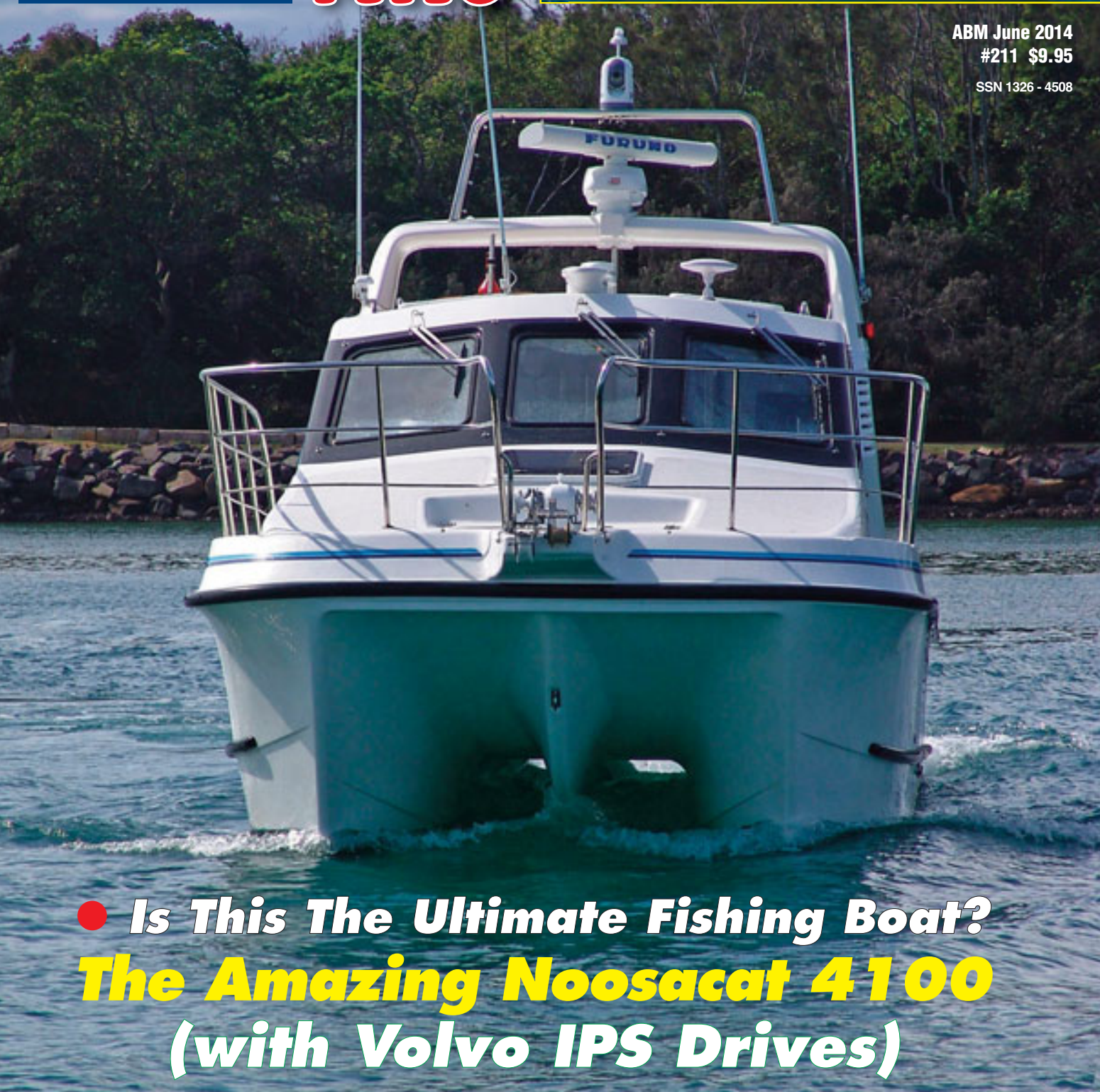
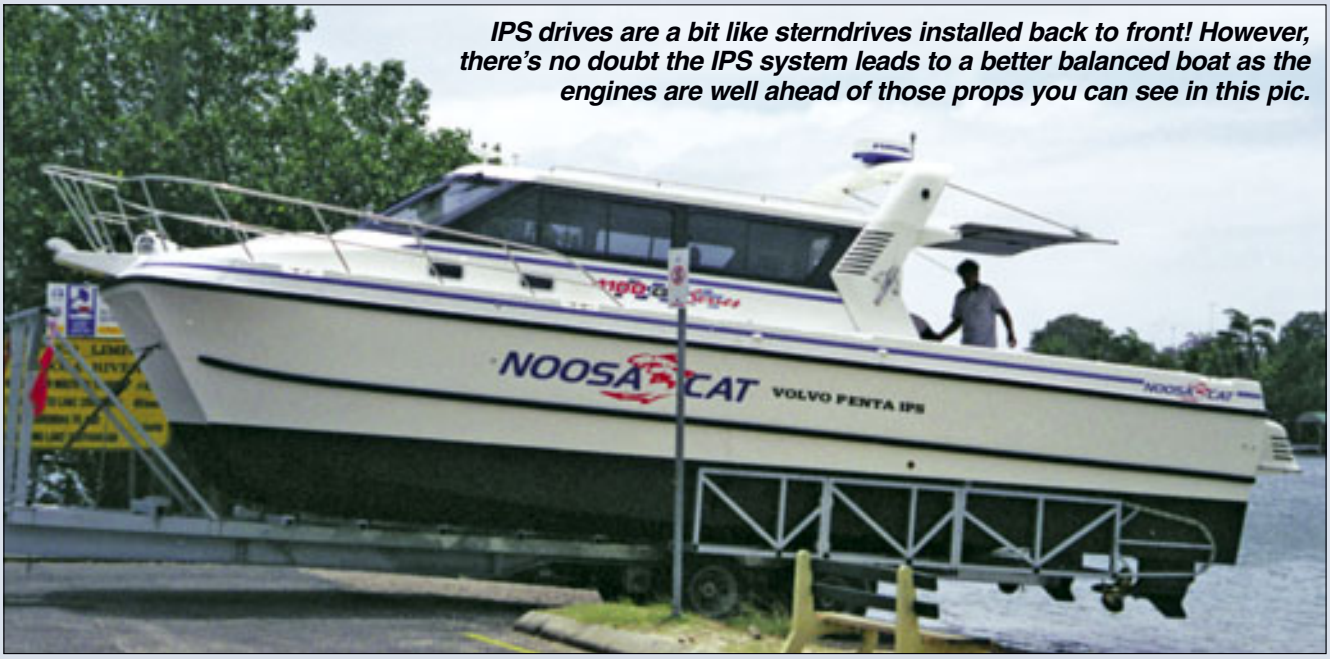


• Is This The Ultimate Fishing Boat?

The Amazing Noosacat 4100 (with Volvo IPS Drives)

The Noosacat 4100/IPS 500 Combo



IPS drives are a bit like sterndrives installed back to front! However, there's no doubt the IPS system leads to a better balanced boat as the engines are well ahead of those props you can see in this pic.

There is nothing quite like testing a big Noosacat. Of all the craft the writer has tested over the years, big and small, few ever light up the emotions as much as the big cats, and in this case, a very special one at that.

Readers will recall the Noosacat 4100 stunned the boating world back in 2006 when it knocked over Riviera and Maritimo, the fancied favourites, for The Boat Of The Year competition. The silence at the presentation evening when the winner was announced was palpable, as the industry was genuinely shocked that the Noosacat team had just pipped all the favourites at the post, and taken out the prestigious award.

They should have too. The 4100 was then – and remains today – a magnificent craft, one of a kind that has very few peers anywhere in the world, let alone in Australia. That's not just grandiose jingoism, either. This is a world-ranked cat, with performance parameters that still leave most monos of this size, in its wake.

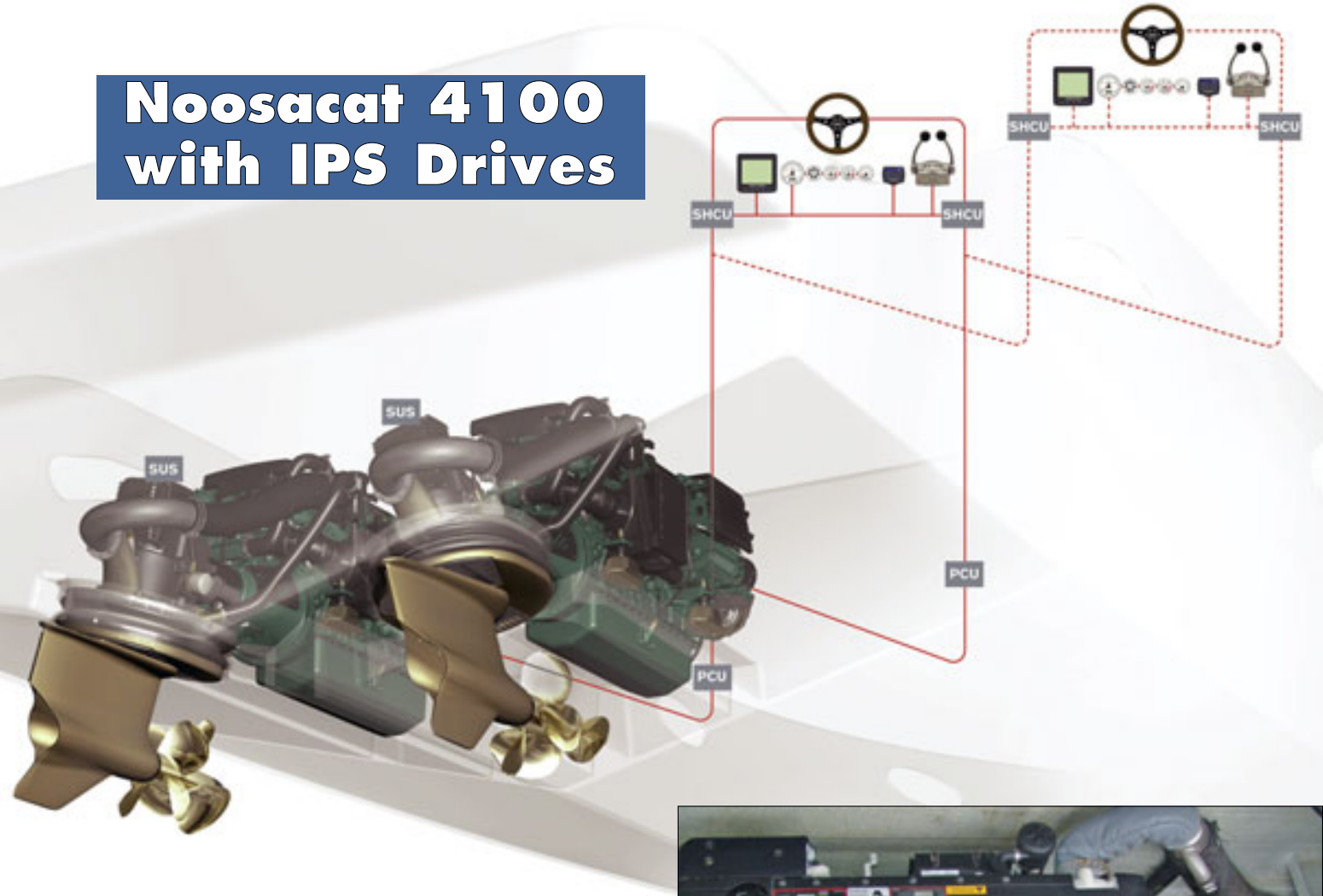
Powered by twin IPS 500s, Volvo's extraordinary 'pod' drive systems, this big craft cruises offshore faster than most of its "competition" can achieve in top speed, and its top speed puts it up there with the fastest ocean going craft manufactured in Australia – and this, all from a 4100 – with truly remarkable performance.

By itself, this would be a magnificent achievement – but there are other virtues to consider. Not only is this Noosacat 4100 one of the fastest craft in the country, it is arguably the best rough water offshore cruiser in Australia in its class – and not by a small margin either. Despite all the hype, very few mono cruisers actually have the capability of long range offshore cruising, especially in Australian conditions.

We have some of the longest, toughest coast line in the world. It's all very well to talk about cruising to Hamilton Island in the brochures, but there's a lot more to bluewater cruising in Australia than marina-hopping up the coast in perfect conditions - with a professional crew bringing the boat home.

Above: It's easy to see where the massive reserves of seaworthiness comes from - running, this rig handles 3.0-4.0m seas with disarming ease. Below: Fit-out is to the customer's requirements and standards; no two 4100s have the same interior. Like the 4100's powerplants, the factory builds what the customer wants in and around the base tooling.

Noosacat 4100 with IPS Drives



That's not just a bitchy comment – the reality is that most of the glamour cruiser owners rapidly find out that long range, blue water cruising is an utterly different world to cruising around Sydney Harbour on a lovely summer's afternoon.

Australia has vast distances to cover, and in so doing, inevitably the craft will encounter what most pro skippers would consider normal offshore conditions, but which can be quite alarming and very uncomfortable for Sunday sailors or weekend cruisers.

So when we talk about long range cruising, you step into another world, especially if you're contemplating fishing, cruising or exploring different parts of Australia such as the east or west coasts of Tasmania, or perhaps taking a run up to the Flinders group of islands, or heading north from Hamilton Island to explore the fabulous Barrier Reef "Ribbons" territory, before moving up to Portland Roads and beyond.

All of this is par for the course in a Noosacat 4100. This boat is built for the worst conditions one could ever encounter and then deal with it safely, and comfortably. This is why it is the choice of most offshore Rescue authorities around the country, and why it has such an unbeatable reputation for seaworthiness in appalling conditions. Not that anybody goes out in rough conditions for the fun of it, but if you're going to make long-range coastal cruising one of the items on your 'bucket list', as the skipper, you will inevitably encounter conditions that will make you wonder why you left the comfort of the marina – and very glad you did so in a NoosaCat.

Design

The Noosacat 4100 is a big, beamy, powerfully built high tunnel catamaran. This boat was powered by the twin 370hp Volvo IPS 500 Pod Drives, and was superbly appointed with the finest array of electronics one can install in recreational craft today. Check this lot out – and let's not even think about

Above & Left: *The IPS drives or pods, together with Volvo's exceptionally compact engine design results in a very 'clean' and organised engine and drive compartment. Relatively easy to install, the Achillies heel of the IPS pods is that the Volvo engineers still have not finalised an adjustable trim or drive angle mechanism for the pods, so the boatbuilder has to be darn sure he's got the drive angles worked out correctly.* ***Below:*** *Check this out - dead sideways, with fingertip control on the joystick - in a big cat! Manouverability is simply amazing.*

Noosacat 4100 with IPS Drives

what it cost!

Furuno:

TZT14 14”display & CPU,
64 n/mile radar
19” Furuno monitor
FCV1150 Sounder w/- 2 & 3 kw transducers
Furuno SC30 Satellite compass (heave compensator)
GPS receiver,
3D charts
Maxsea software w/- PC (with Personal Bathymetric Generator)
WAASP bottom plotting system I/faced w/- Maxsea
Furuno 15”Monitor to cockpit

Mixed:

Flir night vision camera system & interface.
Simrad A/pilot
Wireless network w/- antenna for mobile phone & internet access
Maxsea accesses on line data for live weather conditions & forecasts for any location.
TV configured to repeat Furuno or Maxsea data
Volvo Penta Digital Positioning system, Joystick & docking station w/- joystick to cockpit

Needless to say, this is not something an operator can absorb in a couple of hours, but I was impressed that it is remarkably intuitive, and an operator could grasp the basic stuff pretty quickly. But to understand the system; its sophistication and integration, and be able to explore its full potential – now that is going to take some patience and hands-on time.

In the overall design sense, the NC 4100 has twin cabins, a very practical toilet shower suite, a big

saloon with a central table and lounge (that will comfortably seat 6 people) and running down the starboard side, the comprehensive galley.

Like all Noosacats of this calibre, these boats involve a considerable degree of personal customisation for each owner. There are models with longer cabins, shorter cabins, some are set up for sportfishing, others for cruising. In this price range, the owner's wishes are generally met, and over the years, Noosacat proprietors, Wayne and Debbie Hennig have built many different versions of their craft in the bigger sizes from (say) the 3000 through to the 5000.

In each case, the customer's requirements are carefully calibrated to the design and power plants being used, and then the whole project is packaged up to the budget involved.

Generally speaking, most Noosacat owners have a decidedly pragmatic bent, although there has been some beautiful interior fit-outs built along the way. This is the whole point – Noosacat build literally what the customer wants, to the standard of finish they require, and one that will best suit the owner's application.

In this case, the owner is a fishing nut, and he's based in central Qld with a view to fishing on the outside of the 'Reef in the shipping channels, where

***Left Above:* Returning into Mooloolaba, the Noosacat 4100 paints a handsome picture. *Above:* Just cruisin' - around 25-26kn. This rig is very fast. *Below Left:* A good shot of how one of the 4100s galley was set-up - note the excellent fridge freezer unit. Some customers have LP gas ovens, others just want a microwaves and two top burners - Noosacat recognise this sort of thing is intensely personal and build accordingly. Like the powerful 'wet' eutectic system below - this drives the huge fish box and internal fridge/freezer system in the test boat.**

Noosacat 4100 with IPS Drives

the big red fish lie waiting for the fisho to drop down a tasty morsel they can grab. We're talking here of catching giant nannygai, red emperor, coral trout in sizes most of us can only dream about, but with a rig like this, every fishing ground is within reach.

It's no wonder the owner has such an awesome freezer system built into the centre of the cockpit, complex live bait tanks, and an attitude to fishing that will make most fishos go weak at the knees.

When we talk about the ultimate fishing boat, damn it, this must be getting awfully close.

Performance

The day had two highlights for the writer – one was the sheer pleasure, no, the thrill, of sitting in the big air-suspension skipper's seat with my left hand gently on the helm, as we cruised out of Mooloolaba at 6 knots initially, through the walls, before we opened the rig up, as we put Point Cartwright behind us, and lifted the big cat up to cruise at 25-26 knots – *wow, you don't need to beam me up, Scotty, I'm on my way!*

The IPS Drives create a really unusual point of thrust in the craft, which is quite different to anything you will experience with a stern drive or shaft drives. It is best described as providing an unusually high level of lift about three quarters of the way along the hull, allowing this ten tonne craft to happily plane along at 11-12 knots, sitting high and handsome in the process.

It's almost a weird feeling because normally at this speed, most boats (cats and monos) are unhappily dragging their bums through the water, because they're not going fast enough, and they're half way 'twixt and tween' displacement and planing.

There's really no such thing with these IPS Drives in the Noosacat 4100. It planes superbly, comfortably and quietly at 11-12 knots, thus providing the owner with a very serious alternative performance parameter for long range cruising, and an absolutely brilliant *"get me home"* speed in seriously rough weather.

Because the boat is sitting up so beautifully it will cope with almost cyclonic conditions – whilst still maintaining its 11-12 knots. The writer really worked this process hard because it is such an unusual feeling as much as anything, but after I'd been circling on all the different attitudes of travel for about half an hour,

Okay class - pay attention, please, this is where we learn how to drive all this gear! Yikes - just sitting here looking at it all seems a bit daunting, but in truth, if each unit is taken in isolation, switched on and tuned in, then the next unit, and then . . .and so on, the writer was surprised how intuitive (understandable, logical) it all was. And you've gotta lurve the cockpit repeater station- how good is that? Oh, yes, that IS a joystick up there on the top right; what a boat!

a gentle cough from Mr. Hennig indicated that he felt that we had done enough circling and it was time to get serious about going somewhere at normal speeds . . . So once again, we lifted it back onto the higher plane parameters, and started cruising again at 24-25 knots – before doing a couple of quick runs just to see what it felt like to run 10 tonnes at 33 knots across the ocean.

Crikey, it doesn't get much better than this – and it was easy to see how quickly you could cruise up the coast through to Hamilton Island and beyond.

2014 Electronics Fest

The next impressive part of the program for the afternoon was to utilise the amazing (not to say bewildering) array of electronics this owner has fitted to the 4100.

In truth, you would need to spend 4-5 days nonstop, with instruction manual in one hand, a tech beside you and 100% total concentration to fully appreciate the integration of all this gear.

I was contemplating this as we cruised north towards Bundaberg, when Wayne said "Let's pick up a good fishing reef and I'll show you what we can do with this new integrated Volvo IPS/GPS system."

So we pulled back down to trolling speed, switched on the enormous 19" Furuno sounder, and in a matter of minutes, had identified a reef in 60 odd metres that clearly had a whole heap of fish on it.

I'm not going to pretend to know what they were, but from a lay fisherman's viewpoint, it's the sort of "show" on a reef that would have us all very excited to the extent that we'd figure it was the best reef we'd seen in years. Yes, this Furuno depth sounder array is that good: I felt that by tweaking the controls it was entirely possible for the Furuno to spit out the names of the individual fish, their home address and phone number! Kid you not, the display imagery was superb. But wait, it gets better.

At this point Wayne said "Okay, is this where you want to be?"

After studying the GPS plotter, I worked out that we had a gentle southerly set of 1.4 knots, so I figured that we should be a little bit north of the "show" - so between the GPS and the depth sounder I

positioned the rig where I thought we would normally put the pick down and start falling back to the reef echo on the sounder using the age-old "pay out the anchor line (once you've got the pick embedded) and fall back to exactly where you want to be, before tying it off" technique.

But Wayne said "No, no. . . don't worry about that, just put the boat where you want it to be."

So I did – moving the boat pretty much on top of the ledge on the northern side, according to the GPS.

Wayne looked at me and said "Peter, you're still off the actual reef a bit aren't you?" To which I replied, "Yes, but we've got to allow something for the set

Noosacat 4100 with IPS Drives

With an across the ground cruising speed of around 25 knots, lock 'n load GPS positioning on the IPs drives, plus this huge fishing cockpit surrounding the biggest and best eutectic fish box we've ever clapped eyes on, the writer suspects this owner might be planning some exceptional fishing adventures in the near future!

which is going to push us back over the reef . . ."

To which he replied "Normally, that would be right, but I've got a better idea for you than that – just position us exactly where you want to actually drop the lines." Again, that's what I did. Letting the combination of the current, and a touch on reverse put the Noosacat right over the sounder image. At this point Wayne reached across the helm, pressed a button on the dash and said "STAY !" to nobody in particular I thought, but in fact, would you believe he was talking to the boat?

No, I'm only half kidding because what he was doing was activating the GPS auto-locating feature that is synched to the IPS drives in such a way that from the moment the system is switched on, the Noosacat 4100 would stay motionless above the reef without the anchor, regardless of the sea state, wind or current.

If I hadn't been there and seen it for myself, having positioned the cat (just momentarily) over the reef, I wouldn't have believed it possible.

It was f . . . g unbelievable . . . We just stopped over this reef, looking at all these fish down below on the ledge, for as long as there was diesel running through the engines, and they had a signal from the GPS. Motion was almost indiscernible, the engines were just ticking over in the background and every so often you'd hear a sort of "swooshing" sound from under the boat as the IPS Drives would swivel round and adjust the boat's position to make sure it stayed within about (they reckon) 10 metres radius of the position.

As I said, if I hadn't been there I'd never have believed it, let alone having driven the boat to the point, "parked it" over the reef, and locked on to the fishing position.

After this, of course, what really pi . . ed me off was to learn that Wayne and the owner had been out the previous couple of days and had used this feature with great success on several reefs, only to rub it in when I was there, because we didn't have any bait, did we? Or tackle. Yet there I was in one of the best recreational fishing boats in Australia, with an unbelievable navigation control system, the biggest eutectic freezer I have ever seen in my life, all the

accoutrements that one needs to keep the tinnies cold and the mates happy – and we didn't have any bait. Or tackle. There wasn't even a handline on the boat – all of which goes to prove I've got to have a long talk to Wayne Hennig about the way we do these boat tests!

Ramifications Of The System

Quite seriously though, it was an awesome demonstration of 2014 electronics in action. Yes, I'm aware of the Minn Kota IPod/GPS systems, and I'm aware there are several other electronic programs now that can also be used in combination with either small boats or much larger ones. I'm not suggesting for a moment that this is a unique or new innovation, so much as it's an absolutely extraordinary application of it, that does suggest that we still have a lot more room to develop electronics in the fishing world to come.

Obviously you need to have a boat of the sophistication of the Noosacat 4100 and its magnificent Volvo IPS Drives to do this sort of thing in this much comfort, so far from home, but it must be noted that you can get a similar package from Cummins and ZF to do it too, and other big engine manufacturers (especially Mercury Marine) are now developing similar programs for their 'fly by wire' outboards.

It certainly shows how technology is still evolving, and arguably at an even faster rate than ever before.

I must say that from the point of view of the game fishing world I inhabited in the 1980-1990s to the technological world I'd like to inhabit in 2014, the game has changed in ways we couldn't have believed possible back in the 1980s and 1990s. So I was grateful for the opportunity of seeing this in action, and as we steamed back into Mooloolaba, I realised that I'd been privileged indeed to see first hand how these new systems work in one of the best boats of its kind in the world.

Conclusion

The Noosacat 4100 is a magnificent cat, with a level of performance, ride and handling that is still the equal of anything produced anywhere else in the world. That it is a uniquely Australian craft is something we should all be very proud of because at this point in time, Australia badly needs to find things that we can make better than anyone else, so that we can develop our export markets and rebuild this industry again.

The Noosacat 4100 is available in a wide range of custom fit-outs, including a full Flybridge model, or the Sedan version like this one with the fibreglass covered rear deck, or both, and a very solid range of engine or power options, although once most people have experienced the IPS Drives firsthand, they rarely go for anything else.

But why would you? The IPS system is an extremely efficient form of propulsion and the only real inhibition it suffers is that of any shaft drive or fixed drive system working in shoal water.

In that case, there is still always the sterndrive or jet pump option (and Noosacat can install either systems in the 4100) but for 95% of Australian waters, the IPS Drives are simply magnificent.

Taken together, the Noosacat 4100, replete with IPS Drives, is truly one of the great recreational fishing boats of the world.

ABM