



# NoosaCat 4400





Long term readers worked out many years ago that the writer has a special affinity for what used to be called SharkCats, but since about 1992, have been known as Noosacats.

Indeed, we're very proud to say that a Noosacat was featured on our very first cover back in April 1994, and over the years, we have happily and apparently successfully, tested virtually every model in the Noosacat range.

The writer has owned a number of them, including the classic 23' Noosacat (that is still in production to this very day), and a craft that still wears the mantle, in the writer's opinion, as one of the best all round 7.0m trailerboats ever built.

As noted, over the years we've tested many Noosacats, as Wayne and his ever-patient wife Debbie Hennig have slowly retooled, upgraded, modified and changed all of the craft from their more raw beginnings back in the 1980's and 90's when they were built



they can do, I might add, but it's akin to using a Ferrari to go shopping for Kellogs at a shopping mall – of course they can, but that is not what they are designed to do.

It's interesting to note, too, that

favourite cruisers – and of a wonderfully, uniquely, Australian genre, too.

And so it was with some tongue-in-cheek interest, that we accepted Wayne's invitation to slip up to Noosaville to "track test" his latest generation of the well regarded 4400 cat hull – this time as what is possibly the world's biggest Walkaround,

As most readers are aware, we're not really given to testing \$750K boats, but in this instance, Wayne dressed up the cake more than usual, pointing out it was Australia's first installation of the exceptional new Volvo 370hp D-6 diesels driving through their special HD Duo-Prop sterndrive legs, so not only was it the first use of the 370hp D-6's it was actually the first 'Down Under' installation of what is now the world's most powerful sterndrive.

To top off the invitation, the bastard then turned around and pointed out that

# Walkabout

as SharkCats.

Today's Noosacats are a far cry from the craft of yesteryear.

The smaller models, from the soft riding 520 through to the aforementioned 7.0m trailerboat, are all still very utilitarian craft where the emphasis is on ease of maintenance, functionality and of course, safety and seaworthiness.

These are the hallmarks of the modern Noosacat. As ever, these are not craft used for taking Aunty Thel and the rellos for a picnic up the Hawkesbury River which of course

whilst SharkCat initially, and subsequently Noosacat, have long been derided by the more trendy establishment builders as just "fishing boats", to the writer it seems deeply significant that throughout the years, Noosacats have proved to be virtually recession proof with a long, long waiting list of people queued up to buy them.

Today, much of the factory's capacity is turned over to building craft in the 10.0m-12.0m classes, including the award winning Noosacat 4100 which remains one of the writer's

it also was fitted with the latest, state of the art Furuno Nav Net 'Max Sea' electronic system – which he promised we could use offshore for real.

Needless to say, I stuffed my \$\$\$ prejudices (and maxed out MasterCard) in the drawer at work, conned RC in driving me up to Noosaville in her much more fuel efficient Commodore . . . to test our first \$750K boat.

*Hhhmmm!*

## Design

I have to acknowledge that if Karma, Lady Luck, the Lotto Gods (whoever!)

It's now two years since Noosacat threw a cat amongst the pigeons (so to speak!) to win Australian Boat Of The Year in 2006, to the chagrin of the 'establishment' and all those who assumed the Awards would be won by those who always win the Awards. Worse still, whilst the big blokes are laying off staff, Noosacat is booked out for the next two years . . . Obviously they're doing something the others haven't twigged. Or is the end game simply about building boats people really want - to fish, cruise and explore the Australian coastline – for real. Special report by Peter Webster and Ruth Cunningham



smile upon your humble scribe, this is probably the production boat I will buy.

That said, I envy the WA owner (an earth moving contractor, I believe) because he's built what is probably the ultimate boy's toy – a genuine walkaround fishing boat that makes no pretensions whatsoever to being anything other than . . . a fishing boat, *par excellence!*

It doesn't have a billiard table in the saloon, I couldn't find the Jacuzzi, and the finish? Well, compared to some of the mega yachts we saw at Sanctuary Cove Boat Show recently, the finish would make most Amani-suited brokers curl up their toes in their Guccis!

Let me make this very clear – it is not that the big Noosacat wasn't well finished, from the writer's point of view, it was almost perfect. It's just that Aussie fisho's are not into piano-table finishes in a fishing boat, anymore than we need a teak floor on the sole of a boat that's going to have crayfish or crab pots banged on deck on virtually every trip - well, unless it is a working teak deck, that is.

This is another of Hennig's cats where function and work space efficiency is a heap more important than froth and bubbles.



### Big IS Better . . .

The Noosacat 4400 is bloody enormous, no risk! The back fishing cockpit is so big I'm sure it could be leased out to the NBL as a practice court . . .

Seriously, I don't think I've ever seen a bigger working cockpit in a boat under 50' long. Fabulous.

One of the key features was the big hydraulic cray pot hauler to starboard, and that was just ahead of the tanks that will be plumbed for running saltwater to keep the capture fresh until



the boat comes back to port to unload its precious cargo of WA rock lobsters - and the odd dhufish or three (see pic).

Another great innovation was the gated swimming board and transom area. This almost defies description – it's the transom you have that is open to the four winds. It enables the skipper to simply pull a big (as in 5.0m) RIB onboard and/or a big tinny to go and chase barra in the northern WA creeks. No need for davits here – the skipper will just simply pull the whole damn thing into the cockpit, and







that still leaves plenty of space in the cockpit to work the pots, line hauler and gear whilst unloading the dory.

The walkway(s) up each side are special too, and allow for a veritable party of fishos to work either or both sides of the boat.

The writer has absolutely no idea how many people could fish this boat but I would suggest a baker's dozen (13 blokes) would get lost.

The hardest part of the whole fishing trip would be to act as 'beer boy' bringing the cold drinks backwards and forwards from the front of the boat to the back of the boat via the fridge!

This is one very different fishing boat, folks, and it has such basic honesty I found it completely refreshing all over again.

Hennig seems to have a genius for picking customers who have their feet right on the ground; customers who know exactly what they want and don't give a stuff what the rest of the world thinks they should have.

In this case, the owner went to the trouble of waiting until the new 370hp D-6's came out with the big, heavy duty Duo-Prop legs from Volvo, and having run the rig offshore, I can confirm the wait was definitely worth it.

The acceleration of this boat out of the hole has to be experienced to be believed.

There's no "wind-up" as such. It simply lifts bodily up out of the hole in its own length and is planing – it's not *starting* to plane - it *is planing* already in its own length. If you're on the tennis court (sorry, the cockpit) without hanging on, and the skipper takes off without knowing you're standing there



talking to somebody, look out. Quite simply, you end up in the drink watching the boat disappear over the horizon.

The bite from the paired Duo-Props is phenomenal, and linked to 740 very frisky Swedish horses, with twin turbo charges lighting the wick, there is no lag; just straight out *power* driving through 4 big props with exceptional grip on the water.

**Which Drive Is Best?** As most

readers are aware, boats of this calibre are also available with Volvo's special IPS Drive and indeed, it was partly because the Noosacat 4100 was fitted with two of these IPS drive systems in 2006 (for the first time in Australia) that Noosacat won the Boat Of The Year Award.

It was thus interesting to talk about this with Wayne, because he is extremely unusual in that he's a boat builder who really doesn't have a



preference one way or another for the type of drive system.

Over the years, he's installed more *different* drive systems than I think any other builder in Australia (with the possible exception of Marcel Maujean at Cairns Custom Craft).

That's not blowing in Wayne's ear either. His philosophy has always been that he doesn't care which type of power-plant the customer uses, as long as it's a good fit or match to his hulls.

As a result of this policy, over the years he's used just about every diesel on the planet earth, with every drive combination, including jets, Vee drives, shafts, surface drives, etc.

Knowing he was very taken with the IPS Drives from Volvo in the 4100, I was keen to explore how he felt about this return to 'normal' as it were, where the customer has ordered the 4400 Walkaround with the new Volvo D-6's, but not with IPS Drives – but the quite conventional, albeit heavy duty and extremely robust Volvo Duo-Prop sterndrives

In a sense, Wayne's actions over the first hour of the test provided the answer rather than anything he said.

### Working In The Noosa Bar

We arrived at Noosaville at approximately 8.30 am from the Gold Coast, and literally ran down to the wharf to get on the boat because we had to cross the very shallow bar at Noosa, conduct the sea trials offshore, and then get back in again on a falling tide. On that day, there was a very small tide movement, and very little water on the bar itself.

Bluntly put, if we had IPS Drives Wayne wouldn't have taken his owner's boat to sea across the bar.

"I'm pretty sure we would have got out okay," he said to the writer. "But I'm darn sure we wouldn't have got back in – that's the difference! We nearly touched a couple of times when the water drew back on the bar and a wave formed, leaving practically nothing underneath – and that's the weakness of the IPS system. Not so the big, heavy duty sterndrives that we have here. Even if they had touched, it wouldn't have made a lot of difference, because they're *designed* to do that,

and their inherent draft is a little bit less than the IPS Drives. And remember, you can raise these legs and motor through anything - *as long as the boat will float!*"

"That's makes a huge difference to a lot of owners working in shoal areas."

In other words, it's a situation where an owner working in and out of the Noosa Bar wouldn't contemplate IPS Drives, but not so an owner working in the deep water of Sydney Harbour (for example) where it's not a bar situation at all. In that environment, the IPS, with its unique docking advantages, side thrust manoeuvrability and efficiency of operation, has many advantages.

From the writer's point of view though, it's a walk-up start for sterndrives.

always prefer Noosacats and boats of their ilk, to be fitted with sterndrives that can be trimmed.

People don't really understand the advantage of having "trim-able", steering propellers when a boat is travelling at sea, and the heavier and rougher the conditions, the greater the advantage.

Fitted as this boat is here, the writer would literally take it anywhere – because those 4 big wheels down the back can be steered and the thrust direction controlled to the nth degree, let alone be trimmed up or down to create the perfect trimming situation for the conditions.

### Performance At Sea

Wow! There's no other word for it is there? You can't beat waterline length, and at 4400 or 10.9m long on the waterline, as a cat (where, in the writer's opinion, the waterline should actually be measured by the diagonal of the two hulls) the ride offshore and its cruising speed is awesome.

It only ever amazes me that the blokes who go and buy all the spoofy sports cruisers and 'go fast' boats from Australian and overseas manufacturers never take the time out to go and try something like this offshore.

I guess the real reason here is that those sort of buyers *never really go offshore* much less travel along the coast, out to the islands, or have the time to explore the Barrier Reef, the Rowley Shoals, etc. And that's the difference.

The sports craft are only really used to go across the Sydney Harbours of the world for a couple of hours before you take the babe home to the private apartment . . .

Whereas boats like this are designed to run from Mandurah on the south-east corner of WA up to Perth, on to Geraldton then out to the Abrolhos to fish crayfish, pelagics, West Aussie's favourite, the dhufish, etc.

This is a working boat for a real owner who will travel hundreds of miles along the coastline of WA and put hundreds of hours on the clocks of his D-6 diesels – a far cry from the world of the sports cruiser on Sydney Harbour.



Whether it's the Volvo IPS system or the MerCruiser Zeus system, neither of them offer trimming ability, and for that reason alone, the writer will





The Noosacat was fitted with the latest, second generation first-in-Australia Furuno MaxSea integrated navigation, fish finding, plotting, engine data logging, autopilot systems - seriously, this latest electronic package - which even allows for wave height movement in the display of the seabed - is taking marine electronics to a whole new place. F&B is preparing several reports on these latest electronic developments. (See it yourself on Furuno Boatshow stands or any Taylor Marine showrooms).

And so it is we looked at the ride and handling of this big rig offshore, and folks, I've got to tell you, I've suggested to Wayne that he should make one of these available as a project boat for F&B for at least 12-18 months.

Whilst he didn't seem all that impressed with the idea (!!) he did concede that I looked good sitting at the helm . . . *smooth talker, eh?*

Yep, this is one hell of a boat. It's not about using superlatives, because it's really in a league of its own.

I know of no other craft with the seaworthiness or sea-kindliness even vaguely approaching this craft and let me finish by making the point, that if you wanted to choose a stock production boat in Australia to pick up from the factory and take off for the Kimberley, this is the model you'd choose - and you wouldn't have to change a thing.

As it was, we were inching northwards before Wayne noticed that time was running out and we had to get back across that damn Noosa Bar . . .

### Performance

Sitting in the KAB adjustable skipper's chair running this rig at around 23-24 knots, studying our progress on its separately monitored Furuno Nav Net screen, in almost total silence, as the boat cruised smoothly and quietly across the water, is an unreal experience.

It's almost unnerving in fact, because you normally never get that sort of Mercedes or BMW feeling *in a boat*. And that's how I'd describe it - the feeling of a comfortable chair, helm perfectly to hand, no banging and crashing, no engine noise, no shrieking from turbos, no vibration.

Just silent running where it's so smooth, the combination of the smoothness and the silence means you completely lose the sensation of relative speed across the water; you have to step *outside* the cabin door and stick your head over the side, before you realise you're actually running in the high 20's.

There is simply no sensation of the speed



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Performance of the new 370hp Volvo D-6 turbo diesels was superb, logging a very easy 34.6 knots and cruising at 20kn for just 52-53 l/ph.



inside the wheelhouse.

No wonder the owner installed a Plasma screen and DVD player so the crew could watch movies on route to the fishing grounds – it's actually a pretty good idea because it's so comfortable, so quiet and so easy to do.

For the record, here's how the rig performed:

20.0kn @ 52.8L/ph @ 2,300rpm  
**24.0kn @ 76.3L/ph @ 2,700rpm**  
 34.6kn @ 156 L/ph @ 3,560rpm  
 8.5kn @ 13.3L/ph @ 1,270rpm  
*(on both engines, trolling)*  
 8.5kn @ 15.5L/ph @ 1,590rpm  
*(trolling on just one engine)*

The boat is fitted with 2 x 1000L fuel tanks and it's interesting to note that by cruising offshore at 20kn, the boat has a potential range around 750-775 nautical miles – and that's going to be very useful on the west coast of Australia heading north.

We thought the figures were exceptionally good actually, and a real credit to the Volvo organisation.

### Additional Notes

We haven't talked too much about the "soft" side of the boat because really, it doesn't have any.

Yes, at Wayne's insistence, the owner agreed to install the basic bunks and linings in the two forward double berth cabins, but it was strictly as an after thought, and leaves Wayne slightly embarrassed at the level of fit-out.

Similarly, the galley was nothing much more than a couple of cupboards and a stainless steel sink, a 2 burner stove and microwave - and doubtless would have women or any halfway decent cooks pulling their hair out in frustration that someone could build a boat of this calibre with such a low-key galley.

But for the record, we've seen Noosacat produce some fitting-out schedules that are the equivalent of a Riviera – it's just a question of adding money.

In this case, the owner decided he didn't need a trick galley or nicely fitted staterooms, so he didn't get them.

*As you don't!*



### Conclusion

In this league, Wayne virtually custom builds every boat.

For example, coming through on the factory floor behind this one is a flybridge version with a modified layout that is much more "normal" in as much there is a big galley, beautifully appointed staterooms and all the features one normally expects to find in cruisers of this calibre. Clearly, part of Wayne's success is due to his amicable approach to these issues with his customers; the fact that most of them have had 2 or 3 Noosacats already, has a lot to do with it.

Once you become part of the Noosacat family, it seems most unlikely that you'd ever leave it.

This is an exceptional boat for a very lucky owner and most Australian blokes would all kill to have the good fortune to own something like this and the precursor (obviously) is that you could also afford to run it.

Over the years the writer has driven many big cruisers of different kinds, ranging from exquisitely finished luxurious 'white yachts' to handsome European long range cruisers (and some of them are beautifully built) let alone all the Aussie type sports convertibles of various lengths, but for this writer, the Noosacat protocols for Australian fishermen and boatowners are just about perfect.

This is a real boat for real fishos who still love the deep blue sea.

For more information phone Wayne Hennig (07) 5449 8888 or email [mail@noosacat.com.au](mailto:mail@noosacat.com.au)

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