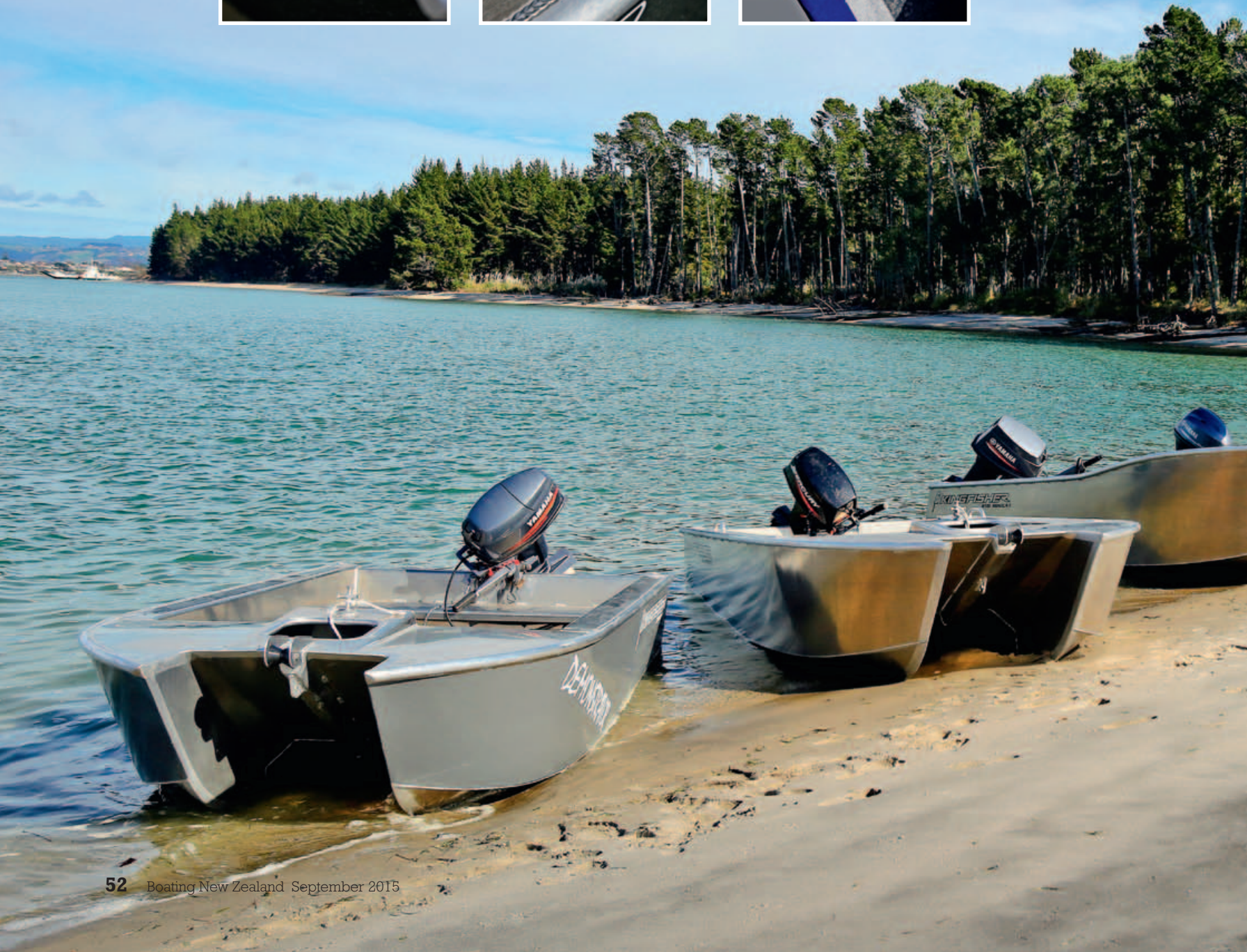


The **KING** *of* **CATS**

Words by **John Eichelsheim** Photos by **Bryce Taylor**





Cats always land on their feet so it makes poetic sense that the range of Kingfisher Minicat aluminium trailerboats will be extremely stable craft.

When Kim Bertelsen designed his range of workmanlike open dinghies, centre-consoles and runabouts, he played to his strengths. Bertelsen is a designer of powercats, so he went with catamaran hull forms rather than the more conventional monohulls; his new Minicat 370, 410 and 450 models slot in nicely under Kingfisher's larger trailerable powercats. The boats are built by his company, Alloy Cats in Tauranga.

The catamaran design distinguishes these small craft from most other aluminium dinghies and runabouts in the sub-5m class in New Zealand. Aimed at entry level boaters and suitable for inshore work, the Minicat range fills a similar niche to the smaller models in Fish City's hugely popular FC range, which Bertelsen also helped design. Like them, the Minicats are basic but strongly built, stable and good value for money.

Where these small craft have it all over many other aluminium boats in this size range is stability. The catamaran hull form provides amazing stability, something we demonstrated by standing three adults on the coaming along one side of a Minicat 450 in Tauranga Harbour – in winter.

All the Minicats offer reserve buoyancy in sealed under-deck compartments to ensure they float the right way up. In swamp tests they support the outboard and the boat's occupants. They also provide an outstanding ride for such modest-sized craft, though there are a few handling quirks peculiar to catamarans – the boats like to go straight so they track a little down-swell and they lean out slightly in the turns – but you quickly get used to it.

FAMILY TIES

The Minicat range comprises three hull sizes, all based on the same formula and solidly built in 3mm and 4mm aluminium, depending on the size, with a larger Minicat 500 under development.

Boating NZ enjoyed putting five Kingfisher Minicats through their paces on Tauranga Harbour: a 370, a 410 and three versions of the 450, including the standout Minicat 450 centre console.

All the boats in the Minicat range share generous storage compartments in the bows, a solid fairlead between the hulls, an open anchor locker with a welded aluminium bollard, self-draining decks and integrated swimsteps. Larger models offer various layout, seating and storage locker options, but the smaller boats are intentionally basic.

“...exceptionally well with modest horsepower.”



Kingfisher 370 Minicat

WITH A HULL weight of only 200kg, this 3.7m open dinghy provides an amazing amount of internal space and is easily driven by outboards in the 15 to 30hp range. Designed for inshore boating, it's the spiritual successor to the old 12-foot tinnie, but strongly built in 3mm aluminium with a 4mm tread-plate floor.

We tried the base boat with a simple bench seat across the transom, deep enough to slide a tote tank underneath and a

25hp Yamaha two-stroke tiller-steer outboard. There's a decent amount of storage in the bows, four alloy rod holders and positive buoyancy under the floor. The decks are self-draining through duckbill scuppers.

The little boat was fun to throw around and showed a decent turn of speed. It's generally a dry runner and the stability is astounding for such a small craft.



Kingfisher 410 Minicat

LONGER, BEAMIER AND heavier than the 370, the 410 is also a fairly basic package, but offers more internal volume. Built from 3mm and 4mm aluminium with 4mm tread-plate floor, it's designed for a single outboard of between 20hp and 40hp.

Like the 370 it has open bow lockers in both hulls, an aluminium bench seat across the transom and four alloy rod holders. Aluminium grab rails, a transom arch and various seating options are available.

The 410 we tried was powered by a tiller-steer, two-stroke Mercury 30hp Light, which was ample power. Performance and

handling were more than adequate for a boat of this size. Like its siblings, it revels in hard turns, gripping the water and only leaning outwards slightly.

As with the 370, the 410 feels a much larger boat than its modest length would suggest. The open layout provides heaps of interior space, and stability is superb – you can safely stand two or more people along one gunwale. The value of stability in a small boat should not be underestimated, but in common with any small craft, the 410's gunwales are only just above the knees, so care is still required when standing.



About as long as the quintessential 12-foot tinnie, the Kingfisher 370 Minicat is twice the boat in every way: twice the number of hulls, twice as much space, twice the stability and twice the load carrying ability. Easily driven with modest horsepower, 370 Minicat feels much bigger than 3.7m.

Kingfisher 370 Minicat

- **length** 3.7m
- **beam** 1.8m
- **construction** 3mm aluminium, 4mm tread-plate floor
- **hull weight** 200kg approx
- **recommended hp** 15-30hp
- **priced from** \$10,950 on an alloy trailer, no engine



The Kingfisher 410 Minicat offers an enormous amount of deck space, exceptional stability and brisk performance. Basic specification leaves plenty of scope for fit-out at home.

Kingfisher 410 Minicat

- **length** 4.1m
- **beam** 1.95m
- **construction** 3mm and 4mm aluminium, 4mm tread-plate floor
- **hull weight** 250kg approx
- **recommended hp** 20-40hp
- **priced from** \$12,150 on an alloy trailer, no engine



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Kingfisher 450 Minicat Centre Console

TO MY MIND the pick of the crop was the 450 Minicat Centre Console. Its layout works well, making the most of the boat's expansive interior.

The console is relatively narrow with a canvas-covered T-top, four-position rocket launcher and plenty of handholds for the boat's occupants to grip. There's a small console locker, largely filled by the battery, and bracket-mounted electronics behind the acrylic windscreen.

Forward, the bow lockers feature So-Pac hatches for dry stowage and there are full-length side shelves. An aftermarket bait station could easily be fitted, as could a good-sized chilly bin down the middle of the boat, which could also serve duty as a seat. A single pedestal seat amidships was fitted to the test boat, but a variety of seating options are available.

The boat's sides were wrapped in grey vinyl, which really enhances the finish and nicely complements



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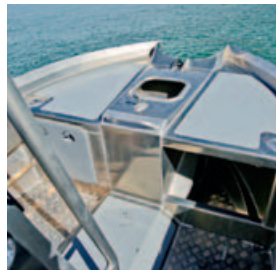
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the colours of the Yamaha 40hp four-stroke outboard. Although at the bottom of the recommended horsepower range for this model, and with the extra weight and windage of the console to contend with, performance with this engine is satisfactory.

The rig feels nicely balanced and the handling is good, perhaps better than the Front Steer. The boat rides well and a play in the surf confirmed it is poised and capable, but also dry. The landings were soft and there was ample power to get out of trouble. Trimming the engine out gives a dry ride and the bows never looked like burying in a swell, even when we took the boats into the surf break on the beach at Matakana Island.

Compared to the Front Steer with 50hp, the Centre Console was a bit slower out of the blocks and the engine had to work harder in general, but it didn't feel underpowered. Without a working GPS we had to guess the top speed at around 26-27 knots, a little less than the Front Steer.



LEFT: The centre-console offers walkaround decks. There's plenty of space either side of the console and access to the transom is good. Gunwale height is mid-thigh on the 450 models. ABOVE: So-Pac hatches turn the bow lockers into dry storage and in calm conditions the foredeck would make a useful casting platform.

Kingfisher 450 Minicat Centre Console

- **length** 4.5m
- **beam** 2.07m
- **construction** 3mm and 4mm aluminium, 4mm tread-plate floor
- **hull weight** 300kg
- **recommended hp** 40-60hp
- **priced from** \$17,750 on a Kingfisher alloy trailer, no engine

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Kingfisher 450 Minicat Open

THE LARGEST MODEL in the current Minicat range, the 450 is offered in open boat, forward control; ie, Front Steer, or centre console models, with a range of seating, layout and equipment options available for each.

The 450 Open we drove was powered by a tiller-steer, 40hp, two-stroke Yamaha. The boat was an absolute hoot to drive: fun to throw around, soft riding, dry and quick enough to cover the ground fast. Like the smaller models, it loved to be thrown into the turns so its coaming grab rails were welcome.

Weighing in at 280kg plus engine, the 450 is constructed using 3mm and 4mm aluminium with 4mm tread-plate floors. Recommended power is 40-60hp, but the lower end of the horsepower range felt ample for the open boat. The overall layout is the same for all three open boat models, but with extra length and more beam, floor space is massive. A bigger boat means more rod holders – six – and a transom arch can be fitted over the outboard.

The three 450 models benefit from a raised sheerline, which helps the aesthetics and deflects spray.



Kingfisher 450 Minicat Front Steer

CONFIGURED LIKE A runabout with twin pedestal helm seats, enclosed bow lockers, side shelves, a small instrument console and provision on the dashboard for bracket-mounted electronics, the Front Steer 450 feels like a proper boat rather than a dinghy.

With identical dimensions to the 450 open, the Front Steer is slightly heavier and carries more of its weight forward. There's extra weight in the split aluminium dodger with its opening

centre section to access the anchor, and the weight distribution is different because the seating positions are well forward. As a result the boat doesn't lift its bows quite as easily as the open version, although the power trim function of the four-stroke 50hp Yamaha compensates for this easily enough.

Under power the boat accelerates smartly and gets along at a good clip. The 50hp outboard feels ample for this hull and



Offering plenty of deck space from its open boat layout, the 450 Minicat Open provides lots of no-frills boating fun. Performance with a 40hp is snappy and it would be spectacular with 60hp. The 450 Minicat Open is a blank canvas awaiting owner input. It could be fitted out any way you like.

Kingfisher 450 Minicat Open

- **length** 4.5m
- **beam** 2.07m
- **construction** 3mm and 4mm aluminium, 4mm tread-plate floor
- **hull weight** 280kg approx
- **recommended hp** 40-60hp
- **priced from** \$14,100 on an alloy trailer, no motor



The 450 Minicat Front Steer has a more conventional, runabout-style layout with a split dodger opening onto the foredeck. The raised wingdeck could be used to advantage for fixing a chilly bin or other removable storage. There's good access to the transom and sides, and like the rest of the range, stability is impressive.

performance with several people onboard was also impressive. The boat's Ultraflex steering was pleasantly light and, like the rest of the Minicats we tried, this one turns on a dime. Also different in this version was a pair of upholstered transom corner seats and a battery box on the floor. The next Front Steer boat out of the factory will house the battery in a new transom locker off the floor, which is great.

This boat looked smart in blue vinyl wrap.

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Kingfisher 450
Minicat Front Steer

- **length** 4.5m
- **beam** 2.07m
- **construction** 3mm and 4mm aluminium, 4mm tread-plate floor
- **hull weight** 300kg approx
- **recommended hp** 40-60hp
- **priced from** \$17,750 on a Kingfisher alloy trailer, no engine

“The catamaran hull form provides amazing stability...”

Developing the tunnel

UNLIKE MOST POWER catamarans, including Kingfisher's larger craft, Minicats are powered by single outboards mounted between the hulls. Designer Kim Bertelsen says it took a lot of work by Kingfisher to set up this configuration, however the system works – there's no hint of cavitation or ventilation, no problem getting the boats onto the plane, and the boats go exceptionally well with modest horsepower.

“We've done plenty of experimenting with the tunnels and the characteristics of the hulls and deadrise,” says Bertelsen. “We've also come up with a good way to help direct water flow over the propeller and avoid cavitation.”

A negative aspect of the wingdeck/tunnel is that the upper portion protrudes above the 4mm alloy tread-plate floor, running fore and aft along the centreline and splitting the floor in two. Most of the boats had non-slip laid across the top of the tunnel which is useful for mounting storage bins or coolers. Alloy Cats may raise the sides and the floors of its larger Minicats to provide a flat floor.



FROM LEFT: Kim Bertelsen, Ben Riddiford and John Eichelsheim demonstrate the stability of the Kingfisher 450 Minicat on Tauranga Harbour.