By Sam Mossman

Ramco Fisherman HT

Ramco is an iconic name in New Zealand boating and fishing circles, with the recognition factor amongst the marine-oriented of, say, the *Edmonds Cookbook* to those flatting for the first time, or Watties Tomato Sauce to aficionados of fish and chips.

Looking back, I find my first boat test on a Ramco was published in the pages of this magazine almost exactly twenty years ago.

The man who steered the marque to success, Bill Mackrell, sold it several years ago, and the company briefly fell on hard times. No need to go into the details of that here – the good news for the brand began when Ramco was bought by Christchurch-based Gary Tomes, one of the partners in Kwik Kraft, perhaps best known for their jet, race and commercial tour boats.

With Ramco relocated to Christchurch late last year, Gary Tomes set about breathing new life into the brand and has come a long way in a short time. In cooperation with well-known aluminium boat designer, Scott Robson (himself somewhat of an icon – it seems like he has designed about half the aluminium boats I test these days), the Ramco range has been reborn. Tomes and Robson went back to the company's roots, dissecting what had made the earlier generation of Ramco hulls so popular and built its reputation, retaining the best features and bringing the designs up to date with the latest techniques.

When I recently visited Christchurch, the combined Ramco and Kwik Kraft factory at Rangiora was a very busy place indeed, with ten builders working flat-stick on a range of project boats, ranging from runabouts to large commercial tourist jet boats.

Design and construction

Ramco owner Gary Tomes and I were joined by designer Scott Robson on the test run. Robson is successful because he understands what the market wants. In the case of the test boat, Ramco's Fisherman HT (Hard Top), the concept is for a clean, open cockpit and a hull that is easy to plane, holds the plane at low speeds, travels well and provides a stable fishing platform. Obviously there is a lot more to boat design than that, but in a nutshell, if you roll all these factors into a good-looking and reasonably-priced package, you have a winner that will appeal to the 'average bloke'.

The Fisherman HT has 5mm bottoms and 4mm sides. Length overall is 6.1m and the hull is beamy at 2.28m. With a moderate deadrise of 18.5°, this hull walks the line between reasonable stability and good sea-keeping at speed, a design aspect Robson has down to an art.

The hull has a reasonably fine entry, but wide, slightly downturned chines, which aid stability. With a fair wetted surface, it does not require planing strakes, an aspect which helps keep the ride soft. Six longitudinal bearers, plus a keel bar, support the hull; laterally there are four bulkheads plus the transom. Although figures were not available at the time of going to press, with relatively high decks (above water level), there looks to be plenty of reserve buoyancy in this hull.

The design looks smart. Welding appears to be both competent and substantial, much of it left unground for full strength. The finish was of a good quality, with paint from the waterline to under the gunwales and a Nyalic finish on the inside.

Left to right: the forward hatch offers best access to the bow for anchor duties; a wide entry allows easy access in

Power and performance

We launched the Ramco at Lyttelton, with one of Canterbury's famous north-westers belting down the harbour at about 15-20 knots and roiling the water. In the shallow waterway this lifted a nasty little chop of half to one metre, typical of windy conditions in inshore waters.

Recommended power for the Fisherman hull is 115hp, and the test boat was fitted with a Yamaha 115hp V4 Saltwater Series turning a 19-inch pitch propeller. A 130-litre underfloor tank has the fuel port on the outside of the transom, avoiding any spillages inside the hull.

Although conditions were not ideal for maximum performance, the rig produced 36 knots (66.7kph) at 6100rpm with three of us big blokes aboard. This would appear to be over-revving a bit, according to Yamaha's recommendations: a 17-inch pitch prop might be a slightly better match.

The cable steering was adequate to the task and I had no complaints at all about the ride of the boat. Trim the entry down into the chop and it cut through the sea softly. Downhill, with the bow trimmed high, it travelled very comfortably and held up on plane to below seven knots, easing down to displacement speed after that with no sudden 'falling in the hole'.

Even in a stiff quartering wind, the hull took little spray and appears to be a dry, soft rider. Stability was good too, with very little wind-heel evident for a 6m-class hardtop. Overall, a pretty good performance in less-than-ideal conditions.

Anchoring

Access to the boat's bow is possible around the cabin sides (there is a grab rail on each side of the hard top), but there is not much space to stand up there, and anchor duties are much easier through the cabin top's hatch. The latter is easy to get to, with a wide cabin entry and reasonable cabin-top height. On the bow, a fairlead is mounted on a short bowsprit and a moderately-sized anchor well is covered by a hatch.

The full bow rails are high enough for a reasonable anchor to be passed underneath, and a cast-alloy bollard is bolted to the foredeck. In keeping with the relatively austere layout that the owner of this boat had specified, no anchor winch was fitted, but there is room for a capstan if desired. The ergonomics of pulling the pick manually while standing in the hatchway were good.

Layout

This particular boat was designed to be a basic day fisher, so no space was wasted in the bow with berths etc, allowing maximum useable space in the cockpit. One side-shelf is built along each side of the forecabin, but it would not take much to tack upright sections onto the inside edge of the deck flange and the chine flat to add more secure stowage room.

The back of the helm console was left open, allowing easy access to wiring and steering. A sealed chequerplate deck extends right to the bow; the bulkhead at the dash is raised above the deck to stop items stored up in the bow from sliding back when the boat is underway.

The large dash top has been left unaltered as per the owner's request, but as a passenger I missed having a grabrail here when travelling in sloppy conditions. It would be easy to bolt one on if the owner decides one is needed after all, and would also provide a backstop for items stored there. Another useful, low-cost addition that could easily be added is a section of dark marine carpet on the dash. This would help stop items

to the forecabin; as a dedicated day boat with no berths, the Ramco has heaps of cockpit space. Right: the battery and oil reservoir are protected up in the transom locker.

Left: clean lines and toe recess space makes the cockpit easy to fish from. Right: stern platforms feature grab rails and a fold-down ladder.

Left to right: The forecabin space is strictly stowage room; Designer Scott Robson (left) and Ramco owner Gary Tomes try out the movable bench seat; The six-position rocket launcher on the hardtop keeps the rods out of the way until needed.

on it from sliding, and cut the internal reflection on the 6mm toughened-glass 'screen.

A Garmin GPS Map 451s GPS-sounder was dash-mounted, along with the VHF – a Uniden Solara DSC. Other basic instrumentation and switching were flush-mounted in the console.

In keeping with the 'back to basics' philosophy of the owner, the seats were simple plastic buckets on pedestals. Glovebox stowage on each side of the hardtop is added to by a large underdeck hold between the seats. Decktread panels trim the gunwale and transom tops, and good-sized side pockets run the length of the cockpit – approximately three metres.

The sealed deck drains to a central sump under the transom, from where water is removed by an 1100gph bilge pump. The full-width movable bench seat is a useful accessory; this hooks over the side shelves to provide a stern or fishing seat wherever needed, and hangs down flat off the shelf on one side, out of the way, when not required.

The transom locker is accessible through three hatches and houses oil reservoir and battery, as well as supplying some extra stowage space. The battery isolation switch is on the inside transom wall, under the protection of the gunwale.

The transom has Portofino styling and incorporates two boarding platforms with grab rails, one of which is fitted with a stainless fold-down ladder. Under the platform, the transducer is bracket-mounted; a heavy rubber rub strip gives all-round protection to the hull.

Fishability

This may be a Spartan layout, but the basics are all there to provide a good fish and dive boat – the hull is reasonably stable and the chequerplate deck gives good footing, while the large-capacity cockpit has clean lines, offers all-round toe room and good mid-thigh support.

Four simple nylon through-gunwale rodholders were fitted, with a six-position rocket launcher on the hardtop for stowage and carrying. Ramco is currently building a bait-station unit for the transom, that will also act as a tow point for water-skiers and water toys. With this, and the addition of an after-market ice bin to store the catch and bait, you have what is needed to get out fishing.

This boat is pretty much a blank canvas. Often additions and refinements only become defined after you have been out and fished the rig for a while, and such is the nature of building in aluminium that alterations after the fact are usually not a big deal.

Trailering

The trailer was built in-house by Ramco (also offered are galv steel trailers from Voyager, a cheaper option). It is made from heavy-duty aluminium, gusseted for extra strength, and features a single axle and zinc protected leaf-spring suspension. The boat is carried on five pairs of wobble rollers per side, plus one at the front of the keel and a keel-entry roller.

The wheel arches are made from chequerplate with big step flanges, and cover attractive mag wheels. Other fittings are a wind-down jockey wheel, single-ratio manual winch, and submersible LED trailer lights. The tow weight of the rig is approximately 1150kg.

All in all

This boat has all the makings of a good 'average bloke's' fish and dive machine. It walks the fine line between being a good rider when under way and being stable at rest. It is also well made and finished, has plenty of work space, good footing, a sheltered hardtop and clean cockpit lines – all at an affordable price.

The test boat was about as basic a layout as is possible, but Ramco's 'options and upgrades' list is a long one, and if you want something that is not on the list, they will accommodate your ideas if at all possible. The iconic name is in good hands, it seems.

Specifications

Material:	aluminium
Configuration:	open-back hardtop
LOA:	6.10m
Beam:	2.28m
Deadrise:	18.5m
Bottom:	5mm
Sides:	4mm
Recommended hp:	115hp
Test engine:	Yamaha 115hp V4
Prop:	19-inch pitch
Fuel capacity:	130 litres
Trailer:	Ramco aluminium
Tow weight:	1150kg
Price as tested:	$59,995
Base key turn package:	$57,995 (Yamaha 115hp V4).