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# FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

Force has just released the most versatile boat ever seen in its arsenal. Jack Murphy launches the manufacturer's F14 and lights up the afterburners on NSW's Hawkesbury River.



## WEATHER CONDITIONS

Wind: 0-5kts  
Sea: N/A



**B**ased on the NSW's Hawkesbury river, Force Boats is the proud owner of a well-deserved reputation as a manufacturer of quality ski and race machines forged in the cauldron of the tournament trail. The lovechild of Rod and Kelly Bickerton, Force has been racking up the accolades and filling trophy cabinets since the first hull popped out of the mould 18 years ago.

The manufacturer's hyper-powered machines offer breathtaking performance with capabilities that would have most of us peeing our pants before we reached them. They're loud, brawny, muscular and intimidating. Its new F14 is none of these, yet promises so much more.

#### NOT THE FORCE WE KNOW

When our editor Angelo first mentioned he'd like me to test a new Force, I quickly retreated to my secret lair to retrieve my Kevlar underpants and genuine imitation NASA space helmet. I'd heard of Force

## "It started to look familiar, more Force-ish; almost like a two-thirds scale model of a real one"

and, more importantly, had met some of the guys who drive them.

Its boats have names like *Burnin'*, *Hellrazor* and *Pigs Arsenal*, and they don't fish. I began to think Angelo didn't like me and was plotting my watery demise (suck it up, princess — Ed).

Ever the professional, I steeled myself, hitched up my fire-retardant britches, rocked up for the review, and was more than a little surprised by what I saw.

There before me, piggybacked atop a Riviera Cruiser, was my ride for the day. And it was naked. No wrap or decals proclaiming a fiery end. Just a pretty little white boat with a 50hp outboard. I was confused.

After several minutes taking in the lines of this fun-sized Force, it started to look

familiar, more Force-ish; almost like a two-thirds scale model of a real one. The next thought that popped into my head was, "I'm going to get wet today". Low to the water and with little protection, I thought myself lucky to have brought my board shorts. But boy was I wrong. After five minutes it became obvious thing this wasn't just an F21 that had shrunk in the wash — it was the real deal. And I certainly let rip.

In a departure from traditional ski-boat hull architecture, the F14 is blessed with a deep 19° deadrise. The sharp hull entry sliced the water like butter and the aggressive front reverse chines pushed spray away like a 'roided-up bouncer at a (s)wanky nightclub. I didn't get a single drop on me, but more on that later.

#### SWISS ARMY BOAT

As I soon discovered, the Force F14 is really several boats in one. One day you could be flying up river with a boat full of bikini-clad babes while towing a tube or skier, and the next day you could be running tender duties or even having a fish. The boat will thus appeal to a broad market, not just watersports enthusiasts.

When I quizzed Force's Kelly Bickerton on the subject, she said it was an opportunity to explore new markets and reach out to customers who didn't need a big boat or uber-horsepower to get the job done. And since the company was considering a tender for its own cruiser, Kelly's husband Rod — the creative influence behind Force Boats — decided to create one of his own. I reckon these guys might be on to something.

There are two hull options available, Tender and Social Boat. The main differences between the two are weight and price. The Tender configuration is vacuum-bagged and 75kg lighter than the



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TRAILEROAT RATES THE FORCE F14	
1 Fun factor	1 2 3 4 5 6
2 Innovation	1 2 3 4 5 6
3 Design and layout	1 2 3 4 5 6
4 Quality of finish	1 2 3 4 5 6
5 Handling and ride	1 2 3 4 5 6
6 Stability at rest	1 2 3 4 5 6
7 Ergonomics	1 2 3 4 5 6
8 Standard equipment	1 2 3 4 5 6
9 Value for money	1 2 3 4 5 6
10 X-factor	1 2 3 4 5 6
OVERALL	1 2 3 4 5 6

Clockwise from below: The minimalist helm places everything at the skipper's fingertips; pristine and unwrapped, the F14 proved to be a lot of fun; handy bow storage compartment; Force's usual quality abounds.



Social Boat. Although this will obviously increase performance, it's also ideal for davit weight-lifting requirements when used as a tender on larger mother ships.

The Social Boat will be a few thousand dollars cheaper, but is designed to be trailered. It all comes down to your intended application.

I tested the lightweight Tender Boat with a few bells and several whistles. We tubed, skied, barefooted, barbecued, and even had a sneaky fish in the afternoon. Not a bad effort for something I could just about carry in my camera bag.

#### WATERBORNE WARRIOR

The F14 is seriously entertaining on the water. It's a bit like driving a go-cart powered by nitrous oxide — the fun factor is off the grid. As I mentioned, the impressive reverse chine deflects spray and keeps you dry even when loaded and underway with up to five people.

What really impressed me, however, was the under-floor submersible hull. When the boat comes to a stop, this separate chamber fills with water, giving amazing stability at rest. The hull quickly empties when you shoot onto the plane and the boat once again becomes light as a feather. Although this isn't exactly a new concept, it's rare to see it on fiberglass hulls these days, and it works particularly well in the F14.

Up for a spot of fishing? No problem. The F14's versatility belies its diminutive physical size.



For a boat that has ballast at rest, it really does plane quickly and effortlessly. By trimming it in you can get the F14 onto the plane within seconds, where it comfortably holds while dialing in more trim.

Fourteen-year-old Riley Exton volunteered to be our fish bait for the day and he carved up the Hawkesbury River on his single ski. Riley fell in love with the boat and its wake instantly and said he'd buy one if his mum would let him.

With all the fun, the Force crew couldn't resist a crack and before I knew it the web bloke was even barefooting behind it. How many "tenders" can do that?

The guys at Force were still fine-tuning engine and prop set-ups, which is why I didn't record any raw data. Okay, I admit it; I forgot because I was having too much fun.

#### SMOOTH OPERATOR

Given the little F14 is built to the same exacting standards as Force's world-champion race and ski boats, its quality of finish and construction are second to none. That is pretty impressive for a rig that can actually cost less than the fuel bill of one of those speed demons.

The boat just feels solid and inspires confidence, and the fittings are all top notch. You can really tell Team Force has pride in its product. So much so, in fact, that the company even offers a lifetime warranty on the hull.

You can find storage almost everywhere you look. The layout is clean and minimalist, rod holders are well placed in the transom well, and the telescopic all-round white light even rises from the deck with the flick of a button. James Bond, eat your heart out. Even though both of these features are optional extras, they fit the boat well without screaming "poser" in the way an aftermarket spoiler on a family car does.

Seating is also plentiful. Five adults can jump in and not feel cramped, unstable or unsafe, and I reckon it's going to be hard to keep the kids out of this one.

#### JACK OF ALL TRADES

After personally driving all sorts of boats over the past six years, I only have one question: why the hell wasn't it one of these? What it lacks in length it more than makes up for in comfort, stability, speed and style.

Although this may be the Force's first crack at the small social and tender market, it's not just dipping its toe in the water. It's drawn on considerable expertise and customer feedback and is set to make a rather large public splash. Kelly tells me the company has already been inundated with enquiries and has orders on the books.

As a tender, the F14 will be stronger, more durable and, in some cases, actually



## FORCE F14

### HOW MUCH?

**Price as tested:** \$31,014  
**Options fitted:** Fuel gauge and sender; trim gauge and sender; three LED lights; stainless steel LED navigation lights; electrical stern LED light; three rod holders; stainless steel propeller  
**Priced from:** \$29,322 (with 40hp Mercury two-stroke and galvanised single-axle trailer)

### GENERAL

**Type:** Fibreglass monohull  
**LOA:** 4.4m  
**Beam:** 1.9m  
**Deadrise:** 19°  
**Draft:** 300mm  
**Weight:** 280kg (boat and engine)

### CAPACITIES

**People:** 4  
**Max. HP:** 60  
**Min. HP:** 25  
**Fuel:** 42L  
**Water:** N/A

### ENGINE

**Make/model:** Mercury 50hp  
**Type:** 3-Carb two-stroke  
**Weight:** 93kg  
**Displacement:** 967cc  
**Gear ratio:** 1.83:1  
**Prop:** Not yet specified (still testing)

### MANUFACTURED BY

**Force**  
608 River Road  
Lower Portland  
New South Wales 2756  
Tel: (02) 4575 4038  
[www.forceboats.com](http://www.forceboats.com)  
(Limited lifetime structural warranty to first owner.)

lighter than RIBs (Rigid Inflatable Boats). And there will of course be none of the air-pressure hassles that commonly occur with these blow-up rivals.

The standard bow-mounted tender cradle on the mothership Riviera did require a few adjustments in order to fit the F14, but nothing major. Rod also added a resting platform for the bow to sit in. The guys at Force can customise your existing tender cradle to fit a shiny new F14.

However, the F14's breadth of scope is far more than "just a tender". Whether by design or fortunate fluke, Force has created a compact boat that makes a fair fist of just about any pursuit you're likely to tackle in sheltered water. More expensive than the ubiquitous tinny but blessed with an uncanny ride and a sexy internal layout reminiscent of a jet sportsboat, the F14 sets out to carve its own niche and will appeal to boaters who would never have previously considered a Force.

### THE WRAP

The Force F14 ticks all the right boxes as a fun, social day boat. The cheapest offering in the Force range with almost miserly power requirements, it has the potential to coax buyers at the expense of other small boat manufacturers.

Like all Force boats, F14s are built to order and almost everything can be customised. Bling her out as a luxury tender, add a casting platform or whack it on a trailer and have a fishy ski boat that's a cinch to tow and store. The only limitations are your own needs and the staying power of your credit card.

May the Force be with you (sorry, I couldn't resist!).