

Boat Review: **Haines Hunter 485 Sport Fisherman**



DOWNSIZE ME

The new baby of the Haines Hunter range will appeal equally to those at the entry and exit levels of the trailer boat market, says John Eichelsheim.

BOATING
NEW ZEALAND

Graeme and Lyn Webb are exactly the kind of people Haines Hunter managing director Lionel Sands had in mind when he designed the new 485 Sport Fisherman.

Retired, and living comfortably beside the beach in Whangamata, the couple lead an active life that includes plenty of boating and fishing. But like many retired couples, a big boat is getting beyond them; they need to be able to launch and retrieve the boat easily, as well as move it around on the trailer and push it in and out of the garage without risking injury.

While they're not in the market for a new 485 – the couple own a similar-sized Seacraft Sierra sold to them many years ago by Sands' father, Sandy – they could be relied upon to offer an honest opinion.

If the old family friends liked the new baby of the Haines Hunter fleet, Sands reasoned it was pitched just about right.

We left Haines Hunter's Ellerslie factory early on a very cold morning in a convoy with a pair of near-identical 485s in tow. Riding on galvanised, single-axle unbraked trailers, with an all-up towing weight of less than 1000kg, a mid-sized family car is all that's required to tow the baby Haines which won the all purpose, under six metre boat of the show award at May's Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show.

The water in Whangamata Harbour was an extremely chilly 13°C, but the boats were easy to launch and manhandle off the beach. Lyn, who normally has the job of holding the boat, enjoyed the luxury of dry feet while Graeme and I pushed our boat out into the shallow channel. A bigger boat would have been impossible to launch at that stage of the tide.



Modern simplicity

The 485 Sport Fisherman is a simple craft, but it's also the most modern boat in the Haines Hunter range with its infusion-laminated, moulded cockpit liner and foam-core deck structure.

It's recognisably a Haines Hunter, from any angle, and shares many of the traits of its larger siblings, including a highly practical layout and excellent build quality.

Sands has managed considerable interior volume with this boat, thanks in part to a reasonably deep forefoot which allows the hull to carry its beam well forward. There's the typical Haines chine and prominent strakes and the little boat has a moderate deadrise at the transom.

Stability is excellent for a small craft and the performance with modest horsepower – in this case a 60hp Yamaha four-stroke with high-thrust gear case and propeller – is more than adequate. We managed around 30 knots with three adults on board and a tight en-

gine. I would expect a higher top speed with a conventional bottom end on the little Yamaha, although you'd give away some load-carrying ability and low speed response.

As it was, the Yamaha High-Thrust offered a great hole shot and the boat climbed onto the plane very quickly, holding it down to 11 or 12 knots – great for picking your way through lumpy seas, like those we experienced outside the confines of the harbour.

Like most Haines Hunter boats, the 485 leans towards fishing. It's an uncluttered layout with plenty of usable cockpit space for a boat of this size. Wide coamings are comfortable to sit on and the option of pedestal or back-to-back seats with storage offers some flexibility.

One of the boats featured a single pedestal helm seat and a passenger-side back-to-back seat, which is a nice compromise, although Graeme commented that he preferred the twin back-to-back seat arrangement.





Easy care

The cockpit liner makes the boat a cinch to wash down. There are no carpets and the moulded non-slip surface works well. The battery lives under the floor, sealed in its own moulded fibreglass box. There's an isolation switch under the transom. Water in the cockpit drains down into the bilge where it's jettisoned by a bilge pump aft.

The open cuddy cabin has a couple of short seats, nicely upholstered, offering a bit of shelter out of the weather when the boat is at rest. Seated headroom is good.

A generous-sized hatch in the foredeck affords easy access to the fairlead and anchor bollard, while the anchor locker is inside the boat in the forepeak.

We tried a bit of fishing here and there, more to see how the layout worked than with any real intent. A couple of anglers could safely move around the cockpit without upsetting the boat's equilibrium, and we appreciated the boat's decent coaming heights in the sloppy conditions. With fishing in mind, a bait-board slots across the transom and the boat is equipped with four stainless steel, flush-mounted rod holders.

Under the cockpit sole a full-length wet locker will accommodate plenty of gear, or a couple of plastic bins. There's no underfloor fuel tank and Haines Hunter doesn't intend to offer one as an option – it would add at least \$1400 to the boat's price. A pair of 26-litre plastic tote tanks hold ample fuel, given the fuel economy of modern four-stroke outboards. And as Graeme pointed out, it's far less hassle throwing a tote tank or two in the car boot to fill than it is towing the boat down to the petrol station. Better still – give the tote tank to your fishing mate to fill! The

tote tanks also slide neatly under the transom, where a moulded lip stops them sliding around.

Well-mannered

A biting southerly breeze made sea conditions a bit uncomfortable and we came to appreciate the shelter offered by the canopy. A backdrop/road cover is also available.

The 485 showed good manners in the slop, travelling comfortably and keeping its occupants dry. Lyn commented that she felt secure in the aft-facing seat and wasn't thrown around too much, even when we put the boat through its paces.

Sands explained that the boat wasn't designed as a "high-speed, offshore race boat", which is fair enough. It's happier at more relaxed speeds, where it performs very nicely with moderate horsepower.

Graeme was keen to take the wheel, where he thoroughly enjoyed himself.

He praised the driving position and the instrument panel, big enough to accommodate a pair of Lowrance five-inch displays. The curved acrylic screen works well too, and the anodised aluminium handrail around the top of the screen offers good support. He was also impressed by the boat's ride and dryness. Even though the 485 we tested had its engine set one hole higher than the other boat, it held on nicely in the turns provided the engine was tucked in a little.

The boat was easy to balance using engine trim, but it was hard to really stuff things up – the 485 runs clean and dry pretty much wherever you set the engine trim, suggesting that the hull is well sorted. Perhaps higher horsepower would make a difference, but equipped with a 60hp engine – right in the middle of the

recommended horsepower range – the little Haines' behaviour is reassuringly benign.

Boating's verdict

In many respects this boat harks back to the family runabouts of days gone by in terms of its simplicity and overall philosophy. It benefits from modern design and manufacturing practice, but the basic premise of an easily-managed, easily-driven family runabout at an affordable price would have been familiar to boaties 25 years ago.

The Webbs gave the new Haines the thumbs-up, as did interested neighbours in similar circumstances who looked the boats over. Sands is convinced there's growing demand from experienced boaters looking to downsize as they get older – the so-called 'exit market' – which this model seeks to address.

But as he pointed out, a versatile, capable little boat that won't break the bank to buy or run should be equally attractive to first-time boat buyers – or anyone else finding it hard to rustle up the crew to help manage a bigger boat.

In New Zealand, boaters looking to downsize traditionally opted for a 'tinnie'. According to Sands, the Haines Hunter 485 costs no more than a tinnie, weighs no more, and is at least as functional, offering a no-compromise alternative: no compromise in performance, quietness, ride, style, finish, and above all – especially for older buyers – comfort. "Quality boating for young and old," he quips, only half joking.

He could well be on to something. ■



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Haines Hunter 485 Sport Fisherman

designer	Lionel Sands
builder	Haines Hunter
construction	hand-laid GRP, foam core and infusion lamination
loa	5.5m
hull length	4.85m (excluding bowsprit and transom overhang)
boa	2.10m
deadrise	17 degrees
horsepower range	50hp-70hp
max speed	30 knots
length/height	
on trailer	6m/2.10m
trailerable weight	850kg (will vary with motor options)

ENGINE

make	Yamaha
type	four-stroke, high-thrust
horsepower	60hp
cylinders	four
max rpm	6000
propeller	13:1/4 x 15-inch