

# BOAT TEST

## IMAGE 7.08 PONTOON



◀ *The rollicking seas off Mount Maunganui provided a true test for the Image 7.08 pontoon.*

# PONTOON'S BRIGHT PERFORMANCE

## LIGHTS UP A DULL DAY

*Soft-riding pontoon a very impressive first for well-respected Invercargill builder.*

TEXT BY MIKE ROSE

Although perhaps not as widely known as some other aluminium boat manufacturers, Image Boats is a well-established, highly respected and successful operation, with an impressive reputation for creating strong, graceful, go-anywhere vessels.

Founded by owner Dean Wilkes some 16 years ago, Image has, in the years since, launched 148 boats, ranging in size from 6.5m up to 11.3m. All, until now, were standard monohulls.

Although in the years before starting Image, Dean had built pontoon boats, by his admission, he didn't have much time for them. He considered them hard riding, wet and not that attractive. As a designer and builder who prides himself on creating good-looking, soft-riding and dry boats, he was happy to continue developing his "normal" range.

However, a desire to expand his offering (and having kept an eye on the advancements in pontoon design) has led Dean to create Image's first pontoon boat: the new 7.08 Pontoon.

Having spent a wet, blustery afternoon in both the

rollicking seas off Mount Maunganui and the rather calmer waters of Tauranga Harbour, I have to say he has done it rather well. The Image 7.08 Pontoon is one of the softest riding, best performing boats of this size I have experienced. It handles rough water with ease, landing soft and true and is equally at home in the smooth: capable of turning sharply in almost jetboat-like fashion.

### **VERY FOCUSED**

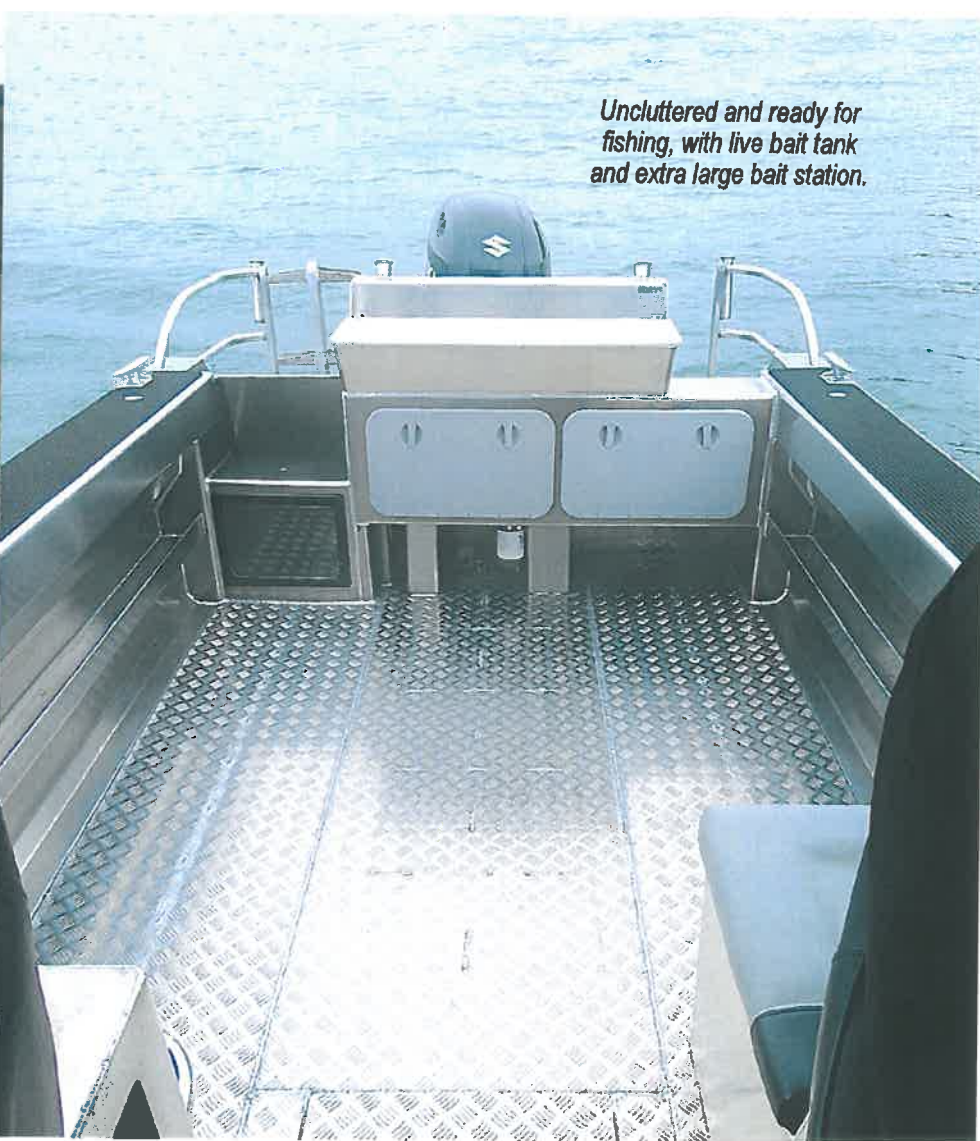
Although committed to producing a pontoon model, Dean was determined to create a vessel that was instantly recognisable as an Image boat. He wanted "to follow the Image lines" rather than those of a traditional pontoon boat.

It is fair to say he has succeeded. While on its tandem trailer (a custom Image creation), the 7.08 is clearly a pontoon boat, it also has those unmistakable Image qualities: in particular, the rugged, no-nonsense, go-anywhere look on which Dean has built his reputation. The paint and graphics reflect this minimalist approach: bare aluminium hull and topsides are offset by a blue



▲ Twin swivelling bucket seats are fixed to large storage bases

▼ Squab infills create either a large comfortable bunk or a massive dry stowage area.



*Uncluttered and ready for fishing, with live bait tank and extra large bait station.*

superstructure, dark grey and blue lines under the gunwales and black window surrounds.

It is the same story on board. The cabin and helm area are almost a study in black and white, broken only by the colourful displays of the electronics.

The cabin has an especially Spartan look. The light grey frontrunner on the cabin top and sides is offset only by the deeper grey of the low seat squabs. There are also infills to create either a large comfortable bunk or a massive dry storage area. Things lighten up considerably in the wheelhouse where the grey frontrunner and vinyl dash surrounds are offset by the bright blue hardtop supports and gleaming aluminium of the handrails, passenger footrest, seat bases and treadplate floor. The twin in-house bolster seats are set upon polished aluminium bases and both have storage underneath, albeit in slightly different configurations. The passenger base is king/queen-like with a padded aft-facing seat. With the driver's seat able to spin through 180 degrees, the starboard

base has been set up to accommodate this: there are an aft-facing foot rail and a drink holder close at hand. There are also drink holders on the port side base and serving both bolsters, reflecting the fact that both fishing and getting to and from fishing spots can be thirsty work.

### FUNCTIONAL DASH

Big screen MFDs have made dash layout a far cleaner and simpler affair than in the past and Dean has taken full advantage of this. A Garmin GPSMap 7412 X5V screen sits in pride of place above the wheel with twin Suzuki gauges and a Troll Mode switch off to the right. A DC panel to the left of the wheel and a Garmin VHF to the right and the job is pretty much done; just the trim tab and windlass controls in front of the throttle complete the picture.

There is plenty of stowage close at hand, too: in long pockets on each side and in the large flat area under the windscreen. Between the seats are a brace of underfloor lockers, ideal for stowing bait or the catch, and, aft of these, a 250-litre fuel tank.

Because the 7.08 Pontoon is obviously designed to head out where the waters are rough, there are well-placed, sturdy handrails throughout: on the passenger's side, across the top of the cabin entrance and along the centre line on the inside of the hardtop.

### SWITCHING THINGS AROUND

One of the first things one notices in the clearly fishing-oriented cockpit is the fact that the step through to the aft platform (and its accompanying live fish tank) is, unusually, to starboard. Most builders place this on port — for the simple reason that it makes their job a lot easier. The steering, gear and throttle cables all run down the starboard side (under the coamings and via the transom) from the helm to the engine. Putting a step through in the starboard side of the transom just complicates things in the design and construction stages. Dean has a very different view: while it might be more difficult for him and his team he believes it is far better for the customer. "When I am putting divers in the water, I

like to watch them clear the quarter and get well away from the boat and the outboard. I can do that far more easily if the gap in the transom is right behind me."

Like everything on board, the transom is a solid, sturdy affair. Above the starboard step-through/live well is a protective drop board; on the transom top there is a custom bait station, developed especially for Image's new Pontoon series and complete with a protective plastic cover and a brace of rod holders; below, enclosed lockers housing the battery and providing handy dry stowage. The fuel filter is mounted safely under the lockers: easy to access and well away from the electrics.

Equally robust is the big gauge pushpit and super-large drop-down ladder (on starboard of course).

As one would expect, there is plenty of rod stowage, too: six on the low profile rocket

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launcher, two in the coamings and a further two out on the pushpit. The long, wide side lockers also provide plenty of space for additional rods, gaffs, nets and the like and, as a nice finishing touch, the coamings are covered in rubber anti-skid: great when boarding or standing and comfortable to sit on when fishing.

#### **GOOD TESTING WEATHER**

As the photos show, the day of our review was not one of Tauranga's finest. It was, however, a very good one to illustrate the Pontoon's rough water handling.

While the water inside the harbour was relatively benign (with just a short chop), out past Mt Maunganui the chop was far more pronounced and there was a pretty reasonable swell as well.

As stated earlier, the Image performed admirably. Regardless of the point of



*The boat stands just over 3m on the trailer.*

One of the softest riding, best performing boats of this size I have experienced says Mike Rose.



Like everything on board, the transom is a solid, sturdy affair.



attack, the ride was always remarkably soft and the landing very predictable. Although one had to give the messy seas the respect they deserved, the feeling on board, in the cocoon of the hardtop, was of a relaxed, enjoyable day out with mates. Back in the harbour, the (relatively) smooth water handling was equally a surprise. For a pontoon vessel with a LOA of 7.36m and a trailerable weight of 1.725 tonne, the Image performs like a far smaller, far more nimble craft. Likely due to its relatively shallow deadrise (just 17 degrees at the transom), it turns almost as tightly as a jetboat and is remarkably responsive to the throttle.

### SUMMARY

It is perhaps not surprising that a boat hailing from New Zealand's southern-most city turns out to be robustly built and designed to cope with adverse weather conditions. What does surprise, though, is that this debut Image Pontoon performs so well in the calm water, too — and looks so good both from the outside and on board. If this debut is any indication, expect to see many more Image Pontoon Series vessels gracing our waterways. ⚓

### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Make &amp; Model:</b>	Image 7.08 Pontoon
<b>Manufacturer:</b>	Image Boats
<b>Priced from:</b>	\$NZ100,000
<b>Price as tested:</b>	\$NZ119,695
<b>Type:</b>	Monohull pontoon
<b>Construction:</b>	Aluminium
<b>LOA:</b>	7.36m
<b>Beam:</b>	2.36m
<b>Deadrise:</b>	17 deg
<b>Height on trailer:</b>	3.05m
<b>Trailerable Wgt:</b>	1.725 tonne
<b>Test Power:</b>	Suzuki DF200ATX 200hp 4-stroke outboard
<b>Propeller:</b>	Suzuki 18.5 x 16
<b>Maximum RPM:</b>	6100rpm
<b>Top Speed:</b>	38.9 knots
<b>Power Options:</b>	Single or twin outboards
<b>HP Range:</b>	140-200hp
<b>Fuel capacity:</b>	250 litres
<b>Trailer:</b>	Image

**Notable Standard Items on Test Boat:**  
Boarding platform, double berth insert

**Notable Options on Test Boat**  
Garmin 12" GPS and VHF, alloy trailer.

**Boat Supplied by Image Boats**

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### FUEL & PERFORMANCE DATA

RPM	Knots	L/h
1000	4.5	2.4
1500	6.2	4.8
2000	7.0	6.9
2500	8.6	10.0
3000	16.7	13.4
3500	18.0	15.5
4000	22.5	21.0
4500	26.5	48
5000	29.2	35.6
5500	32.4	45.5
6100	38.9	68

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