

# Ticks all the boxes

Words and images by Matthew Jones

The owners of this boat had been dreaming of their ultimate all-weather cruiser — perfect for game fishing, diving, overnighting or anything else — but did they find it at Image Boats?



## Weather conditions

Average wind speed	15 knots W
Sea state	Moderate/rough

It was a wet, gloomy morning as we unhooked the safety chain and slipped Petrol Hill off her trailer into the ominously-coloured waters of Bluff Harbour. Conditions were eerily calm as we slipped quietly through Hell's Gate and plotted a course to take us some 14 nautical miles across Foveaux Strait to Ruapuke Island.

Leaving Bluff in our wake, conditions outside the big hardtop grew increasingly unpleasant with up to two metres of swell and building winds. It was the perfect opportunity to relax back into Petrol Hill's comfortable quarters to become acquainted with her owner Garry Swney, creator Dean Wilkes (owner of Image Boats) and their relaxed southern demeanours. The usual sharing of fishing tales ensued before the conversation turned alarming as Garry recalled a close encounter with a great white shark while fishing in the same area a few weeks earlier. It was at that moment I felt most grateful to be inside the enclosed cabin of an Image boat.

We tucked into a secluded bay at Ruapuke Island to take advantage of its shelter. Petrol Hill's imposing presence coupled with the mystical backdrop made for a captivating combination as the weather eased briefly. After a comfortable morning's adventure, and with a plane to catch, we left the blue cod biting, engaged the automatic capstan and headed back to Bluff.

On our return, the wind against tide effect had turned Hell's Gate from flat to a rather dodgy line-up of two-metre hull-testers. It's not the kind of place you would normally hand over the helm of your brand new pride and joy, but Garry calmly obliged with the instructions to do whatever I liked.

He's brave, I thought, but after the first run into the head sea I soon discovered the grounds for his trust: the big Image Fishmaster's ride was impressively soft and well-mannered. Multiple runs later and the verdict was still the same: impressive. The hull gave no quarter while excellent vision was enjoyed from the comfortable and well-equipped helm.



- Excellent ride
- Custom build allows customers to get their dream boat
- Big, capable and comfortable cruiser
- Crammed full of features
- Plenty of torque/grunt from the twin Suzukis



- Big, beamy towing prospect. Over-width flags required



Fridge, freezer, full-size oven, four gas hobs, sink, pantry, water filter...



Sleeps five adults in comfort; insulated hull for peace and quiet



The talented Garmin GPS Map 7012 and digital gauges provided a wealth of useful information.

With counter-rotating 175hp Suzuki four-strokes, Petrol Hill can be thrown around with reckless abandon if the urge arises. A clever switch allows both engines to be trimmed together or independently if required. The extra turning ability of the twin outboards and a bow-thruster mean she's also manoeuvrable around the dock.

## Built for it

Dean Wilkes has been building tough, dependable boats for the commercial and recreational sectors (both in New Zealand and Australia) for almost three decades. Based in Invercargill, Image Boats calls the unpredictable waters of Foveaux Strait home. Its boats are built specifically to handle these volatile conditions, which is why they're held in such high regard. Since forming the company in September 2000, Dean has over 134

RATINGS	
Fishability.....	★★★★★☆☆
Innovation.....	★★★★★☆☆
Design and layout.....	★★★★★☆☆
Ease of towing.....	★★★★★☆☆
Handling and ride.....	★★★★★☆☆
Stability.....	★★★★★☆☆
Ergonomics.....	★★★★★☆☆
Finish.....	★★★★★☆☆
X-factor.....	★★★★★☆☆
Overall.....	★★★★★☆☆

### Full of tricks

The options list on Petrol Hill is three pages long, which is testament to Image Boats' ability to seamlessly integrate all its customers' needs into a functional, user-friendly boat. All the usual mod cons a cruiser needs have been neatly fitted, including the galley with a fridge, freezer, full-size oven, four gas hobs, a sink and a pantry. There's plenty of storage throughout plus a few extra luxuries like a water filter, Fusion 700 stereo system, rode counter for the anchor warp, battery monitor, fresh water gauge, gas heater/window demister and a classy vinyl roof lining.

An interior designer was engaged to help choose the complementary colour scheme and the Swneys decided on Tek-Dek (synthetic teak) flooring in the cabin to create good indoor/outdoor flow, with easy clean-up no matter the occasion. Due to the timing of my flights it was still to be laid, but having now seen it finished I can confirm it looks great and ties in all the interior colours nicely.

To increase year-round comfort, Petrol Hill's cabin top is completely foam insulated from the chine up. The hull is also insulated for a quieter, more comfortable night's sleep.

The Swneys like to catch their dinner, so Petrol Hill's cockpit has been well set up for bounty hunting. There's a huge island bar bait station

### PERFORMANCE DATA

IMAGE 9M FISHMASTER WITH TWO x 175HP SUZUKI FOUR-STROKE OUTBOARDS AND 18.5P PROPELLERS, THREE POB.

RPM	Knots	L/hr	L/nm
800	1.9	2.2	1.13
1000	3.8	3.1	0.82
1500	4.9	6.1	1.26
2000	5.7	11.3	1.99
2500	6.9	17.2	2.49
3000	8.9	27.7	3.13
3500	13.9	36.7	2.63
4000	18.4	45.5	2.48
4500	22.6	58.6	2.60
5000	24.3	69.6	2.86
5500	24.7	74.8	3.03
6000	29.0	94.0	3.24
6200	31.6	127.0	4.02

complete with a sink and saltwater wash-down pump close to hand to confine and easily clean up the mess. A walkthrough on each side provides access to the caged duckboard,



Ready to fish: large, custom bait station and caged aft platform. Plenty of rod holders

expanding the fishing room. There are no fewer than three integrated boarding ladders so divers won't have to wait around long to get out of the water — certainly a good thing in these parts.

Large underfloor bins with gas struts will easily store the dive gear, and with the private toilet/hot shower access from the cockpit there's no

wet gear being dragged indoors. The cray pot hauler will certainly come in handy, as will all the knife holders. For exploring untouched offshore islands, a boarding ladder has been integrated into the bow rail and a customised tender cradle is mounted on the roof.

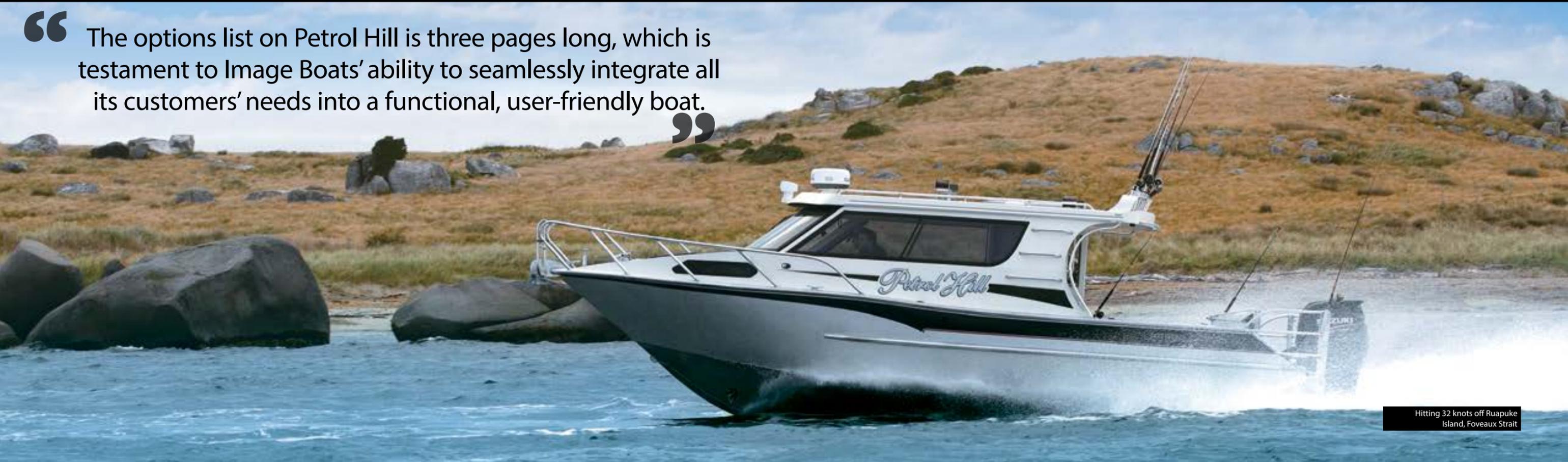
The ripple-like hull effect is a recognisable feature of many Image Boats, achieved using

an orbital sander before coating with Nyalic. It also serves a practical purpose, as scratches are easier to repair.

### Sealing the deal

By focusing on customisable quality over quantity Image Boats is enjoying a niche in the market. Dean says that because they're

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Hitting 32 knots off Ruapuke Island, Foveaux Strait

a small manufacturer they can be much more accommodating to their customers' needs and offer a friendly, personalised experience. "Once the hull length is decided the customer takes full charge of the build process," he says.

Dean says their custom-built alloy trailers make trailering such a big, solidly built boat a viable option. "We fit them with two huge skids for ease of getting the boats on and off. All you need to do is get the hull within the skids and it will drive straight on." And indeed it does.

Garry and Bev can't speak highly enough of their new pride and joy, so why did they choose an Image boat over the competition? "Quite a number of reasons," says Garry. "We saw an Image boat at the Auckland Boat Show and it ticked most boxes."

With a high level of customisation available, Image Boats made sure the Swneys' build would tick all the boxes — which, once a few final background checks were made, sealed the deal for the couple. "We made enquires with people who own Image boats and they only had good things to say about them," recalls Garry.

He increased the bait station dimensions at the last moment to ensure it was just right, which Dean and his team graciously accommodated. "The Image Boats team is great to work with and are so welcoming when you call in.

That was important to us because it's the people that make doing something like this enjoyable. Towards the end Bev and I were in there every day checking on progress," he says.

When asked if he'd change anything, he says, "No I'm very, very pleased and Bev's absolutely delighted as well — which is so important because we're planning on spending a lot of time on board. There are a few trips on my bucket list, like circumnavigating Stewart Island and overnighting at Port Pegasus. This is definitely the boat for that; we're absolutely chuffed with the way Petrol Hill has turned out."

## The last word

Petrol Hill is an impressive boat packed full of functional features. While it's a big, beamy towing prospect, Garry and Bev towed Petrol Hill from Invercargill to both Milford and Doubtful Sounds within the first two months of ownership — proving that having such a capable and comfortable trailer boat really does broaden your horizons. Customer service is paramount for a successful custom-build, and customers don't come much happier than Petrol Hill's owners — looks like they've found their ultimate all-rounder. h

For more information contact Dean Wilkes at Image Boats on 03 214 4573, dean@imageboats.co.nz or visit imageboats.co.nz

## SPECIFICATIONS

### IMAGE FISHMASTER 9M

Construction	Aluminium
LOA	9.3m (8.3m hull length)
Ext. beam	2.9m
Hull thickness	4mm
Topside thickness	3mm
Towing weight	3480kg (dry)
Deadrise	18°
Engines as tested	Two x Suzuki 175hp four-stroke
Fuel capacity	600L
Water capacity	200L
Packages priced from	\$240,000



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### TO OWN THIS BOAT:

Examples based on purchase price of NZ\$240,000

Deposit	\$50,000
Final balloon payment	\$50,000
Term	60 months
Monthly payment	\$3794

Phone 0800 438 226 or visit [getaboat.co.nz](http://getaboat.co.nz)

\*Normal Toyota Financial Services lending criteria apply. Interest rates are subject to change at any time.

Crossing a rough Foveaux Strait showcases the Image 9m's comfortable sea-going ability