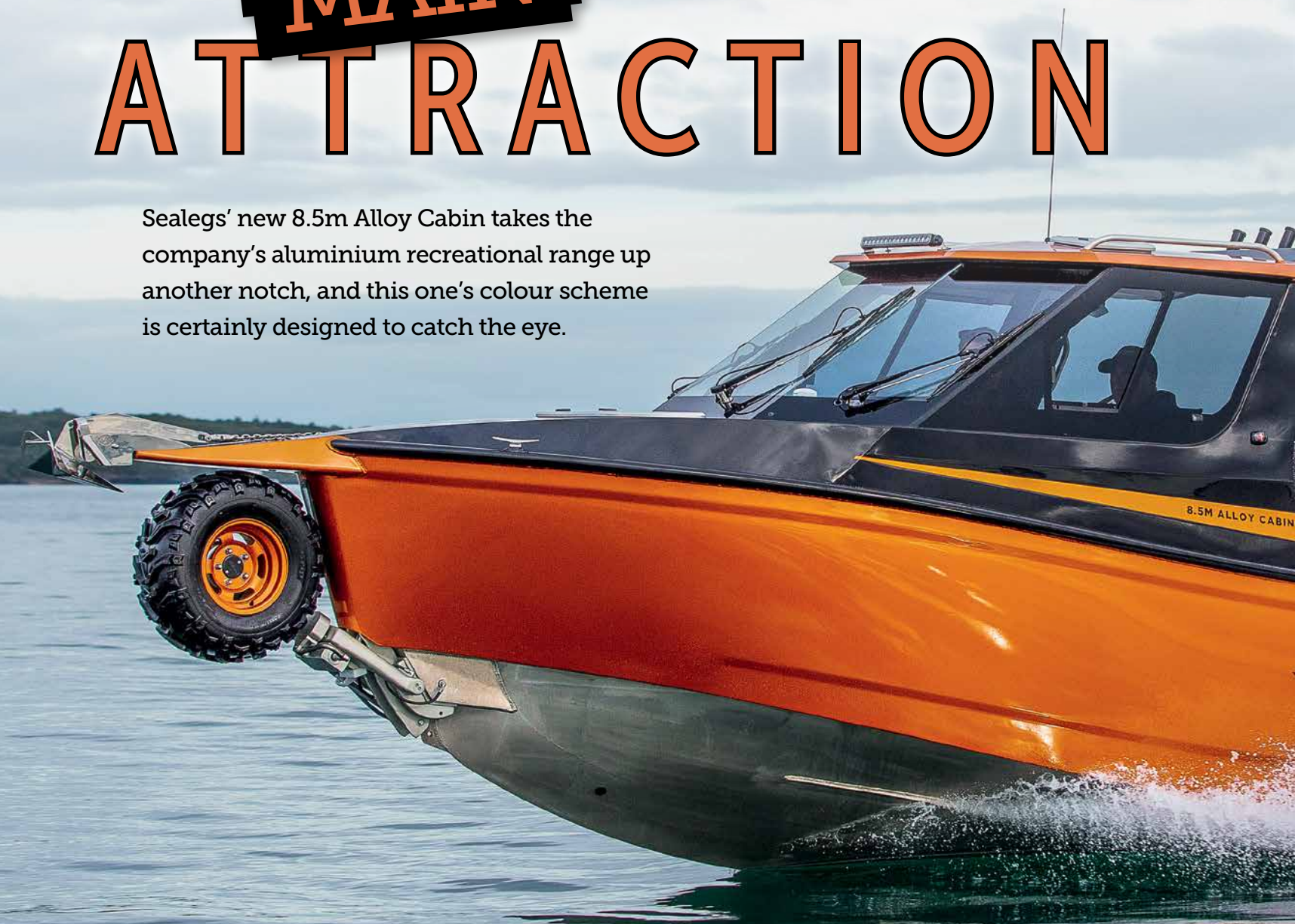


MAIN ATTRACTION

Sealegs' new 8.5m Alloy Cabin takes the company's aluminium recreational range up another notch, and this one's colour scheme is certainly designed to catch the eye.



review

Sealegs
8.5m Alloy
Cabin

WORDS BY JOHN EICHELSEIM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIMI KNIGHT

M

anufactured at Sealeg's North Shore facility, the 8.5m Alloy Cabin is based on an Innovision design featuring a hull with rising sheerline, a relatively plumb bow, a sloping foredeck, sturdy beltings and noticeable tumblehome aft. Deadrise is a modest 16° at the transom, but the fine entry, relatively long waterline length and plumb bow ensures a soft, comfortable ride.

This model takes full advantage of Sealegs' all-wheel-drive Amphibious Enablement System (AES) capabilities, which in this guise is rated to carry up to 3,000kg. Sealegs has been able to take the boat out to 8.5m overall (6.7m hull length), and the hardtop configuration and all-aluminium construction realises considerable gains in interior space compared to Sport RIB and Sport D-Tube models. This boat weighs in at 2,250kg dry and has a payload of 500kg as well as 250 litres of fuel.

She featured at the recent Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show, where she drew a lot of admiring looks, as well as considerable interest from potential customers, says Sealegs' Global Sales and Marketing Manager Peter Small.



LEFT The helm station nicely separates on-water and on-land controls.

BELOW The 8.5 Alloy Cabin looks smart and performs well.



“This model was particularly well received. I think it benefitted from being displayed inside under lights, which showed off its striking orange-and-black colour scheme and our attention to detail inside and out.”

This 8.5m Alloy Cabin, the ninth boat of its line to leave the factory, benefits from a high-quality fit-out that includes Ultralon U-Dek on the cockpit sole, transom and coamings, premium seats and electronics, and a glossy, black-painted interior. Rather than feeling dark and gloomy, the boat feels inviting and luxurious inside, the black paint contrasting nicely with the orange exterior and interior highlights. Of course, the model's available in any colour combination you like.

The review vessel is fitted with Hella Marine lighting throughout: lightbars on the hardtop, Sea Hawk-XL dual-colour floodlights for the cockpit and EuroLED white/blue lights inside the hardtop. These were



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... she drew a lot of admiring looks as well as considerable interest...

used to good effect at the boat show, changing from white to blue.

Hella also supplied the anchor light, navigation lights, various courtesy lights, including strip lights under the gunwales and LEDs to illuminate the cupholders. Speakers for the Fusion entertainment system are also illuminated.

This boat differs from earlier examples in that the hardtop has been widened so it feels more spacious and the windscreen mullions have been eliminated. Instead of mullions, she features a toughened glass, three-pane windscreen with the panes bonded together. Consequently, vision through the windscreen is excellent while sliding side-windows and small skylight hatches in the



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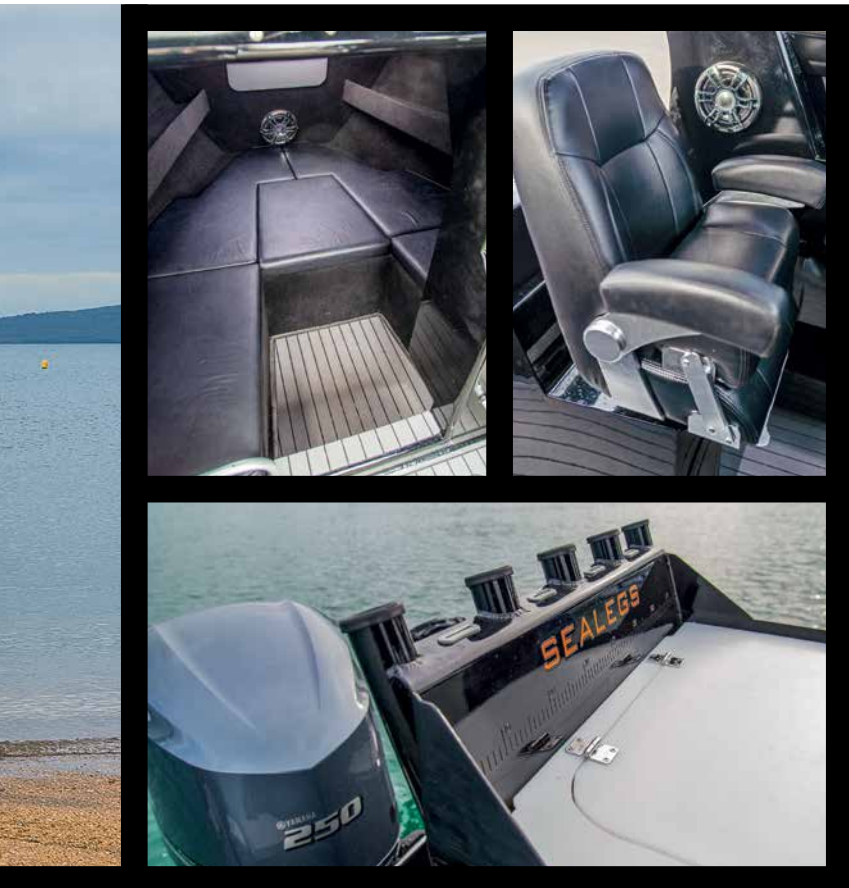
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FAR LEFT AWD with diff-lock can handle a variety of beach conditions. Browns Bay's firm, gently sloping expanse of sand presented no challenges.

LEFT An all-black interior feels luxurious, complemented by supportive Hi-Tech bolster seats on Softrider pedestals.

BOTTOM LEFT The transom bait station looks good and works well too.

hardtop roof provide ventilation and three, two-speed wipers keep the windscreen clear of spray.

Although the interior has a luxurious feel, including the generous v-berths (with infill) in the forward cabin and provision for a toilet, the boat is well set up for fishing and diving. The cockpit is a decent size and the vessel's high sides and generous freeboard mean it should be safe in sloppy conditions. Stability at rest is good, thanks in part to reverse chines and the fact that the wedge-shaped hull is widest at the waterline along the chine. The chines also provide excellent hydrodynamic stability.

What sets the 8.5 Alloy Cabin apart from earlier Sealegs models is the successful relocation of the inboard motor to the transom, leaving the cockpit clear. The upgraded 35hp four-stroke Briggs and Stratton petrol engine is housed in the transom wall with air intakes to the front and side and the exhaust and forced air ventilation outlet to the rear.

The pumps and oil reservoirs supplying the hydraulic motors in each of the three wheels are also housed behind the transom,



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 **DOMETIC**



INSET the bow camera is aimed at the front wheel and the ground below it. It displays on the Simrad MFD.

RIGHT This version of Sealegs AES is rated up to 3,000kg.

BELOW The 8.5m Alloy Cabin has a distinctive profile.



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accessible via a hatch on the starboard side. The step-through is on the port side where the transom is slightly lower. The boarding ladder is designed not only for boarding the boat from the water, but also from land. Folding to the side, the ladder is shaped to clear the rear wheel.

One house- and one start-battery are housed under the port side berth in the forward cabin.

The Sealegs experience is similar with every model, but it doesn't really get old. It still feels slightly odd driving a boat down the beach and into the water and vice versa, but it's highly satisfying! Engine noise is certainly less intrusive with the Briggs and Stratton tucked away inside the transom wall.

We made several entries and exits during our afternoon with the 8.5m, to accommodate photographers, videographers and others, but Sealegs' AES is well-sorted and very simple to operate. Making the transition from land to water and back again is child's play.

AWD ensures good traction in most situations and there's the option of engaging 'diff lock', which forces all the wheels to turn in unison, to overcome more challenging beach conditions. Maximum speed on land is 7.5kph – 10.1kph with diff lock engaged. A bow camera, which feeds to the Simrad MFD, keeps you apprised at all times of what's below the front wheel.

Sealegs has put some thought into the way the controls are laid out in the 8.5m Alloy Cabin. 'Terrestrial' controls, levers and instruments are largely grouped together so they are easy to operate with one hand, leaving the other one safely on the wheel. Power steering is standard, turning both the front wheel and the outboard. The prominent emergency stop button, which activates a hydraulically-released mechanical brake, is on top of the dash.

The vessel's 'aquatic' controls and instruments are likewise logically grouped and there's ample space on the dash for a 12-

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This boat is nicely set up for fishing with a practical transom-mounted bait station that includes a good-sized live bait tank and a row of rod holders (five) and knife slots. The rocket launcher across the back of the hardtop provides storage for six more rods and there are four angled through-coaming rod holders, plus cup/sinker holders that light up at night. Side pockets are easily wide enough to accommodate dive bottles and there's a large 450-litre wet or dry locker forward of the underfloor fuel tank.

On the water, a V6 250hp Yamaha four-stroke outboard provides the motive power. In the right conditions it will propel the 8.5m Sealegs to a top speed of 39 knots and the boat cruises comfortably at 25-30 knots. The helm position is good, Hi-Tech bolster seats on Softrider pedestals providing comfort and support. Aft-facing seats have storage underneath: a pull-out Dometic fridge slots in under the port seat.

Power steering and an adjustable helm position

make driving the boat a pleasure. Vision ahead is excellent, thanks to the all-glass windscreen and the way the foredeck slopes down slightly, which is a bonus when operating on land as well. The hull is soft-riding, dry and nicely-responsive to helm and engine trim inputs, handling very nicely.

When left in auto mode, Zipwake trim tabs take the guesswork out of trim settings, but trim tabs were hardly needed during our review, so we switched them off for most of it. In more extreme conditions it is often better to use the tabs in manual mode.

Perhaps the most all-round Sealegs model yet, the 8.5 Alloy Cabin opens a new market sector for the company.

A smart looker that performs well, the 8.5 has the length, on-water presence and range to tackle a variety of boating tasks. Well spec'd, comfortable and nicely appointed, it's suitable for serious fishing and diving, as well as family boating.

There's even the option of sleeping onboard – adding a gas cannister stove or BBQ would take care of cooking duties – and the boat can also be supplied on a conventional road trailer, for even more versatility. **BNZ**

SEALEGS

Sealegs 8.5m Alloy Cabin

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HIGHLIGHTS

Well spec'd, comfortable and nicely appointed.

Suitable for serious fishing and diving as well as family boating

Uncluttered cockpit because all the AES machinery is tucked away behind the transom

SPECIFICATIONS

loa 8.5m
hull length 6.7m
beam 2.31m
draft 0.9m
deadrise 16° at transom
construction aluminium (5mm hull and transom, 4mm topsides, decks)
weight 2230kg (dry)
engine Yamaha V6 250hp
engine Briggs and Stratton 35hp
fuel 250 litres
cruising speed 25-30 knots
max speed 39 knots

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