



Slick, lavish, **iconic**



With a production history spanning 26 years, Auckland's Formula Cruisers has worked hard to establish itself as a premium builder of semi-production motor yachts and sports.

While it is naïve to suggest builders of luxury vessels are 'recession-proof', Formula Cruisers has effectively turned the other cheek and invested in its brand, writes **Steve Raea**.





With a shift to new and larger premises within Hobsonville's marine precinct, and a concerted push into the Australian and US markets, 2008 will stand out as a year of strategic growth for one of our most respected yards. At a time when many production boatbuilders have hunkered down and consolidated, Formula Cruisers, through the leadership and management of naval architect and business manager Grant Senior, has taken an altogether different tack.

Rather than 'stick to its knitting', Formula Cruisers is on the verge of releasing concept designs that will see its luxurious Icon range of motor yachts and sports fishers expanded to include 62', 68' and 75' options. Formula Cruisers has also appointed dedicated sales agents in Queensland and Perth to represent its business in Australia and Asia, and in support of this, displayed its flagship Icon 54 at both the Sydney International and Sanctuary Cove Boat Shows.

Senior says he can't recall a period in his eight years at the helm of Formula Cruisers when there has been so much enquiry, but also concedes getting that enquiry onto paper hasn't got any easier.

"We had very strong interest at both the Sydney and Sanctuary Cove shows with the Icon 54 and we see this as potentially our strongest export market. But we're also making a push into the US where the Kiwi dollar represents outstanding value."

Senior says the move to larger premises at Hobsonville means Formula Cruisers can now accommodate up to six boats on the production floor at any one time and introduce larger models to the Icon range. It has also allowed the business to take on additional work as contract laminators for the Sea Nymph range of fibreglass runabouts.

Formula's focus, however, is firmly on the luxury end of the market.

"We see potential in expanding the current Icon range to 75 feet and we're very close to releasing full design drawings for an extended Icon 62 based on the existing Icon 54 and two completely new boats – the Icon 68 and the Icon 75."

Formula's current flagship, the Icon 54, has been in production now for nearly three years and has found a steady market with five boats in the water and a sixth dedicated sports fisher due for launching early this year.

During its time in production, the Icon 54 has undergone some subtle design changes that have collectively resulted in considerable gains in internal volume but without any noticeable impact on exterior lines and styling.

Formula's latest launching, Icon 54 number five, brings these design changes together in a package that introduces a fresh new interior layout ideally suited to the warmer Australian climate and the Aussie's penchant for extended limits game fishing.

Launched in October, this new Icon is the first

to feature an internal flybridge staircase, which has allowed Senior to include enclosed toilet and showering facilities in the starboard forward corner of the cockpit where the exterior flybridge stairs would normally be located.



Senior says this is a design option that's available to customers at no additional expense and allows for the placement of an automatic washing machine and dryer to further enhance the boat's ability as a long-term live-aboard option.

"What it means is that crew don't have to walk through the boat and down into the forward accommodation to use the head or shower and makes the cockpit fully self-contained.

"You could say it draws an effective demarcation between the cockpit and saloon, which is an important consideration for some owners, who prefer to keep the fishy thing outdoors for obvious reasons."

The other notable change in the latest boat, says Formula Cruisers sales and marketing manager Troy Woods, is the optional replacement of the front saloon windscreen with a solid fiberglass screen. This again, says Woods, is a design option more likely to appeal to Australian clients and serious off-shore game fishers because it is both survey compliant and will keep the boat cooler and ensure faster and more efficient performance of the onboard air conditioning system.

"It has also allowed us to build in a bank of additional storage lockers and chest height cupboards where the windscreen dash would normally protrude back into the main saloon."

While these changes are optional and at no additional cost, the Icon 54 has also undergone some subtle design changes to the hull to add additional internal volume and headroom.

A US-trained and qualified naval architect, Grant Senior says length overall has increased two feet, which has allowed the boat's freeboard height to be raised accordingly. This in turn has resulted in greater headroom throughout the boat.

Senior also says the beam has increased from 16'6" to 18'7" – creating noticeably more internal volume and particularly in the forward guest cabin which now boasts a true walk-around island-style double berth with masses of locker storage built into both sides of the hull.

The good life

There is no doubt that the Formula Icon 54 is a superb vessel on every level, with a build quality and an attention to detail that can only be achieved from a semi-production build process that takes 10 months to complete from start to finish.

From high-gloss cherry veneers and walnut burr cappings to rich natural



textiles and fabrics, the Icon 54 is unashamedly luxurious throughout and equipped with the very best fittings and appliances to create a stylish and extremely comfortable living environment.

Even with the internal flybridge staircase, the saloon has lost none of its spaciousness due to the clever semi-circular stairway design, exiting well forward of the helm station, which in this boat is optional at the aft end of the flybridge.

The saloon focal point is the large U-shaped dinette to port, richly



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upholstered in leather with a matching settee opposite. A large richly-lacquered dining table takes centre stage and, when not required, lowers almost to floor level.

Storage is a feature of the Icon 54 and wherever space allows, the designer has added a cupboard or drawer to very practical effect. The settees are an excellent example, with slide-out drawers under each. Space has also been maximised around the foot of the flybridge staircase with a nifty corner bar setting utilising what could easily be dead space.

While this boat has been optioned with solid fibreglass where others have had a large saloon windscreen, the interior is light and airy with a large aft window and three picture windows on each side of the saloon giving uninterrupted views around the boat from the central dining table.

Senior has spent a lifetime on boats and his yachting pedigree is apparent in a galley design set up to workable in any seaway and equipped with domestic appliances. Features include Corion countertops and a plethora of under-bench and overhead cupboards, drawers and lockers specifically designed for crockery, pans, cutlery, cups and glasses. A nice touch is the large galley window, which electronically lowers into a recess to bring the cockpit and galley together.

He says the Icon's been designed with live aboard comfort in mind and to this end has been fitted with a Bosch domestic four-burner hob with oven and grill under, ice maker, F&P dish-drawer and a single round stainless steel sink. A large brushed stainless steel fridge and freezer unit is fitted opposite the galley to port.

The galley floor and central companionway has been laid in high-gloss cherry and holly to complement the expansive use of teak and holly on the cockpit sole and transom boarding platform.

The boat is faithful to Icon 54 traditional three-

cabin layout, which features an owner's stateroom to port with full walk-around queen-size berth and private and beautifully appointed en suite with separate shower stall.

The guest cabin is forward in the bow and also features a generous walk-around double-berth, while a twin-berth cabin aft to starboard provides dedicated overnight facilities for two couple and two singles. The forward double cabin and twin centre cabin share a bathroom that faithfully replicates that in the master cabin.

The immediate and overriding impression of the accommodation is one of spaciousness and extreme comfort. Each cabin has inner-sprung mattresses with ample drawers and hanging lockers, opening hatches and ports and individual thermostat control for heating and air conditioning. This boat was also fitted with the optional soft furnishings package, which includes colour co-ordinated bedding and scatter cushions for a sophisticated designer look.

Those who appreciate quality joinery will savour the attention to detail and the solid cappings designed to take the knocks and ensure easy



SPECIFICATIONS

(PRICE AS TESTED \$2.43M)

LENGTH OVERALL	58'
BEAM	18'7"
DRAFT (FULL)	4'
DISPLACEMENT (MEDIUM SHIP)	24,000kg
FUEL CAPACITY	4000 litres
WATER CAPACITY	1000 litres
HEADROOM	6'6"

TO OWN THIS BOAT:

	EXAMPLE BASED ON
Purchase Price of	\$2.43M
Deposit	\$NA
Final Balloon Payment	\$NA
Term	60 months
MONTHLY PAYMENT	\$NA*



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FORMULA ICON 54

maintenance. The enclosed fly bridge with clears aft is luxurious and stylish, with wrap around ultra-leather seating forward, air-conditioning and heating and the owner's choice of forward or aft helm station.

This example featured the aft helm station, which is essentially a single GRP-moulded unit in crisp white with grey trim and brimming with the latest Raymarine E-series instruments including a closed-circuit video facilities monitoring the bow and twin MTU Series 60 825hp engines.

Helm seating is by way of two fully-adjustable, Navigator helm seats. Despite being aft, driver visibility has not been comprised, with a clear view forward and aft. Refinements continue up top with a mini bar, 12-volt fridge, and separate thermostat control for heating and air-conditioning.

With the option of being fully-enclosed (with the use of expansive clears) or open, the flybridge in the only place to be underway. Additional comforts include a large curved teak bench seat behind the helm and a rear flybridge bimini for additional sun protection. Matching overhead opening hatches ensure good through ventilation when under way.

With more than 11m² of usable space, the expansive cockpit is brimming with useful features and options that extend to a fitted stainless steel gas barbeque, various live bait tank and fish storage options, rear passenger settee and a large and secure boarding platform and quality stainless

hardware designed to cope with the loads of a 25-tonne vessel.

Woods says Formula Cruisers is close to completing an Icon 54 configured exclusively for off-shore game fishing that features stunning stainless steel tuna towers, each equipped with their own compliment of big-screen electronics.

He says the Icon series has always been faithful to the adage that most buyers are likely to want to enjoy the full mix of boating options whether it be diving, fishing or simply cruising.

"We have design options that cater exclusively for deep sea fishing but in standard trim we prefer to cater for the widest possible user base. To this end we do not compromise cockpit layout by putting in gear and equipment that favours any one boating activity over another."

But that said, standard fittings include a full stainless steel rocket launcher, recessed rod holders in the cockpit combings and dedicated rod storage in recessed lockers. The boat is also fully plumbed with deck wash and live bait tank facilities.

Performance is guaranteed, with twin MTU Series 60 825hp engines and ZF drive train delivering a top speed of better than 32 knots and comfortable and relatively efficient cruising at 18 to 25 knots. The Icon 54 now carries 4000 litres of diesel for extended cruising range and 1000 litres of water to match.

Woods says it's important to note that all cruisers

in the Icon series are equipped to a very high standard straight off the factory floor.

"When you purchase an Icon you purchase a true turn-key package that includes everything you need for safe, reliable and comfortable cruising. Big ticket items like bow thruster, full electronic instrumentation, air conditioning, gen-set, shore power and battery inverters are all included in the base price.

"If you shop around and compare apples with apples you'll soon establish that for the quality, finish and industry-leading 10-year warranty, a Formula Icon represents outstanding value in comparison to similar-sized imported production yachts."

Formula Cruisers has built its reputation on quality build and design innovation and this new Icon 54 with its internal flybridge staircase and additional cockpit facilities continue that tradition.

While perhaps pitched at the Australian market, the new configuration adds to the genuine live aboard capability of the yacht, and will no doubt appeal to retirees considering selling up and enjoying apartment-style living on the water. ↴

For more information contact Formula Cruisers at 09 416 4836, or email mail@formulacruisers.com

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