

DIVE NEW ZEALAND REVIEWS:

Tristram Marine's 881 Offshore

By Ron Czerniak, Marine Consultant.

Arriving at Orams Marine Village Boat Park in Auckland's Westhaven Marina, I met up with Kingsley Fink, one of the sons of Lance and Bronwyn Fink, the owners of Hamilton-based Tristram Marine. We had arranged to go out on Tristram's top-of-the-line fibreglass 881 Offshore.

The 881 was in the water alongside a finger pier, ready to load up with dive gear for our dive out in the Hauraki Gulf. Gear storage was a breeze with more than ample room for dive bags and dive tanks, conveniently secured in an ingenious and removable side-rack arrangement developed by Tristram. Although weather-wise it wasn't shaping up to be the best day for diving, with a strong NE wind and threatening rain forecast, the sea conditions were certainly going to allow me to see how this Tristram Offshore 881 handled a seaway. Cruising out of Auckland harbour with a fair chop on the water soon made me realise that dive site options were going to be limited. However, we felt that the SW side of the Noises, which I hadn't dived in years, might be a possibility – and I was also curious to see if the scallop



Ample room for dive bags.



The removable side rack.



Inboard engine cover provided a great area for sitting while gearing up prior to exiting the boat.

beds I remembered were still prolific.

As we motored down the harbour, Kingsley and I had the opportunity to chat about the 881, his role in the company and about Tristram Marine in general. I soon discovered that Kingsley is a keen scuba diver and we instantly formed a bond, which opened the door for a candid discussion about what makes a great dive boat.

I had explained to Kingsley that in order to keep our Dive New Zealand/ Pacific magazine 'dive boat' articles objective, no matter what vessel we were using to dive from, we had formulated the 10 'Must Have' and the 10 'Would Be Nice To Have' checklists (see <http://divenewzealand.co.nz/boat-tests-top-ten-features/>), and that I'd be writing the article with these lists in mind.

As we rounded North Head and set a course for the Noises, it soon became apparent that a dive out there was unlikely and with a freshening wind against tide we hit very confused and rough sea conditions as we opened up the 881 heading into Rangitoto Channel. Maybe the diving wasn't going to be great, but I realised that this was going to

be an ideal opportunity to see how the Tristram Offshore 881 would perform in a rough sea.

Kingsley was more than willing to open up the latest Mercruiser Volkswagen 3.0 V6 diesel inboard; which quietly revved up as he hit the throttle. A confused sea with waves running around half to one metre at times is a great sea to find out how any boat performs. The 881 didn't disappoint and I was immediately aware that Kingsley was fully confident in the boat's design, solid construction and ability to handle what we were about to throw at her. Whichever way we pointed her – head on to the waves, beam on, quartering off the port bow or running with the waves off the stern quarter – the long keel hull handled the sea beautifully. This was turning into a fun adventure!

The helm and passenger front seats are adequate for the job and would suit most boaties, but in these sea conditions and if it were my personal boat, I would use the advantage of Tristram's in-house upholstery department and have them customise the seats to give my back some further lumbar support.

This unique service allows Tristram to offer customers customisation of their seating, from colours to foam shapes even to foam density. However, the foot rest in front of the passenger seat is nicely positioned and by watching how Kingsley was going to hit a wave, I was able to 'ride' the seat and avoid any spine-jarring discomfort. A nice touch is the stainless steel grab handle, ergonomically mounted on the port bulkhead beside the seat and naturally positioned for 'grab' and additional support in the seas we were experiencing.

The Fink family have been involved in boat building for generations and over the years they have built up a formidable reputation for manufacturing high quality, innovatively designed fibreglass boats from the 581 Prima M2 up to the 881 Offshore we were on. Wherever you look while on board, quality of finish and attention to detail is in evidence. When I look at a boat, I am probably much pickier than the average punter, but try as I might to find fault with this craft, it was hard to find anything of note to complain about.

Although the weather gods had decreed this was not going to be an ideal dive day, we did find a nice sheltered cove on the lee side of Rakino Island – proving that in just about any weather conditions, dive adventure can be found in the Hauraki Gulf! Locating what looked to be a good spot with the help of the 12" Garmin GPS/depth sounder, I began to suit up. I couldn't help being impressed with the size of the cockpit, which is ample for up to four divers who could, in a pinch, all suit up at the same time. However, a two-plus-two suiting



Top left: A stride entry off the stern swim platform.

Top right: A back roll off either side.

Left: The large swim platform, extending across the entire stern, is easily accessed from the cockpit and provides an ideal entry platform.

Bottom: The boat in dry dock – observe her long keel hull.

up schedule would be more logical and practical. Getting ready for a dive on the 881 was more like being on a small launch rather than a large trailer boat! The inboard engine cover provided a great area for sitting while gearing up prior to exiting the boat.

Kingsley explained that they'd set up the boat for optional dive entry methods: (1) A back roll off either side or (2) A stride entry off the stern swim platform. I tried both water entries, and although both worked fine and the guys at Tristram have ingeniously thought

about the layout to make a side back-roll entry relatively easy, by means of a conveniently-located foot step and grab handle I found a stride entry off the stern more convenient.

The large swim platform, extending across the entire stern, is easily accessed from the cockpit and provides an ideal entry platform, facilitated by the very clever and ruggedly constructed waist-





A quiet moment to observe her rise and ride.



A hot shower can work wonders.

high inverted U-shaped stainless steel rail at the extreme stern of the swim platform. This rail also doubles as the support for the removable and very

ample bait board/rod holder assembly. This can be easily removed or re-positioned whether diving or fishing. This rail provided a secure support when

standing on the swim platform, either fully kitted up, while getting ready for a dive or removing your gear after the dive.

The standard ladder on the Tristram 881 Offshore is a good all round ladder. However if I was to set up an 881 for myself I would have Tristram design and manufacture a custom 'dive ladder' to allow for fins and the extra weight of my dive bottle, BC and weight belt. Tristram Marine continually customise different packages to suit all applications and requests. This 'can do', customer-focused attitude is definitely a hallmark of the Tristram experience.

Once back on board and after a hot shower, a feature easily provided with an inboard diesel cooling system and simple hot water holding tank, I could forgive the ladder! Amazing what warmth and luxury will do to put things back in perspective. I hadn't been able to dive the Noises as planned, but the dive at Rakino proved remarkably pleasant and would be a good area for novice divers to go for their first open water experiences.

As we headed back to Auckland with a moderate following sea, Kingsley handed me the helm so that I could get a first-hand feel how the 881 performed. In

DIVE GEAR MAINTENANCE GUIDE

LOOKING AFTER YOUR DIVE GEAR

After every dive, wash all your dive equipment using 25ml Salt-Away concentrate to fresh water; either spray gear with the Salt-Away Auto-Mix unit or wash gear in a bucket. Set the Auto-Mix unit to Salt-Away and give everything a light spray. There is no need to rinse the gear off afterwards as Salt-Away protects all surfaces, metal and rubber, so just drain, shake and allow to dry. It is non-toxic.

Regulators: At the end of each dive, carefully use air from the cylinder to blow away water and debris from the first stage inlet. Replace the dust cap on the first stage before cleaning. Wash carefully after every dive by soaking the regulator, dive computer, hoses and dive console in a 15ml Salt-Away concentrate to 1 litre of fresh water mix, leaving overnight if possible, then remove from

the mix and leave to air dry (no rinsing required).

BCDs: After diving, wash BCDs inside and out using the Salt-Away mixing unit, or a 15ml Salt-Away concentrate to 1 litre of fresh water mix in a bucket. No need to rinse with fresh water. Periodically rinse the inside with a weak disinfectant solution to kill any bacteria. Check for leaks before and after every dive.

Wetsuits: Using our Salt-Away mixing unit, or a 15ml Salt-Away concentrate to 1 litre of fresh water mix, wash the suit inside and out. Clean and lubricate zips with the same Salt-Away mix to remove all salt.

Storing your dive gear after cleaning: When gear is dry, store it in a cool, dry, dark place, away from direct sunlight.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

- Overall Length 9.25m / 30'3"
- Overall Beam 2.5m / 8'2"
- Deadrise 21°
- Transom Angle: 16°
- *Underfloor Fuel 390L
- *Water Capacity 140L
- Horsepower Range 260–420hp
- Overall Length on Trailer 9.8m / 32'1"
- Overall Beam on Trailer 2.5m / 8'2"
- **Overall Height on Trailer 3m / 9'8"
- Overall Weight on Trailer 3500kg

*approximate figure
**depending on jockey wheel height

a word – superbly! With the full-length keel, well-researched hull design, along with the relatively heavy displacement of this craft, the ride is comfortable and gives you a strong sense of security.

Idling into Westhaven Marina, I pondered my 'gut feeling' impressions of this Tristram 881 Offshore. In a nutshell: a luxurious boat more akin to a small launch than a trailer boat. A vessel that ticked just about every box on our 10 'Must Have' items and ticked every box on our 'Would Be Nice to Have' list.

An ideal boat for four divers out on a one-day dive excursion and an absolutely superb boat for two divers on an extended long-weekend trip, with spacious V-berth bed, cooking, freezer and sink set up. Now that I know that Kingsley is a keen diver, I'm hoping for an invite to do weekend excursion in the future; perhaps for a dive adventure out to Great Barrier? 

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