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**PNG MARINE PLAYGROUND MARK RICHARDS PROFILE SYDNEY SHOW PREVIEW
DIESEL OUTBOARDS BUYING SECONDHAND CRUISE CRAFT CENTRE CONSOLE**

Off the Trailer

FINNISH FUN

Axopar's talented all-rounder packs loads of well-considered features inside a unique exterior.

By Mark Rothfield





If you happen to get a chance to drive the Axopar 28, you'll discover what a soft-riding, sure-footed and seaworthy beast it truly is. Blink and you'll think you're aboard a North Sea rescue craft or military stealth vessel.

Aesthetically, the Axopar is 'out there' when compared to the conventional flock – its appearance is definitely different. Among local buyers, though, it boasts a near 100 per cent conversion rate once it has been driven and appreciated.

Mark Richards, of *Wild Oats* and Palm Beach/Grand Banks, has an Axopar 24 as his Pittwater pleasureboat. Christian Beck, owner of rival supermaxi *InfoTrack*, is another high-profile owner, as is yacht broker Andrew Moore, who bought a 24 after experiencing Richards' boat. Even a Sydney ferry passenger was inspired to place an order the day after seeing an Axopar performing on the harbour.

Importer Eyachts has averaged three or four sales a month, while the Finnish manufacturer has three 28 moulds running simultaneously.

Eyachts MD, Peter Hrones, happened upon Axopar while chasing an outboard-powered vessel to bolster a dealership portfolio that includes Sealine, Greenline and Fjord. It had to be equally cutting-edge and quirky, since his customers generally prefer something left-field yet affordable.

The Axopars fit that bill.

Defying convention, Hrones is considering running water tests during this year's Sydney International Boat Show.

"Everyone says it's the best boat they've ever driven," he says. "When you know boats, you understand the bow shape and the underwater design, whereas that's not so apparent when the boat is sitting static on a stand."

SHARP SHOOTER

The Axopar 28's bow is a reverse-swept stub of roughly 40cm in height, and the forefoot then commences with a sharp 65-degree deadrise. Surely it can't have enough buoyancy, you think. But surely it does, because the hull's substantial rocker pushes the waterline well back.

With the 28, an optional thruster resides two metres aft to ensure it stays submerged.

The Axopar 28 comes in four variations including (below) the aft-cabin model.





85 improvements for a boat that had already claimed numerous awards



As much thought and cleverness has gone into the interior spaces as the exterior of the Axopar 28.



The vee flattens to 22 degrees, drawing 0.8m, while square chines set on a 2.95m beam cater for stability. The main chine is stepped near the bow, plus there are multiple strakes. Furthermore, two underwater steps amidships serve to reduce surface tension and aerate the landings.

In other words, there are complex, multifarious design factors sequentially playing a part in the 28's ride and handling. That they're orchestrated in such harmony can be attributed to the hull's heritage, which harks back to the America's Cup arena, where Axopars served as inboard tenders.

The 28 was launched in 2015, but has just undergone a major facelift. Hrones counts 85 improvements for a boat that had already claimed numerous awards. The Finnish builders have put more curve in the windscreen, the beam was increased by 100mm, the topside height raised, the dash is neater, cleats are more sleekly integrated ... the list goes down to providing magazine storage and more drinkholders.

The boat comes as open, T-top, cabin and (as tested) aft-cabin versions, with an equally wide choice of outboard options, scaling from a single 200 to a 400hp that will deliver 50 knots (92.6km/h). Twin configurations are also possible.

PERFORMANCE AND SEAKEEPING

The test boat sported a 350hp Mercury Verado, a supercharged in-line six-cylinder that, for mine, was the ideal power partner. It gives the boat an imperceptible transition to plane, quiet mid-range cruising and a top-end of 45 knots (83.3km/h).

We began on a mirrored Coomera River at 12 knots (22km/h), demanding just 2000rpm. Around 4500rpm saw 32 knots (59.2km/h) for a 48lt/h burn rate, translating to a six-hour range from a full 300lt fuel tank, while 6000 clicks brought 42 knots (77.8km/h) and 100lt/h.

Engine trim and tabs can extract a couple of extra knots at maximum revs, with the tabs having a joystick control for simple, intuitive operation.

Steering is light and precise, strakes biting as the two-tonne hull tracked on rails around river bends. Spray disperses from the chines well aft and the wake remains almost perfectly flat. Engine and wind noise is negligible, too, allowing us to savour the Fusion sound system.

With wind battling tide, the Gold Coast Seaway conditions were as harsh as I'd ever



seen them, with 2.5m seas breaking in some parts. At one point we *almost* dipped the bow to its gunwale cap, but it came through dry and unscathed. Running back in, some trim and judicious throttle work saw another acid test passed with flying colours.

If you want the Porsche of offshore fishing boats, a fast coastal hopper or a Rottnest runner, this could well be it.

BED AND BREAKFAST

The aft-cabin version apparently accounts for 75 per cent of the 28's sales, finding its way everywhere from Auckland to Adelaide to Airlie Beach. It has a separate head compartment forward and comfortable accommodation, with buyers feeling like they're getting lots more boat for little extra money – around \$8000, in fact.

The cabin is enclosed by a forward-leaning windscreen, sliding doors and hardtop with canvas sunroof, but you can easily open it to the elements. Though cosy in dimension, it's a triumph of space utilisation.


By swivelling the helm seats to face the aft lounge, a dinette nook is created. The lounge then converts to a bed suitable for kids or shorter adults. Straps hold the portside seat aloft to clear access to the aft cabin, or you can drop into it from an overhead hatch on the aft deck. The queen-sized bed is more than adequate for overnighting or power naps.

Galley-wise, there's an icebox and sink in the helm seat bases, but no inbuilt stove. Most owners would head to a restaurant or take a sushi platter.

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On deck is a bow table, concealed anchor locker, sunpad atop the aft cabin, and boarding platforms either side of the outboard well, all connected by well-protected walkaround access.

The 28's hull is laminated in solid fibreglass with an inner structural grid and a hard-wearing rubber gunwale bumper for protection. It gives the Axopar an edge – a hard edge – over large RIBs, which are perhaps the nearest equivalent in terms of performance.

In both its Finnish design and finish, the Axopar deserves to take a bow. It's an eye-opening and idea-altering vessel – drive it, and you'll see. 

AXOPAR 28 AC	
Length overall:	8.75m
Beam:	2.95m
Weight (without engine):	1940kg
Fuel capacity:	300lt
Capacity:	8 passengers
Power:	200-400hp
Power (as tested):	350hp Mercury Verado
Price from:	\$185,000
Price (as tested):	\$235,000
More information: Eyachts, tel (02) 9979 6612. Web: eyachts.com.au.	