

Whittley

CRUISEMASTER SOVEREIGN 2300



Nothing but the best

A truly unique boat in terms of style and craftsmanship, the Sovereign is the best effort yet from a company that already has the respect of most marine industry professionals.

As the world heads more and more in the direction of plastic pop-out everthings, and throw-away 'convenience' lifestyles, the Whittley family stubbornly turns a blind eye on the trend and continues to produce a range of boats that can only be described as remarkable. Remarkable for the quality and craftsmanship that goes into every boat, remarkable for their unique designs, and most of all remarkable for the amount of human hands-on craftsmanship that goes into the manufacture of every component.

Here's a little story that illustrates quite well what happens when they do a new model. Whittley senior had an idea for an outstanding dash console, but it was the sort of complex thing that really needed to be injection moulded out of plastic. With the production quantities most local builders are talking about, injection moulding is just not on. A lesser person may have just forgotten about the idea at that point and done something easy, but not this crew. He ended up carving the whole thing out of timber, produced a mould, and now has exactly the dash he wants through a combination of a fibreglass base with teak, vinyl and a wood grain plastic sheet added.

Photographs and words, no matter how well used, can not describe the essence of one of these new boats, an



essence that is a combination of craftsmanship, first rate materials and a degree of dedication that has become a rare commodity. You have to actually see one and touch one to fully appreciate what the Sovereign is all about.

Layout

In broad terms, the seven metre (23') Cruisemaster Sovereign follows the well established styling of the recent cruisers,

with the distinctive two level cabin profile and much the same treatment of general externals. In detail, however, most things have been further developed and improved.

The foredeck of this boat could become the standard model for boat builders, as a classic lesson in getting the fundamentals of ground tackle right, and also in maximising available space up front. The whole boat is a model in terms of space

utilisation, but the sharp end is exceptional.

The broad view shows a bow sprit backed by a power deck winch feeding chain through a haws hole. This is backed by a big stainless bollard flanked on either side by two deck hatches, backed in turn by the forward cabin hatch fitted with internal and external handles.

Now look at the detail. A large teflon roller is fitted into the sprit for the chain to

run on, and above and in front of that is a large open bracket through which either anchor or mooring rope can be fed. This means that you can easily handle a sand or reef anchoring job.

The 30 metres of substantial chain and the solid anchor come as standard equipment with the boat, and the locker into which the haws feeds the chain has been made extra deep so that the whole length of chain can pile up as much as it wants without jamming the haws pipe.

A warping drum has been fitted over the chain gipsy so that rope can also be retrieved with the power winch, and an additional deck switch allows this to be done by one person on the foredeck.

The two deck lockers could hold enough rope to securely anchor five boats this size in 30 fathoms of water. Some wag suggested that one was a rope locker and the other a standard issue Queensland 30 can ice box! No matter how you approach it, or what you put in it, you can never have too much storage of this kind. I have been in exposed places where people do carry a lot of very substantial ground tackle, but is is also great for bulk storage jobs of any kind.

This area and the side decks of the boat are covered in a mild non-skid pattern which works better with deck shoes than it does with bare feet, especially if you polish that glass. Fuel and water fillers are located in the side decks, by the way.

If you go forward along the side the low and out-angled style of the bow rail offers no support at all, but this is not a problem as you have very good recessed hand holds along the cabin sides all the way. The better way forward is through the forward cabin hatch, which is quite large. I noted that the cushion covers down there were far too good to stand on, so I lifted



one to see what you would be standing on. In inimitable Whitley fashion, even the glass moulding *under* the cushions was covered in carpet, and where you would stand a set of solid teak battens had been placed to put your foot on.

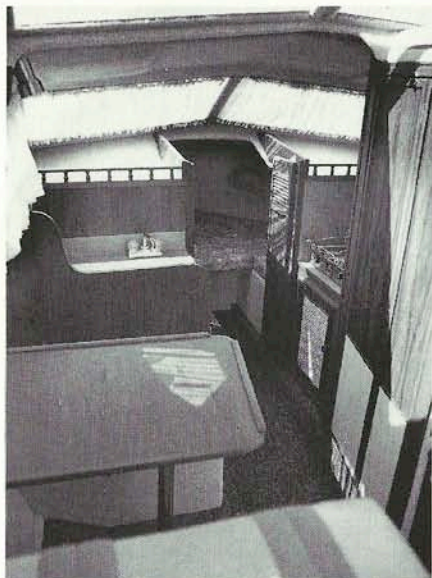
I have never seen a better foredeck than this on any boat, allowing for the fact that the boat is not likely to be used in the sort of rough water that would require more substantial bow rail security out there.

Coming back around the side you notice two things about the cabin roof. One of these is the solar panel which feeds the twin batteries on a demand system at up to four amps. While trialing the boat, Whitley found that this solar panel worked so well, even constant use of lights and a refrigerator over a period of days failed to run the batteries down. It is way ahead of the solar panels we've had in the past, apparently.

The second thing is the glass hatch immediately over the helm position. This has a very strong and effective snap seal catch on it that can also be used to fix the hatch to be open just a few centimetres. If you want it open all the way, the hatch swings back over to come to rest on a rubber buffer.

From inside the boat you get to fully appreciate just how well that two stage cabin front works in terms of maintaining

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You won't find a dash like this in any other Australian boat, and few overseas products could match it either. The genius of these people shows through in both the utilisation of space and attention to fine detail.

was particularly aware of how well the system was working as I did the last of my notes inside the cabin area.

All of the windows are glass, and the two front ones below the screen are huge. The big side windows are all sliding which allows good ventilation control on either hot days or when the covers are in place. You also get curtains supplied as a standard item with one of these boats, which does a great deal to add to that totally finished look they have.

The basic approach inside is to have the foot of the forward cabin up under the foredeck, coming back under that first

rise. The bunks come back behind the window line either side of the companionway, pretty much the way you access a normal cuddy with dash top cut-out for headroom access. There is no filler for the dash cutout, so with the cabin doors closed you screen the sleeping area from view but don't actually seal it off.

The water tank is located under the head of the bunks, and a clear glass tube on the front allows you to check water levels easily.

The cabin is intended as a sleeping area really, so you have enough head room to sort of loll about on the bunks, but you don't have sitting head room. The bunk cushion fabrics are first class, as is the finish throughout the interior, with absolutely everything carpeted, including the huge storage bins under the bunks. You get further side shelf storage and, with the fillers in place the double berth is a very large one.

The galley sits in an alcove between the head/shower and the forward cabin, with the sink and refrigerator opposite ahead of the dinette. Pause a moment here to take in the fact that every surface, other than working ones, are either carpeted or teak — solid real thing teak. Dark grey carpet on the floor, light grey carpet on all sides and exposed surfaces. Even the major teak doors have been further adorned with cane rafia patterns or a carpet inset. It's incredible!

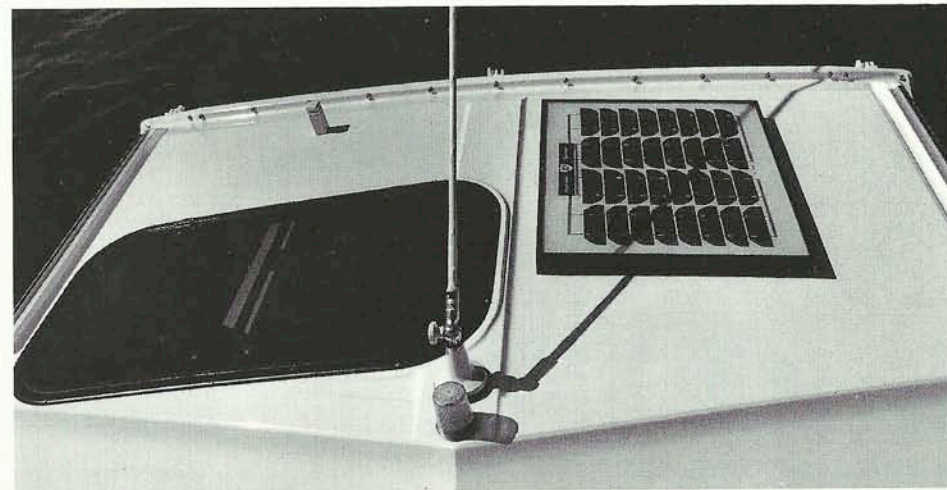
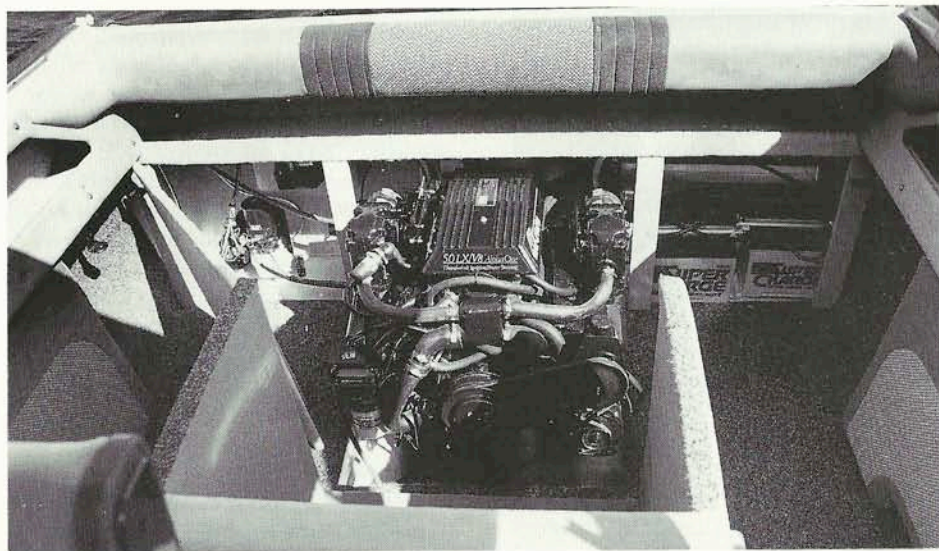
You get big shelves either side where the bunks extend the bulkhead back beyond the screen line, which is handy when you are preparing meals. The galley module is based on a big cupboard with three carpeted shelves, then the two burner spirit stove stands on the forward edge of that. Behind that a lid opens to access a large storage bin, and behind that sliding doors access what I suppose would be plate and utensil space. I have been on 40 foot boats that don't have this much galley storage.

Right opposite the galley another module contains the Engel fridge and a good size sink with hot and cold pressure taps and a decent draining space. Another storage area behind this is an alternative space for crockery and cutlery.

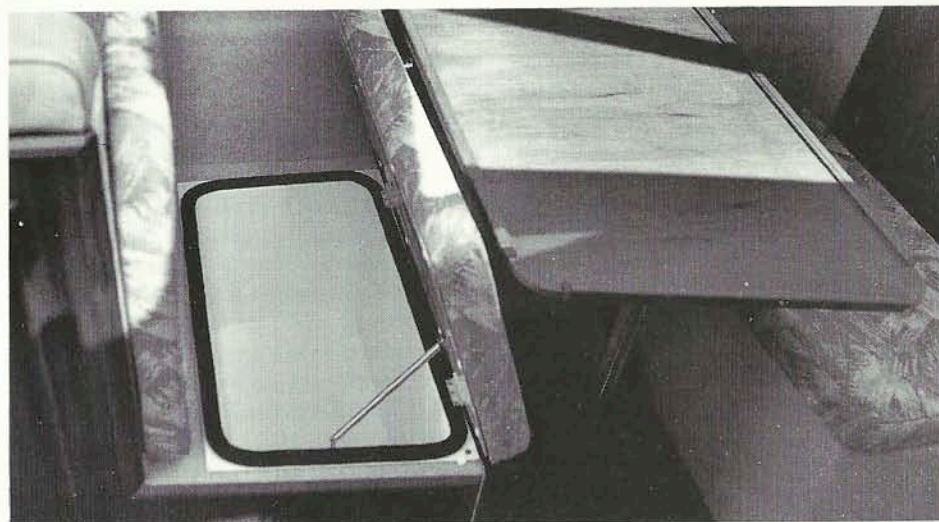
All of this area offers good head and elbow room. You can prepare a meal in reasonable comfort and ventilation is such that the galley location is quite practical.

If you'll pardon the obvious pun, the head also offers good head room — 1.75 m in fact, because my head just touches the roof. This space also has plenty of elbow room, so the hand held shower can be used in comfort, a storage area with a sliding door keeps the loo paper dry, and you can open a paper out

high light levels. I noticed it during the day out on the water, but later back at the boat yard with a heavy overcast coming in, I



Engine access is excellent, as is access to all areas that may require service or regular attention. The hot water system sits in on top of the batteries in the transom area. An excellent new solar panel on the cab roof keeps the batteries topped up, even when in heavy demand. The massive ice box under the dinette seat is in addition to a regular refrigerator on board.



Whittley does a fascinating thing here. A large storage cupboard backs onto this seat to become the back rest, and a seat cushion has been placed on top of this. This becomes the companion seat where you sit up top and rest your feet on the dinette seat below. It works well as you can face forward and look out the screen when travelling, or turn around and face the cockpit when relaxing in a social setting.

You can take any part of this boat and say it is outstanding, but the thing that blew me away was the whole helm module. I loved it.

The helm position is based on an elevated module with the foot rest provided by a storage box that is large even by Whittley standards, then the seat

base all the way to the cockpit floor being a teak cocktail cabinet opening into the cockpit. The top of this has a drop down door that becomes a servery, and inside you have the racks and holders for bottles and glasses. The bottom half of this unit is another open storage space.

The helm seat is a two seater lounge, but it's also a nice spot to sit sort of side saddle from which position you can converse easily with people on the rear lounges.

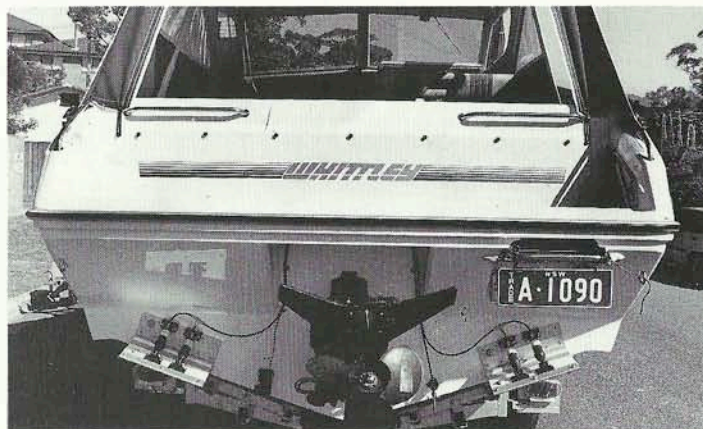
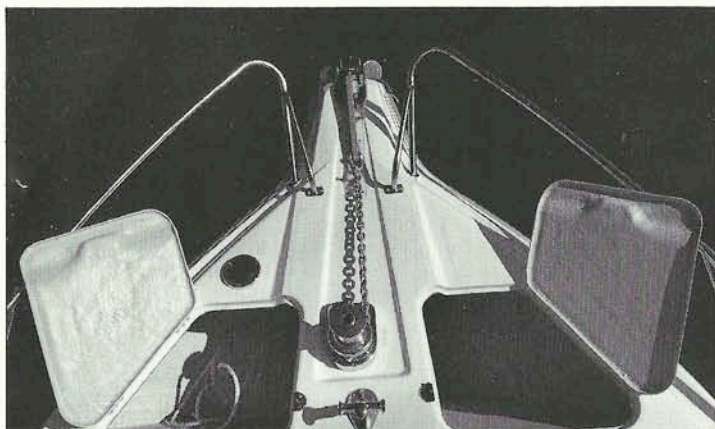
The dash mentioned in the introduction extends out of the bulkhead formed by the head/shower area. It is quite a complex thing with a fibreglass housing, teak grab handles coming off each side, a black vinyl brow across the top, and a background formed from a teak grain durable plastic

and read in comfort on the Porta Potti.

The dinette occupies the remaining space in the lower level, and the same upmarket fabric has been used on the cushion covers here with sufficient space

for four at the teak table.

Again there is an enormous storage bin under the forward seat, with a large insulated ice box under the seat at the cockpit end.



No practical consideration has been overlooked. Lights have been recessed into the swim platform sides along with a hand held shower. Up front, chain and two rope lockers are so large the second rope locker gets used for extra general storage space most of the time, although it would be great for long distance cruising when backup ground tackle is required. Trim tabs are fitted to balance the boat and a foil is fitted to the stern drive leg by Hunts Marine.

so you get the effect of the classic wood grain dash. This presents all of the switches and gauges at a perfect angle to the eye. The wheel does come across several gauges, but it is a fine stainless destroyer style thing and I found that it hardly impaired the view of the dash at all.

The display includes tacho, speed, oil, temperature, cruise log, fuel, battery and trim in the centre cluster, with a small Humminbird sounder flush mounted to the left and the switch and fuse panel to the right. All fuses are external so you never have to find your way through the

wire jungle to change a simple fuse.

In a line under that to the left of the wheel you have a stereo/cassette, switches for the water system and spreader lights, and the switch for the deck winch. Trim tab switches sit over on the side above the throttle. A 27 meg radio hangs under this console where the driver can operate it without having to move from his seat.

From the helm seat you look straight through the screen centre when seated, and if you want to stand for a better view, you simply throw back the overhead hatch and when you stand you have your head right through the hatch and a full 360 view of everything around you. It would be hard to come up with a better helm setup than this.

The cockpit is a completely modular area, and fully lined with carpet and vinyl faced side pockets located way up under the gunwales. This allows space under for tables and lounge seats not in use to be tucked in out of the way.

Let's start with the cockpit stripped bare, in which case we have the engine cover tilted back to expose the whole engine, and a pair of side panels removed

to give full access to the area under the aft deck where you have the operating gear for the tabs on one side, and two batteries and the hot water system on the other. They really thought about this, right down to having the batteries slightly offset to pick up the last useable centimetre of space, yet everything in there is still completely accessible.

Next we put the covers back and close the engine box. We now have a centre lounge on the insulated engine box and the battery switch is exposed through a cutout in the port side transom panel. We also have walkup access to the rear deck either side of the engine and a lot of open cockpit space.

Next we drop in two quarter sections either side of the engine box and now have a full width rear lounge. You can stop there, or swing up two more lounge sections that hang under the gunwale either side, and you now have an enormous lounge area in front of which you can locate the removable teak snack table.

For the final touch, lower the table a little way and put the filler cushions in

place, and you now have an enormous double berth or a place you could sleep a whole flock of little kids side by side.

This thing borders on genius for a couple of reasons. First, when these multi modular tricks are performed as a rule, you find that the layout only really functions well in the basic module and the variations tend to be something of a compromise. This time every one of the modules works as well as the others. Secondly, when you are stripped down to the basic form, all the bits and pieces are usually in the way and a complete pain in the neck. In this setup all the bits simply disappear and you end up with the clear space you are looking for.

Consider the detail. Most of the cushions in the modular lounge setup are soft fabric covered, but the key cushions you might step on to go over the back of the boat with the lounge in place are vinyl covered.

Finally, the swim platform has been completely integrated into the stern of the boat now with such niceties as recessed sealed lights either side and hand shower. Under the platform a stainless steel folding ladder folds out then down to provide steps that are handy for getting into this high boat when it is on the trailer as well as when you are coming in from the water.

A fairly simple framework supports a full set of covers for camping or long range trips, and the layout makes it quite a practical boat for two couples or a big family group to use for extended cruising.

The other thing that makes this a more practical long term cruiser than some boats over 10 metres is the huge amount of well organised storage space available. The boat makes use of every centimetre of space, and yet there is still plenty of elbow

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room for the people. This has been done by recovering all that 'out of sight, out of mind' space most designers simply ignore.

I find it very hard to equate this craft with all the 23 to 25 footers that have gone before it. It is a new way of making boats, and if cruising and overnighting is your game, it has to be seen as a much better way of making boats.

The exterior is beautifully finished in white and dark blue with a nice array of stainless and polished aluminium setting things off. All the windows and their frames line up with the angles of the cabin and the lines of the external graphics to give what is essentially a bulky boat a slick, streamlined appearance. It is, without a doubt, a genuine class act all the way.

Performance

There is not really anything specially remarkable about the hull of this boat. It is a modest vee with a fairly long rake in the stem and wide, down turned chines running pretty much stem to stern. The way it benefits from some of the gear on the back makes it a little hard to estimate how a bare hull would go, but I estimate that the boat is balanced to run fairly level, even with the stern drive engine out back.

Walking around the back you notice that this boat has what is now the standard Hunts Marine stern drive setup, which involves the automatic fitup of a Tiger Shark foil on the cav plate. The stern also wears a set of wide Gibson electro hydraulic trim tabs. The Whittley folk claim that the foil is not necessary because they put a great deal of time and effort into getting this boat balanced to the point where the foil is not required.

As the power goes down, the first thing you notice is that the familiar resistance of

the stern drive trying to plane that weight aft is not there. The hull stays flat, keeping the cutting edges down as it picks up speed, gradually rising flat onto a clean plane.

There is, in fact, some slight degree of squat because you can see it at the bow from the helm, but you can't actually feel it in the flow of the boat. It is a continuous surge of smooth power and the only time you really notice that the boat is not dead flat is when it suddenly seems to rise a little higher at around 3000 rpm.

That, by the way, is with tabs right off. You only use the tabs to correct attitude when the hull leans onto a strong beam wind, and it is great to have them there when a load of non boating passengers show a liking for the same side of the boat. I think that this excellent performance is coming out of a combination of excellent weight distribution and the foil on the leg.

We had a speedo go down on us when we played with this boat, but we did get a clean plane at 2100 rpm and read 22 M/ph at 3000 before the gauge went down. The factory has a figure of 40 M/ph at 4500, which sounds right to me.

The Mercruiser 230 hp 5 litre V8 is a perfect power plant for this hull. It cruises so comfortably and is so quiet in that well insulated box you are hardly aware of it.

With the power steering and a hull that will go pretty well without attention to tabs or trim, this makes the Sovereign an ideal social cruise boat that can be handled by a first time boat owner. It ran very comfortably and quietly when we got a stiff wind on the bow quarter, and although the tabs allowed me to easily sit it dead upright again, most people would not have been fussed by the degree to which it wanted to lean into the wind.

Something that did impress me greatly

was the ease with which we recovered the boat. I always have considerable reservations about these big trailer boats on the basis that they can be a handful at the ramp. Launching with multi roller trailers is no hardship, but when we came back we had a stiff wind coming straight across a ramp that had nothing but rock and concrete with which to welcome a runaway hull. Coming in at almost 45 degrees to the rear rollers, the stem soon locked into the system and was trapped by plenty of rubber giving me an easy shot at clipping the hook into the eye. As long as gentle power was applied at that stage, there were no exposed metal edges at all to damage the glass, and the boat could go nowhere except into the rollers. Gearing was so good that I wound the boat on from that point without help, and that is a

lot of boat to recover.

It goes without saying that this style of boat is not going to work for everybody, but for those strictly into social boating, cruising, weekendng or entertaining, you would need to see this one before you parted with money. Those looking at craft to 10 metres would also be well advised to check these out first on the basis that the Sovereign can probably deliver the same amount of useful space as many larger boats, and it is certainly a more sophisticated and better crafted boat than most. It might just save you a lot of money without sacrificing any features, space or quality.

Boats like this give a whole new meaning to the label 'Made In Australia', and they sure improve the job of this little boat tester out of sight.

By Ron Calcutt



Specifications

Make/model:	Whittley Cruisemaster Sovereign 2300
Length:	7 m (23')
Beam:	2.5 m (8'2")
Weight:	1720 kg (3792 lb)
Deadrise:	23 degrees
Fuel:	177 litre (39 gallons) with deck fill
Water:	130 litre (29 gallons) with deck fill
Power:	Mercruiser 230 hp V8 stern drive

OPTIONAL V8 Power is available from the range of Mercruiser and Cobra stern drives.

Whittley Cruisers manufacture a range of fibreglass craft including 5.3 m, 6.0 m and 7.0 m models.



WHITTLEY CRUISERS

Family Built For Family Boating

Jim Whittley stands tall as a highly respected well established Australian boat manufacturer in an industry dogged by “boat builders” who appear overnight and then disappear almost as quickly. Sadly many owners are left with orphaned products with difficulties in obtaining replacement components and poor resale value. The same can be said for some imports.

The Whittley story began over 40 years ago with Jim and his brother Ossie building timber boats for themselves and their mates. It wasn't long before Jim was fulltime into building production model plywood trailerable cruisers. In 1962 timber construction made way for the new wonder boat building material — fibreglass. The retained skills of working with timber allow the Whittley family to enhance the interior of their boats with rich warm teak panelling skillfully complimented by other finishing surfaces.

A modern factory specifically designed for boat manufacturing was built at Briar Hill an outer Melbourne suburb. This is now the home of the Whittley team. Jim spends most of his time in developing new models and refining existing ones. Jim's wife Aileen is responsible for the purchasing and administration. Neville, their eldest son, manages the production whilst their second son Steven looks after the timber shop. Last but not least, their daughter Angela makes all the upholstery. All the family work in a truly hands-on fashion ensuring continuation of the high quality finish and superb interior design which are both synonymous with the Whittley name.

Buying a new boat can be a very confusing experience particularly when there are lots of options to sort out. The Whittley philosophy is simple. All their models come complete with an incredible range of standard features which are designed to make family boating more enjoyable. They are proud of the proven resale value their boats enjoy in the marketplace. They are equally proud of the experience and skill of the dealer team. Call the Whittley family for the name of the dealer nearest to you.

WHITTLEY MARINE INDUSTRIES PTY. LTD.

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