



ADVENTURE JET **ADDS THRILLS** TO AUCKLAND HARBOUR

BY KEITH INGRAM

Jet boating and Hamilton Jet are iconic names synonymous with New Zealand's lakes and rivers. Since the early 1950s, when the wild Irishman Bill Hamilton developed the first waterjet propulsion unit to enable his farm workers to easily access the South Island high country, the Christchurch-based company has become a world leader in waterjet propulsion for small craft to large, fast ferries and patrol boats.

The South Island can rightfully lay claim to the development of jet boating tourism, with companies like Shotover Jet and Kawarau Jet being some of the historic players. From these early beginnings, a national jet sport industry has sprung up around our waterways and is now venturing into the marine environment.

In the past six months we have seen two such companies start new jet boating business opportunities on Auckland's waterfront, which in itself is a bit different. Both companies operate similar vessels by the same designer and builder and

are based within a few hundred metres of each other. There's nothing like friendly competition to sharpen up one's act when establishing a new business.

We were invited to review the first company to set up shop, Auckland Adventure Jet, which launched its new, purpose-built 24-seat tourist sea jet boat in late November. Getting to this stage was not easy, as owner Paul McCauley will attest.

The process of working through a number of Resource Management Act consents and safety issues took two years. Being the first company to transit this bureaucratic minefield with success meant working closely with the Auckland harbourmaster's office to develop safe operational parameters and staff training to ensure the new tourist adventure will be safe for the public.

It is no secret that jet boating as an adventure tourism activity is fraught with its own dangers. This is partly because the river jet companies are not looking for trained skippers to drive their vessels, but rather they seek to recruit boy racers



ABOVE: The driver's position

BELOW: The blunt end with the protective platform and raised hatch. Note the missing life ring



Open water, wind chop, waves and the wash from other vessels all add another dimension to the activity

with good hand-eye coordination and quick reflexes.

These companies are only required to give 50 to 100 hours of boat and river familiarisation training before these drivers with no other maritime qualification are let loose on the public. This is in a powerful river jet boat travelling at speeds of 70kph within centimetres of rock faces, willows and river banks in an effort to get the adrenalin flowing by scaring and thrilling their passengers. Is it any wonder that we see a steady flow of accidents resulting from this boating culture?

I have said it before - as long as they keep driving boats at speed within metres and in some cases centimetres of rock faces, trees and river banks, sooner rather than later the odds are they will hit one.

Clearly, jet boat tourism is a multi-million dollar activity, so the powers that be must balance the revenue from tourism against the risk of potential harm or loss of life from this type of activity. It would fair to say this sector of our industry ►

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The 180 degree reverse turn gives all the thrills in a shower of spray

has cleaned up its act somewhat in more recent years.

Can we take the river jet boat and let it loose in the marine environment? Not safely you cant and not with a river jet driver. This is because the open water, wind chop, waves and the wash from other vessels all add another dimension to the activity.

In addition, you are bound by international collision regulations and New Zealand's maritime rules, so it's a whole different ball game where maritime skills come into play and boy racers just do not cut the mustard.

How do you give the thrills while not risking the spills? We thought it would be opportune to speak with some returning passengers sporting the new wet look and designer hair with grins from ear to ear. Fortunately we found some

young visitors on their Big OE who had also done the South Island river experiences. They were unanimous in saying the river experience was fast, sharp and scary. Yes, it got their adrenalin flowing, but for the girls, not again.

And Auckland's Adventure Jet? Fantastic! A mix of speed, fantastic scenery, fast turns and sudden stops, a wetting or two and all too soon the 45-minute trip is over.

Would you do it again? And the answer is, "Yes, we would like to go under the Harbour Bridge next time."

Which just about says it all. Clearly, you do not have to scare the wits out of people to give them the thrill of speed and jet sport action.

Designed by Scott Robson and built by Kwikkraft, the Kwikkraft 7800 looks impressive. Painted in go-fast red

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“...by using an S-bow entry with a moderate dead-rise we believe we have got the best of both worlds”

with attractive graphics, the *Adventure Jet* is a smart looker. Aesthetically her lines are nice, from the stylish bow, with grandstand seating, rising to the smart aero-foil at the stern. The rules required the design ensured the boat be positively buoyant in case of swamping or roll-over and be self-righting so she sits upright, to offer a safe haven until help or assistance arrives after an emergency.

The vessel has been built to withstand the stresses and forces of nature she can expect to endure during her service life.

She is constructed in 5083 marine grade aluminium alloy with the hull bottom in 6mm plate and a 10mm keelson. The sides, bulkheads, framing girders and just about everything else is in 4mm plate.

Her twin supercharged Volvo 223kW (300hp) D4 turbocharged marine diesels driving twin Hamilton HJ213 water jets sit snugly under the grandstand in a fully soundproofed space, where the roar from the engines is minimal on the passengers.

Access to the engine bay is via a hatch under the foil, which gives good access to the jet units and for servicing the engines. She carries 400 litres of fuel, and 100 litres of water for washing the salt off between trips. Two life rings are mounted on the transom, although one was lost during a power stop and wetting during the previous trip.

The choice of diesel power rather than traditional petrol or liquid petroleum gas (LPG) power of river boats is interesting. Two reasons for this are that maritime rules restrict vessels of petrol or LPG/LNG power to 12 passengers, plus the risk of fire was a major consideration.

“Our operating base is Pier 3 downtown in a highly public space and then out on the harbour on a busy waterway,” says senior master Dean Kennedy. “Everything about our operation is safety first.”

The is larger than her river sisters with a deeper entry, carrying a 16.5 degree vee aft.

“As a design we had to look at her whole business model,” said Scott Robson. “Traditionally, marine jet boats are pigs if you try to use them as a tourist adventure craft. The ride has to be soft while the hull must be able to slide in safety and be fuel-efficient.

“Waves and wind chop are the greatest obstacles, so by using an S-bow entry with a moderate dead-rise we believe we have got the best of both worlds,” says Scott.

Part of the problem in adding depth to the hull is that this restricts the ability to do Hamilton turns safely, because get it wrong, trip up on a wave and the vessel risks a rollover. So 360 degree Hamilton turns are out, advises Dean.

“However, we do train our skippers to do a 180 degree version or a reverse spin. This, along with power stops and travelling at speeds up to 50 knots, gives passengers an awesome sense of speed as they clip across the wave tops.

“Just chucking a seven tonne loaded vessel into a reverse spin at 40 knots exerts some awesome G-forces on to passengers. We do a number of spins – six to eight, depending on the group – plus about five power stops, which brings about the wet bits. This, with the speed recovery and harbour travel, gives an exciting jet boat experience,” said Dean. ▶

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Staff member Moniquea Frear gives the safety briefing with plenty of humour while not detracting from the serious importance of learning the skipper's warning signals for turns and stops, the need to hang on firmly while bracing your feet, and fitting and using inflatable life vests before stepping on board.

Loading is a mix of where you might like to sit, weight distribution and ensuring everyone understands the skipper's instructions. Once the boat is loaded, the skipper takes his position in the driver's seat.

As it's a jet boat, we still use the term, with the small helm and bucket controls to the left and the throttle on the floor, as in a car accelerator.

All the engine instrumentation is an easy glance from the helm. Clearly the ability to train mariners to be jet boat drivers is not a lost cause, as some river folk might suggest. There is a big difference between operating a jet boat on our rivers, where you might also have control of the river, to operating as a high-speed vessel on one of New Zealand's busiest waterways, where local harbour, Maritime New Zealand and collision regulations all apply, while giving customers an exciting experience.

The harbourmaster's rules require a speed restriction of five knots on leaving the dock, and a further 12 knot inner-harbour restriction. "Once we're clear, we have two areas, one off the bays and another above the Harbour Bridge, where we can play," said Dean.

All their skippers must hold a commercial maritime qualification and on joining the company they undergo a three-week induction course and on-the-job training before going solo.

"This is important, especially when doing reverse turns," said Dean. "We train the skippers to read the water, travel across the waves and look for a spot to do the turn down the wave, never up or into it, as the risk of a roll-over is increased if you trip a wave.

"They must be familiar with the rules and regulations, have a proven ability with people and, above all, be able to listen and read the conditions to ensure safety comes first," says Dean. Needless to say, he has an excellent relationship with the harbourmaster.

It appears skipper training and operating standards between the two companies operating jet boats on the harbour might be at odds. To this end, and to ensure any complaints the harbourmaster receives from the boating public about red jet boats and to Auckland Adventure Jet are easily identified and are not confused with another similar vessel, the company is about to install an AIS system. This will enable the harbourmaster or other ships to track their movements at all times. It is an excellent initiative by this safety-conscious company that will safeguard their skippers from false complaints.

These new marine or open-water tourist sea jet boats are extremely robust in construction, the seating layout pays attention to passenger comfort and there is good use of safety rails. The tiered grandstand seating ensures everyone has an uninterrupted view, ensuring many have new designer hair styles by the time they return.

The fixed grins on their faces just about said it all, confirming as we head towards the Rugby World Cup that Auckland Adventure Jet just about has all the ingredients for a successful tourism business as we head in the future. ⚓

SPECIFICATIONS

Length	8.2m
Beam	2.8m
Draft	450mm
Construction	5083 marine alloy
Engines	2 x Volvo D4 supercharged marine diesels
Power	2 x 223kW
Propulsion	Hamilton HJ213 water jets
Speed	55 knots
Service speed	40 knots
Deadweight	4.5 tonnes
Service weight laden	7 tonnes
Passengers	24
Builder	Kwikkraft
Designer	Scott Robson